

Wells Local History Group Newsletter



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Number 71 – Spring 2019

A small change this time – instead of the usual portrait picture on the front, we have a landscape one instead, and this leaves space for a list of the contents of the newsletter. There are two reasons for it. Firstly, there are a lot more landscape photographs around than portrait, so it is easier to find something suitable that way around. Secondly, I seem to spend a lot of time looking through my old newsletters for an article that I knew was there – but don't remember which issue it is in. Let us know whether you like it, hate it, or have no strong feelings!

The AGM approaches, so it is time for a formal notice to the effect that if you wish to nominate someone for the committee, or wish to raise any other issue, please let me (with my secretary hat on) have details by 30 April.

You may recall that in the autumn of 2014 we had a special newsletter issue to commemorate the centenary of the start of the First World War. Five years on, brings the eightieth anniversary of the start of the Second World War this autumn. It would be good if we could issue a similar special newsletter. We have already published several stories of men in the various theatres of war over the years, so this time we would like to concentrate on the home front. So, if you, or a member of your family was in the Red Cross, WRVS, ARP, Land Army, Fire Watching, Home Guard, or similar, or if you were evacuated, or have any similar story to tell, we would like to hear it. You don't have to be a great writer, and if you would prefer it you can tell the story to one of us to write for you. Please help if you can.

Keith Leesmith

George Edwards, Sam Peel and the 1923 Strike.

People fall out. Those around them take sides. This has always happened. Writing about it is easier if the protagonists are long dead. When they were known to some people alive it is more difficult. But it is worthwhile making the attempt to tell the story.



Two such protagonists were Sam Peel and George Edwards. Sam Peel fought many battles in Wells, the best known of which was his successful attempt to improve housing conditions. Those who saw the play about him last March will know that he engaged in a more controversial fight over farm labourers' wages. And his antagonist in this case was not a local landowner, town councillor or member of the ratepayer's association but a farm labourer and brick maker turned

Methodist preacher and trade union organiser called George Edwards. The two men's lives overlapped by a few years but by the time Peel arrived in Wells aged 32 George Edwards was already in his sixties. His major endeavours as a trade unionist lay mostly behind him and in 1914 when his wife died, his health broke and he thought that his active life was over.

Like Peel, Edwards was born in Norfolk in Marsham near Aylsham. Unlike Peel who was trained as a printer, Edwards was a labourer and the son of a labourer. His mother, a widow from a previous marriage was a hand loom weaver, working at home as most weavers did; his father having served in the army for ten years found it hard to get work and alternated between brick making and various forms of casual farm labour. George's most vivid early experience was of being sent to the workhouse at the age of 4. Separated from his mother as the rules required, his father was put in prison for stealing five turnips, found on his possession by a local policeman. He was taking them home for his hungry family. George spent that winter in the workhouse. At the age of 6 he was found his first employment as a bird scarer, for which he was paid for a seven-day week one shilling. Thereafter he worked with his father making bricks in summer and cleaning turnips in winter. His employer was known to treat misdemeanours at work by hanging boys up by the heels and giving them a thrashing. By the age of ten he was set to ploughing, done in those days with horses. By the age of 17, he had become a team man, looking after and leading the team of plough horses as well as feeding and grooming them. There, because he lived in the farmhouse his wage was

2s a week. Once again, any alleged misdemeanours were punished by thrashings and the docking of wages. On one occasion, falsely accused he retaliated, knocking his employer to the ground. He, of course, lost his job.

It was then that he began to attend the local Primitive Methodist chapel, met his wife Charlotte and, at the age of 22 with her help first began to learn to read. He had never been to day school in his life. He became a lay preacher and so learned the art of public speaking which was to serve him later as a trade union organiser. The first agricultural trade union in England was formed in Warwickshire led by another 'Prim' preacher, Joseph Arch at much the same time. Before long Edwards was speaking at union meetings, at that time involved in the Liberal campaign to gain the vote for labouring men. He then encountered what was to be an enduring state of affairs: asked by his employer if he had been speaking at such a meeting, he said that he had. He was told that he must either cease such activities or leave his position He chose to leave. Since accommodation went with the job, he and his family found themselves homeless and only by the kindness of another that he was not out on the road.

The story of Edwards' activities as a full-time union secretary, his election as a District Councillor and work for the local Poor Law Guardians; his union organising – cycling thousands of miles to recruit men to the union – his election to the County council and, at the end of his life, his election to Parliament: these can be told another time. For now it may be enough to say that the thirty

years that separated their births and the very different circumstances of their upbringing may help to explain how two men, who both believed passionately in the uplifting of working men and women to a condition in which they had a decent wage, security of employment and housing and fixed working hours, could so passionately have disagreed. A social historian of Norfolk once said to me that George Edwards hated Sam Peel. Whether that is true, it is a testimony to the violence of their disagreement.



What was it about? The background was the Great War and its aftermath. During the war one major issue was food security. Food prices were rising because of the difficulty in getting grain from abroad. Agricultural wages were low, less than half the wage of urban workers. As early as February 1915, there was growing agitation

amongst farm workers for an increase in wages. The farmers refused to meet the union. In the face of threats of industrial action, the government was persuaded to set up machinery to provide a forum for wage negotiation and arbitration, a Central Wages Board with wages boards for each county. Edwards was appointed to the Central Board and was, together with Peel, a member of the Norfolk county board. By their endeavours labourers' wages were raised from 15s to 25s a week, still much less than the 42s that a woman could get in the town, let alone the 50s a man might earn. Gradually, wage levels were increased further.

The war ended. Foreign wheat – from Canada and from the Baltic and Turkey – came into the country. Prices fell. So severe was the change that some estates sold out. Many tenants took advantage of this and bought their farms. But between the two were those landless labourers who had, in Wells, constituted a major part of the population, as elsewhere in Norfolk. In 1911 there were 140 agricultural labourers in the town, more than three times the number of fishermen. Many had gone to war and many had not come back. Those who returned and those who had worked the land during the hostilities found a changed situation. In June 1921 the wages boards with their power to preside over wage negotiations and to secure minimum wages were abolished. 'It was' said George Edwards 'the greatest betrayal of the agricultural industry that any government had been guilty of.' The farmers had suffered badly with the fall in commodity prices but in the absence of an arbitrator, there was no compulsion for them to negotiate with the trade union. They also laid men off in

considerable numbers to save money, putting the land to grass and reducing crop rotation in the process. Wells, like other places, put men to work on road mending and drainage schemes, but paid them way below a decent wage.

The winter of 1921 became the setting for a dispute between farmers and farm workers but also between two men of high principle. Both Edwards and Peel were members of the union. Even before the ending of the Wages Board, the union had been forced to accept a reduction of wages from 46s. to 42s. a week. Dealing with the voluntary Conciliation Committee which replaced the Wages Board, Peel, who had become head of the local union committee agreed to a reduction not to 39s. as the national committee proposed but to 36s. a week. Seeing the weakness of the union, now that the harvest was in, one local farmer issued a notice that he would henceforth pay 30s a week. His men struck. The farmer, Womack Ringer, reacted by bringing in blackleg labour.

Peel had always spoken out against strike action. He believed that farmers and farm workers were on the same side, ensuring that cheap food for the urban working classes was not at the expense of either farmers or those in their employ. The unity of the agricultural interest in the face of falling prices demanded sacrifices on everyone's part, he believed. So, on February 25th, 1922 Peel agreed to a reduction to 30s a week. The national executive of the union, helpless before the local decision, nevertheless condemned it. Peel and his committee were forced to resign. In the last weekend of

June Peel announced that he was to be president of a new agricultural labourers' union, the National Union of Landworkers, having resigned from the national union in the process.

At the beginning of July Edwards spoke at an open-air meeting at Aylsham expressing his anger at what Peel had done, describing his own childhood experiences in which the idea of a 'common interest' played no part: the years of low wages, bad food and housing with the personal humiliation which characterised so much of labouring life.

But this was not the end of the matter, rather its change of gear. After the 1922 harvest, the farmers pressed for a further reduction to 25s. for a 54-hour week. With winter coming the Norfolk committee, with the exception of Edwards, were afraid of opposing it. Peel's response was to propose that his new union should be 'recognised as the official negotiating body on behalf of the agricultural labourers'. A meeting with the farmers in Norwich Corn Hall was arranged. Only pressure on government from all sections of agriculture it was argued would work. In mid-January 1923, farmers' leader, J.F. Wright declared that 25s. a week was 'impossible with the income of the industry'. Peel agreed that the wage made up a 'disproportionate part of the farmers' expenditure'. Attempts were made to get the government to intervene. Farmers issued leaflets trying to persuade the worker to accept 25s but for longer hours. The good offices of the bishop of the diocese, Bishop Pollock were sought, to no avail. On March 24th the men struck.

Not all did. In Marshland, wages were in any case higher. Labourers were reluctant to leave their animals, milk supplies to Kelling Sanatorium were maintained; many farmers maintained wages. 7,000 men struck, about a quarter of the Norfolk workforce though in some parts of north Norfolk the figure was more like 90%. The use of 'blackleg' labour in the second and third weeks of the strike was met with widespread picketing. Some of the men were ex-soldiers for whom the deferential attitudes of some of the older farmers were anathema. Meetings of pickets sometimes began at village war memorials. Violent incidents between pickets and 'foreign' workers ensued. Police were deployed to protect men ploughing. Inevitably by the third week of the strike some 200 summonses had been issued by Walsingham Petty Sessional District, at which Sam Peel sat as a magistrate.

The story of Peel's treatment outside the court even after he had delivered lenient sentences on the defendants has been often told. He was stoned and 'covered' in rotten fruit and vegetables by the angry crowd. George Edwards appealed to the crowd to 'Be good lads', but in vain. With some difficulty he was got away from the court house under the protection of a cordon of police. The story is also told of the union's attempt to get more sympathetic justices to come to Walsingham. It was eventually agreed that neither union supporting J.Ps nor those who were farmers would sit.



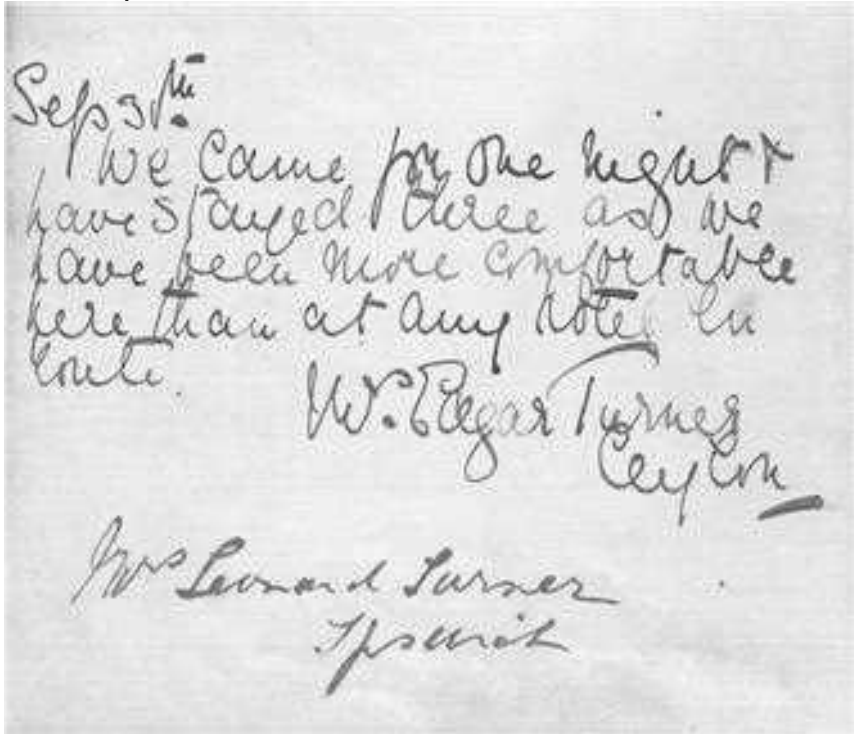
The strike ended; Peel's union which 'represented nobody' evaporated. The workers got 25s. for a 50-hour week, leaving a little more time for those many who had allotments or smallholdings. Whether George Edwards and Sam Peel were ever reconciled is not known. Separated in age by 29 years, they were from different worlds. Who was closer to the mood of the post-war age is hard to say. In any case, mechanisation of agriculture and the migration of suburban dwellers to the countryside in increasing numbers were to change the face of Norfolk forever. Our villages now have scarcely a farm worker and many of the houses are empty except at weekends and in the summer.

Roger Arguile

“We came for one night & have stayed three” –

The Railway Hotel September 1913

The Railway Hotel’s Visitors Book of the early 20th century continues to provide some intriguing insights into the lives of Wells’ visitors during that period. Clearly not all of those visits were for pleasure and an eye-catching entry for the 30th September 1913 is one such case in point.



Mr. Edgar Turner wrote, “We came for one night & have stayed three as we have been more comfortable here

than at any hotel en route." This unremarkable entry was counter-signed by Mr. Leonard Turner of Ipswich. The catalyst for further research in this particular case was the one-line address "Ceylon" that was provided by Edgar Turner.

William H. Uker's 1935 publication *All About Tea* details Edgar Turner's distinguished career in the Ceylon tea trade from the time of his arrival there in 1887, up until his retirement to Suffolk, in 1924.

Edgar Turner's early life and career is also covered in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, which was first published by Arnold Wright in 1907, six years before his visit to Wells-next-the-Sea in 1913. It states that *'Edgar Turner is a well-known figure in Ceylon planting circles. Born in 1862 in Ipswich, of a family which has played a great part in the modern history of the Suffolk town, Mr. Turner, after an education received at the Ipswich School, went to Mincing Lane to learn tea-tasting.... Mr. Turner came out to Ceylon in 1887, and lived for five months with Mr. N. M. Home, on Woodstock, Ambegamuwa. He then took up a billet on Rahatungoda under Mr. P. E. Sewell and has lived in Upper Hewaheta ever since.'*

After helping start the Maturata and Hewaheta District Planters' Association in 1896 and serving as both their secretary (1897 & 1899) and chairman (1898), he went on to be elected chairman of the Planters' Association of Ceylon in 1904. This followed a visit to the south of India during the previous year as a labour commissioner for that association. In visiting India in 1903, Edgar Turner

became the first planter to visit India in order to establish a recruiting agency. Having then served the Planters' Association as secretary from 1905 – 1907, Downing Street announced on 15th June 1908 that "*The King has been pleased to approve the appointment of Edgar Turner, Esq., to be an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council of the Island of Ceylon.*"; a position he retained on that Council as the representative of the Planters' Association until 1911.

No further details are recorded about Edgar Turner's prominent career in Ceylon before his visit to Wells in September 1913, although it is known that he went on to become chairman of the Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association in 1921-22, before finally retiring to Walberswick, near Southwold, Suffolk in 1924.



It would seem unlikely that Edgar Turner's visit to Wells was in anyway connected with his business in Ceylon. If so, then the answer would most likely lie with his

travelling companion and elder brother, Mr. Leonard Turner of Ipswich.

Leonard Turner was a career engineer, but also a landscape painter in watercolour and had been a member of the Ipswich Fine Art Club from 1883–1913. In 1881 he had exhibited four watercolours in Ipswich - *'From the Cliffs, Felixstowe'*, *'Study at Low Tide'*, *'On the Rocks'*, and *'Low Tide'*. Through the late 1800's and into the early 1900's, Leonard exhibited over thirty works, mostly landscapes, which also included *'Harwich Harbour'*, *'Walton Ferry'*, *'On the Orwell'*, *'Old Mill, Walton on the Naze'*, *'Rainclouds, Southwold'* and *'Dunwich Marshes'*.

Had Leonard Turner come to Wells in 1913 to capture on canvas the local shoreline? Probably not, as research to date has not revealed any subject matter he painted beyond Suffolk and that of the neighbouring Essex coastline. It would appear more likely that Edgar had accompanied Leonard on a business trip to the area.

By 1911, Leonard Turner was a director of E. R. & F. Turner, a mechanical engineering company, started by a Walter Turner, close to the Ipswich waterfront in 1837. The company were manufacturing agricultural machinery, steam engines and boilers throughout the 19th century. Their main customers were the flour millers and animal feed processors. Up until the 1870s they were manufacturing machinery to drive horizontal mill stones, and by the late 19th century were at the forefront of new technology in the milling industry. A considerable number of mills were equipped with Turners products,

including engines and boilers, transmission gears and drive shafts. In effect they were producing equipment for the complete mill. During this period they had also designed and produced their own roller mills, for crushing seeds and beans for their oil, and maize to create cornflakes and other breakfast cereal.



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Write for particulars and prices to the Makers:
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and 22, Mark Lane, LONDON, E.C.

In 1908 Turners decided to discontinue the manufacture of steam engines and boilers, and to concentrate on the growing demands of the milling business. In addition to flour milling machinery, the firm manufactured and erected the first complete maize flaking plant for animal feeds in the country. By the time the Turner brothers visited Wells in 1913, the company had a workforce of 600 and were specialising in flour milling machinery of every description, both for roller and stone systems.

Following the outbreak of war in 1914, the company's works manager, Arthur Leggett, conceived the idea of a single purpose lathe for the accurate production of shell bodies. These were so successful that some 2,000 similar machines were produced and distributed to plants across the country. Mr. Leggett later became managing director of the company and owner in 1932. As an interesting aside, in 1937, Turners supplied its first flaking mills to Weetabix Ltd.

It would be interesting to hear from any of our members who could enlighten us further on the possible identity of the local company or companies that the Turner brothers were visiting in 1913, or the current whereabouts of any of the E. R. & F. Turner machinery that would have been used in Wells at that time?

In researching the history of E. R. & F. Turner of Ipswich, I am indebted to John Norman of the Ipswich Society and his article on the history of the company that appeared in the East Anglian Daily Times in May 2015, and the information gleaned from Grace's Guide to British Industrial History.

Steve Adcock



Bathing Fatality at Wells

While browsing the “Wells Next the Sea – A Trip Down Memory Lane,” Facebook Page, I noticed an intriguing memorial card concerning the tragic death of 15-year-old Charles Robert Leggett. I decided to investigate further.



On Sunday, 22nd July 1906 at around 8 o'clock in the morning Charles Robert Leggett left home and called for his friends, James Devling, Lawrence Page and Geoffrey Bunting. The four of them went off to Wells beach to bathe. The tide had turned and was three quarters on the ebb.

They were swimming in an area known as The Point. James Devling swam for about twenty minutes and then returned to the shore. As soon as he got to the beach he noticed that Charles, who was about 15 yards from shore, was in difficulty. James at once went to Charles' aid. Laurence Page said he heard Charles calling out "Help, help, Jim; I can't stand here!" When James Devling reached him, Charles got hold of James firstly round the neck and latterly round his wrist. James struggled hard to get him out but they both went down together. When James came up for the second time, he

was alone. James Devlin was the only one of the group who was a competent swimmer. The other boys only went in as far as their waists. James returned to shore so exhausted he could hardly stand. He then spotted Charles again and made another attempt to save him but was too exhausted and turned back.

Charles body was eventually recovered an hour and a half later by Coxswain T. Stacey at a distance of 700 yards from where the lad entered the water.

It was thought he may have suffered from cramp. The Coroner stated that this was a dangerous place for non-swimmers to be, as the tide was strong, and he had no doubt the tide had knocked the deceased off his feet.

James Devlin was commended for his plucky conduct in his gallant attempts to rescue his friend. I searched for James Devlin/Devling on various family history websites, but it would appear he was not a native of Wells (unless someone knows different). Perhaps he was staying with relatives in Wells or was on holiday? The only boy by the name of Page I could find was Sydney Lawrence Page who was born in Barney, Norfolk in 1889. On the 1911 census he was living at Wells Next the Sea on the High Street. The other boy appears to be Geoffrey Philip Bunting who was born at Anmer in 1889. Perhaps he too was staying with relatives or had cycled to Wells?

Charles Robert Leggett was born around 1891 at Wells. He was the son of Robert Thomas Leggett, a grocer and

draper of Staithe Street, Wells. His mother was Susan Nott Leggett née Selley.

I found Charles gravestone in Polka Road Cemetery. Sadly, the grave has toppled over and is lying on the ground: but the inscription can still be read. It says:

CHARLES ROBERT LEGGETT
Third Son of ROBERT THOMAS And
SUSAN NOTT LEGGETT
And Grandson of The Above
Who Was Drowned While Bathing at
The Point Wells 22 July 1906
Aged 15 Years
“God Moves In A Mysterious Way”



After discovering this story, I can now make sense of an anecdote recounted by my first cousin, Sylvia. She informed me my father, Thomas William Kemp, born 1894 was forbidden to swim in the Quay area.

This tragic drowning must have been very much on my paternal grand-parents minds. They had already lost one son to illness in 1903 and obviously did not want to lose another.

Lynn Sharpe

The Puzzle of the Naming of Polka Road - Revisited.

John Wykes' discovery of a sheet music cover dating from 1861 in his collection (see illustration), has made it possible to take the matter of the naming of Polka Road a stage further than Steve Adcock did in his article that appeared in Newsletter No.64 (New Year 2017).



Using data from the Norfolk Register of Electors, Steve narrowed the date of the change of name from the original New Road to Polka Road to the year 1885 or thereabouts. He then explained in detail and conclusively in our opinion, that the name must have derived from the polka dance of Bohemian origin in 2/4 time that first appeared in Prague in 1835 and then spread widely throughout Europe and Britain and elsewhere, for the remainder of the 19th century in what has been dubbed the 'polka mania'. He went on to theorize that the brig *Polka*, itself named after the dance and built in Newcastle in 1845, may at some time have called at Wells with coal from the North-East. That brig was in fact still going strong in 1862 and was then engaged in the Newcastle/Baltic trade. We shall see that Steve's theory about some sort of connection with a ship was probably nearer to being correct than he ever thought, though it was not that particular ship.

(In order for the reader to be completely informed about this long-standing puzzle, it is worth mentioning that in her booklet *Aspects of Life in Wells-Next-the-Sea* published in 1981, Nita Nicholson recorded the following: "In 1881, according to White's Directory, a Miss Louisa Folkard lived in Church Street. It is just possible that legend is right, and that the road eventually took her name - 'Polka' being a corruption of 'Folkard'". The only benefit of that legend is that it is from any learned point of view, so easily disposed of. The short form of the Old German names of Fulcard, Folkard and Folkerts is Fulk, according to Reaney's authoritative *The Origins of English Surnames*. Furthermore, corruptions

of names more often than not use the same first letter as the original.)

In 1858 the paddle & screw steamship *Great Eastern* designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel was launched at Millwall on the River Thames. She was a ship of biblical proportions because as contemporary observers pointed out, at 692 feet in length, only Noah's *Ark* at 300 cubits was comparable in size. (It was not until White Star Line's *Olympic* was built in 1899, that an even longer ship appeared.) From the moment of her launching the *Great Eastern* became the Queen of the Seas and was celebrated in every way possible. She made the first of her ten trans-Atlantic crossings in 1860. Four years later she was fitted out as a telegraph cable-laying vessel, and it was her work that culminated on 25 July 1866 in communications between Europe and North America dropping from about one month to only a few minutes. The ship's cable-laying career ended in 1874, and she was finally broken-up in the Mersey in 1888. The ship was an unlucky one in certain respects, it being rather prone to accidents: even her launching had been botched up! So, during the thirty years of her life she was in one way or another hardly ever out of the news.

What interests us here is that a polka was written about her. The *Great Eastern Polka* was composed by a dance music prolific called Charles Coote Jnr. (1832-1916) and was premiered at the Royal Strand Theatre in London in 1861 in a musical burlesque called *Aladdin* written by Henry James Byron (1835-1886). Just how a polka celebrating the greatest ship of the times fitted into a

burlesque called *Aladdin* that also featured the first ever appearance of that popular pantomime character Widow Twankey, the present authors have been unable to fathom.

Coote's toe-tapping polka became very popular indeed, with the sheet music depicting the *Great Eastern* on its cover selling widely. It was taken up by bands all over the world, becoming a standard in the repertoire of most of them. It became a favourite for pianists playing in their parlours. The sheet music possibly reached Wells via Frederick Brightmer's music shop in Station Road. Brightmer also ran a brass band which, conducted by himself, could be hired for dances and other special occasions. No doubt bands from outside the town were occasionally brought in too. The popular Great Eastern Polka would have reached Wells somehow.

What has all this got to do with the naming of Polka Road? Wells was first linked with the rail network in 1857 when the Wells & Fakenham Railway Company opened a line to Fakenham. Lord Leicester and the other directors of the company hoped this would halt the declining fortunes of the port and town. But even after the construction of a short spur down to the harbour in 1860, the decline continued for the port was unable to handle the increasing size of ships. So, in 1862 the Wells & Fakenham became part of the Great Eastern Railway, a move that connected Wells with a rail network to London and the south with its ever-growing food markets. Four years later the West Norfolk Junction Railway, which also eventually became part of the Great Eastern, came to Wells connecting it via Holkham,

Heacham and King's Lynn, to another line running to the south. (Edwin Gales, proprietor of The Nursery that filled the area south of Theatre Road, and publisher and editor of the *Wells Herald* from 1887 to 1892, often used the latter line to get to London, and had nothing but praise for the service. See Newsletter No.53 of April 2013.)

By the late 1800s therefore, the Great Eastern Railway Company had become very important to the economy of Wells, its station handling seaside tourists as well import and export cargoes. It is recorded that a dozen or so passenger trains called at the station each day, as well as goods trains to and from the harbour, with all of the rolling stock emblazoned with the company's name. Throughout that period platforms and other parts of the station, which stood on New Road, were upgraded. The station yard, which included an Engine Shed and a turntable, was called the Great Eastern Yard. The company with its Stationmaster (George Paynter in 1890) residing above the station and its Permanent Way Manager (William Smith in that same year) living in Theatre Road, was a substantial employer in the town in its own right. On top of that, the port with its stevedores and dockers, was now largely dependent upon it. So were other employers like the Corn Mill close to the station yard to which a short length of track had been laid. There was a Railway and Commercial Hotel on the corner where Station Road met New Road. So, in various ways the name Great Eastern would have been in popular and regular use all over the town.

So, maybe, when the matter of renaming the rather prosaic sounding New Road came up before the Wells

Improvement Commission in about 1885, several names were suggested. Perhaps because of its importance to the town and because its station was situated on New Road with its Great Eastern Yard immediately behind it, someone suggested renaming it after the railway company. (Did one or more of the Commissioners hold shares in the Great Eastern Railway Company?) And the road was, after all, on the eastern side of the town. However, Great Eastern Road would have been rather pretentious sounding, and entirely out of keeping with the nature of that thoroughfare. It was then, like other roads in the town, chalk-surfaced, which meant it had often to be watered-down: 'watering of roads' being one of the most frequently listed items in the Improvement Trust's financial ledgers of those times. Could it have been during those considerations that one of the Commissioners, or one of their wives even, one who rather liked being pranced around the dance floor at a rapid rate, then made the connection with the name of the particular polka that was all the rage, and that is how the road got its new name?

All that having been said, it is quite possible that this subject will have to be revisited again! For if the name Polka was on record in the Norfolk Electoral Rolls in 1885, then why is it that the name New Road was still being recorded in the Wells Improvement Trust's ledgers as late as 1892? (See illustration.) Was it simply that the Trust's accountant with the responsibility for the ledgers did not much care for names that stemmed from such a frivolous source?



As no Improvement Trust Minute Books (as opposed to ledgers) for this period appear to be extant, maybe we shall never know for sure exactly when Polka Road got its name. But the present authors would each bet their last dollar on it being connected, not with any old polka, but with Charles Coote's particular one.

Peter Elphick and John Wykes.



Walsingham Railway Station becomes St. Seraphim's

St Seraphim's Icon and Railway Museum is housed in the former railway station in Walsingham. Walsingham Station opened in 1857 and was a prosperous station, central to village life. From its outset the station catered for passengers, livestock, parcels and goods traffic. Walsingham Station was influential in the revival of religious pilgrimage to the village, which has been a pilgrimage shrine since 1061. Special pilgrim trains were run from the 1930's. These trains were so long Walsingham Station's platform had to be lengthened to 70 metres.



The station closed in 1964 after the Beeching report; however, it would continue its association with religion.

In 1967 the station was converted into an Orthodox Chapel by the Brotherhood of St. Seraphim, supported by the work of two Iconographers, Father David and Leon Liddament. Leon had a studio beneath the Chapel from the late 1980's, creating and selling traditional hand-painted Icons. A collection of Icons, documentation, and equipment were inherited by St Seraphim's Trust. Working with these collections St. Seraphim's achieved museum accreditation status in 2016. The museum is the first museum of Icons in the United Kingdom, and the new display will show the icons currently held in store.

St. Seraphim's aims to tell its intertwined story of Iconography and the Railway. The museum houses a small collection of railway artefacts and an extensive archive of images, documentation and oral histories. St. Seraphim's is dedicated to preserving the heritage of Walsingham Station. In 2017 the roof was renovated with half the slates renewed and half re-used, and the guttering replaced. In 2018 three railway windows were replaced on the upper floor and in 2019 the restoration continues with the installation of replica windows on the lower floor, with funding from the Pilgrim Trust. This preservation continues in the garden which was used as allotments by the railway workers. This area has been beautifully developed with new plantings and the rebuilding of the former lamp and oil shed. The garden is also a registered Quiet Garden, a space for reflection and tranquillity. The garden is part of Walsingham open gardens on the 29th and 30th June.



St. Seraphim's is currently in development with the Heritage Lottery Funded, 'Our Heritage' Project, 'Volunteering at St. Seraphim's Trust: displaying Icons and reaching new communities', with refurbishment supported by a grant from the Foyle Foundation. The project aims to create a permanent display of our Icon collections and enhance the display by bringing forward more stories such as those of the railway. St. Seraphim's is run almost entirely by volunteers and there are always opportunities for you to help with the running of the museum, the garden and to work with our archives. St. Seraphim's looks forward to welcoming new volunteers and sharing our unique heritage with more visitors.

Elyshia Brooks

Volunteer Coordinator

Contact the museum at - 01328 820610 - Email: saint.seraphims@gmail.com

WLHG Books and DVDs

The following books and discs, published by the group, are currently in print and are available. The first price is for the general public, the second in the concessionary price to members. Members who live out of town may buy post and packaging free, in exchange for the fact that they are generally unable to attend the talks.

Contact:

Nita Spencer, 30a Theatre Road, Wells-next-the-Sea, NR23 1DJ
01328 710501 – jnornita@aol.com

TOWN WALKS: (4 available)

South Route, Central Route, East End Route, West End Route,
£2.00 each, - members £1.50

A SKETCHBOOK WITH NOTES

A collection of the sketches from the above walk books
£2.00 – members £1.50

DVD DISCS (4 available)

- 1) Wells Harbour
- 2) Harbour Disc Two – Beach, Floods, Lifeboats etc.
- 3) Wells Town 1 – Church, Railway, Burnt St., Church St., High St., Polka Road, and School
- 4) Wells Town 2 – Staithe St., Freeman St., Buttlands, Gas Works, Hospital

All the above a collection of old photographs with commentary by Maureen Dye – last between 30 and 40 minutes each
£5.00 – members £4.00

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG LAD – MEMORIES OF WELLS

Reprint of the book by Geoff Perkins – members only - £8.00

WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA – A SMALL PORT AND A WIDE WORLD

Not published by us but selling it on behalf of Poppyland Publishing
Roger Arguile – Paperback Version only - £14.95 -members £12.00

TALKS PROGRAMME

All at the W.I. HALL, Church Plain – all Wednesdays
2019

3 April 7.30pm Peter Townroe
Some stained glass treasures

1 May 7.30pm John Alban
Defence of the coast in the 14th century

8 May 7.30pm
Annual General Meeting & Members' Social Evening

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4 September 7.30pm Orla Kennelly
Second Air Division at Sculthorpe

2 October 7.30pm to be announced

6 November 7.30pm Cyril Southerland
Fishing off Norfolk in the 19th Century

4 December **2.30pm** Stephen Pope
The Victorian Workhouse

2020

5 February **2.30pm** Keith Leesmith
Wells, Fakenham, & HMS Rockingham

4 March 7.30pm to be announced

1 April 7.30pm Robert and Liz Scott
Blickling Hall

6 May 7.30pm Steve Adcock
The Early Policing of Wells

The next Newsletter will be published during the late summer

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