

Wells Local History Group Newsletter



*Arrangements due to Coronavirus
Wells Maltings & Community Association
The Wells Improvement Bill
Visit of William Samuel Parkyn ARCA*

Number 75 – Autumn 2020

A MESSAGE FROM THE WLHG COMMITTEE

Like every other similar organisation in the Country, WLHG was caught out by the coronavirus lockdown and had to abandon the April and May 2020 meetings that it had planned. This included the AGM when we would normally have called for nominations for the committee for the coming year, and also presented the accounts for the previous year. As far as the committee is concerned, all the current members will continue until the next AGM – due May 2021. You will find a copy of the accounts elsewhere in this newsletter.

We now come to the programme for the autumn of 2020 through to the spring of 2021. You will appreciate that the booking of speakers to make an interesting and varied programme is no easy task and falls almost exclusively to Roger Arguile. Although the lockdown is gradually being eased there are several questions that we do not know the answers to at the time of writing. Will the WI Hall be reopening to hirers by September? Is it large enough to provide the required social distancing? Would any alternative venue be suitable and available? (The Maltings and St Nicholas have been mentioned). Considering the age of our members how many will decide not to attend talks for the time being? Will the current easing of restrictions (possibly mainly for economic reasons) lead us towards normality, or will the lockdown have to be re-imposed because cases of coronavirus start to rise again?

You will appreciate that there are many unknowns, which makes it difficult for us to decide what to do at the present time. We have come to the conclusion that we would be better to abandon the autumn programme and not re-start talks until the New Year. Since the majority of members now pay by standing order, we will send each person/couple who pays this way a copy of Mike Welland's newly printed book "The Holkham Murder of 1851". We will not print new membership cards at the present time but will instead do so to coincide with the revised programme, which will run from January to May. This is assuming that during the intervening period we are confident of being able to re-start in early 2021. Members who normally pay by cash or cheque will have the option of paying the normal amount (£10 individual or £15 couple) and receiving a copy of the Holkham Murder book, or of paying a reduced membership fee. (£8 or £10 a couple).

We hope that you are happy with the above arrangements and look forward to seeing you in 2021. The provisional programme is printed on the rear of this newsletter.

You will appreciate that the Archive Room in the Maltings was also caught by the lockdown – it being due to open to the public the day after Easter Monday. We do not at present know the plans of the Maltings for reopening, and therefore, for the time being, we will not attempt to institute the regular opening that we had planned. It may be possible to open on an "appointments only" basis later.

WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2019-2020



Balances brought forward

Deposit Account	11,171.01
Current Account	3617.09
Cash in hand	11.22
Uncashed cheque	-60.00
	14739.32

RECEIPTS

Membership	1146.00
Meeting Fees	430.22
Books	394.75
DVDs	66.25
Newsletters	68.25
Misc	110.00
Interest	20.64

Total Receipts **2236.11**

EXPENDITURE

Speaker Fees	140.00
Room Hire	153.00
Expenses	149.37
Membership Printing	1050.93
DVDs Production	88.00
Fed. & Insurance	90.00
Archive Room	3396.67

Total Costs **5067.97**

DEFICIT FOR YEAR

2831.86

Archive Fund	5156.08
	-3396.67
	1759.41
General Fund	10148.05
	11907.46

Balances carried forward

Deposit Account	11191.65
Current Account	767.48
Cash in hand	15.44
Uncashed cheques	-67.11
	11907.46

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Examiner

Maureen Dye

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Wells Maltings & The Community Association

Until 1929 there were maltings all over the town; huge hulking sheds that dominated the yards that ran down to the Quay. In that year F & G. Smith who had maltings in Great Ryburgh and Dereham decided they could to advantage dispense with one of their bases. Because of a dispute over noise levels caused by the machinery it was Wells that they closed. For more than forty years they mostly remained, empty, derelict and potentially dangerous. The efforts of the town had been toward the provision of housing and the demolition of slum cottages rather than doing something about unprofitable eyesores.

1972 was to be a turning point. At the beginning of that year, the Wells Urban District Council turned its attention to one of the few maltings which had found another use. It was as a grain store that the Staithe Street Maltings had its



final industrial purpose, owned by Eastern Counties Farmers' Cooperative, an Ipswich- based firm which had come to Wells in 1935. ECF closed its Wells operation in 1971 and the UDC bought it for £6000, half the asking price, with the intention of turning it into an Arts Centre.

The response locally was surprising and quite sudden. Hearing of the idea that it be used as an arts centre, a small number of people in the vicinity proposed to take over the Sackhouse and part of the main building for just such a purpose. How they came together is not clear: their first chairman was a glassware designer, Ronald Stennett-Willson who had set up a factory in Kings Lynn and who was later to set up Langham Glass. The guiding light seems to have been Michael Hooton who administered the project assisted by John Plumbe who was fundraiser, and Jonathan Field artistic director. The actors Michael Gough and Edward Fox who had recently acted in the film *The Go-between*, filmed in Norfolk were recruited; the former as vice-chairman, He had just moved to Field Dalling. Others were the memorably named Roddy Maude-Roxby a stand-up comedian who had worked with Terry Jones and Michael Palin of Monty Python fame.¹ They leased the Sackhouse and part of the Maltings from the Wells Urban District Council. With the active assistance of Molly Kitson and some volunteer help they turned the Sackhouse into a coffee bar and art gallery. They intended they said to

¹ (*Other names mentioned in the press were, Brian and Persephone Paine, Nancy Williams and Jane Jermyn*)

devote the building to demonstrating local crafts such as blacksmithing, weaving, printing, music and painting. They set about making the north end of the maltings into a makeshift theatre. They proposed to seat 700 people; in the event it seated less than a hundred, scarcely enough to make a profit. The toilets and bar were in the Sackhouse.

But in the same year, the government passed legislation abolishing Urban District Councils; an act which was to take from Wells almost all powers over its own destiny and handing over all of its property to the new District Council based in Cromer. Relations between the Cromer Council and Wells Town Council quickly soured as it became clear that Cromer was determined to have its way without regard either to the prior decisions of the former Wells Council or its current will. From the day that the two councils began their separate existence, April 1st, 1974, it became clear that the intention was that Wells would no longer have any say in its own affairs.

Undismayed Mary Kitson, chairman of Wells Town Council who was also an elected member of the new District Council took to the District the proposal that Wells retain control over the Maltings and, for that matter of the rest of the property which they had administered formerly owned by the UDC. Opposed by fellow Wells councillor Charles Ramm she confessed herself bitterly disappointed at the failure of her resolution. It was supported by only six councillors. Cromer and Sheringham, both part of the new



District, had been treated more generously she noted. She concluded that she should stand down as chairman of the town council which post passed to Frank Sawbridge a longstanding member of the council who abandoned all attempts further to retain powers 'until a revised act gives us statutory powers to provide these facilities or a 'converted' North Norfolk District Council sees the errors of its ways'.¹

Then in January 1976, having stripped Wells of all its property save the Buttlands and the cemetery Cromer produced a scheme for the provision of housing in the centre of Wells which it presented to the Town Council via

¹ WTC Minutes November 1974

its Deputy Secretary R.V. Nash and its Chief Assistant Architect P.S. Eccleshare. The proposal was to demolish the Maltings and build houses on the site.

A Steering Committee was immediately set up by the Town Council under the chairmanship of Councillor John Christmas to investigate the possibility of the community use of the Maltings.¹ The Steering Committee worked quickly and presented its report to the Council the following month, March. It sought to demonstrate the need for community use in the town: among those suggested as users were the Youth Club, the Playgroup; the Football Club; the St. Raphael, Nelson and Good Companions clubs. Other uses suggested – that the town could do with a museum, an indoor bowls club, an adjunct to the arts centre, and facilities for the Sailing Club. However, the report concluded that £8,100 was required merely to put the building in good order which would not include the costs of modifying the building which was of course necessary. The proposals were to remove the top floor to create a building on two floors, the upper to be used as a dance floor/sports room and a lounge/bar in a smaller room or used for smaller receptions and meetings. The ground floor could provide exclusive use by the Youth club and Playgroup with a smaller room to be used as a Day Centre for the elderly and infirm and for the museum.

¹ *WTC Minutes Feb. 2nd, 1976.*

The Report concluded that ‘....the full force of the Town Council should be employed to stop the NNDC continuing with their plans for the site and let the Town Council become its tenants ‘ Its appendices included the following: (1) The building was acquired by Wells UDC for a mere £6,000 for use as a community centre not a building site.’ (4) ‘The site is not suitable for residential development in the heart of the holiday centre of Wells’; (6) while in the financially difficult times of 1976 it would be possible to build a few houses very cheaply, with a subsequent saving to the ratepayers of North Norfolk (because of the cheap building land) in the long run that saving will be at the expense of the residents of Wells and particularly the coming generations. ‘¹

The costings seemed prohibitive. So after further debate at its meeting on June 21st. 1976 Charles Ramm, so often a thorn in the side of the Council proposed that “In view of the high financial commitment needed to use the Maltings for a community centre we notify the NNDC that we will no longer pursue the matter but request a piece of land be earmarked for community use [between the Glebe and Staithe Street] as soon as possible.” Defeated by the enormity of the task if not by argument, all members of the Council save John Christmas, erstwhile chairman of the Steering Committee, voted in favour. It did not at the time seem a likely request to receive a favourable hearing.

¹ WTC Minutes March 22nd. 1976

Meanwhile the cessation of Wells' local control over the Maltings complex in 1974 must have come as a shock to the Wells Arts Centre. In order to protect what they had done they had to negotiate with the new council, as they did in September 1975. Stennett-Willson and Field met with Mr. Terry Nolan, newly appointed Chief Executive, (ex -Walsingham RDC) of NNDC to discuss the future of the buildings. What they said is not recorded but they must have obtained at least a stay of execution.

The most vehement though not the only opponent of the attempts to retain the Maltings had been Charles Ramm and Ramm died suddenly in October 1976. The Council began looking for alternative possibilities for a community hall and lit upon the possibility of using the Regal Cinema recently closed. In February 1977 they commissioned a report on the condition of the building on receipt of which they agreed to borrow £20,000 for its purchase and conversion, subject to the granting of a singing and dancing licence from magistrates, which was not forthcoming. At some expense they appealed to the Crown Court but failed to get the refusal overturned. NNDC continued to work towards the demolition of the Maltings. At its December meeting the Town Council agreed to inform NNDC that it was the opinion of the Town Council that all dwellings planned for the Maltings site should consist of at least two bedrooms. NNDC's instead sought and obtained planning permission for demolition and for the building on the site of thirty flats.

The District Council's proposals were part of a programme of house building for the whole district to be submitted in the form of bids to central government. However, because of government cuts, by a third, to the housing programme Cromer seems to have decided to omit Wells from its 1978-9 bids..¹ (One result was that whereas Wells UDC had been able to pursue a policy of council house building, no houses of any kind were built in Wells by the District in the five years after they took over.)² The delay caused Wells Council to consider opening a fund for the provision of a community hall. A management committee was formed. One possibility canvassed was that of leasing the Church Rooms.

Then the November meeting of the Council received the news that the District was prepared to offer the Staithe Street Maltings complex for a new community hall.³ By this time Myrtle French had become chairman of the Town Council – on a casting vote. It must have seemed as if common sense had prevailed at last though it still seemed an impossible task to raise the necessary funds, no less difficult than the earlier proposals. The Council decided to call a public meeting following which the inaugural meeting of the Community Association took place on July 12th, 1978

¹ (*press cutting Quaysider / Marcus French*)

² WTC minutes 2nd/ May 1977 also press report *Franks Sawbridge*

³ WTC Minutes Nov. 1st. 1977

The council was to be represented by Mr. R. W, Sizeland.

Meetings took place in the Mayshiel restaurant run by the Offords, Norman and Peggy. Enthusiasm for the association seems to have been unbounded. It had representatives from thirty organisations in the town: Scouts, Cubs, Guides, Brownies, football club, Playgroup, Swimming Club, and Bowls Club and many more. Norman Offord became chairman. Others were Betty Emmerson, Harold Coombes, clerk to the council and Myrtle French. No longer constrained by the limitations of local government financing arrangements they began fundraising that year by every means available: dances, jumble sales, even requests for donations by letters sent to every house in the town. It was a long slog. It took until



1984 for enough money to be raised to start the project, some £18,000, for a lease from the District Council to be signed. The lease was obtained after long negotiations principally through the efforts of two members of the Wells Centre, its acting chairman Rod Travers a retired engineer, and John Plumbe an accountant; both local residents. It was signed by the Association's trustees, Betty Emerson, Harold Combe and Myrtle French.

Having a building that had lain empty for thirteen years, save for the squadrons of pigeons whose hanger it was, presented a massive challenge to be met initially by a group of people who were entirely volunteers; local builder Terry Moore and his wife Caroline, Betty Emerson's husband John among them. Nevertheless, now having taken possession of the building they could begin the work of clearing the building prior to making it useable as a facility for the town. They began by removing the old machinery, elevators, corn bins, thousands of feet of timber planking, immense piles of brick rubble, pigeon muck by the barrow-load and all manner of other rubbish. Some of it was simply poured out of upper openings onto a trailer borrowed from local farmer Des Wright. The ceilings were low, supported by cast iron uprights, which needed to be removed so that a new higher ceiling could be built; the ground floor needed to be raised so that it was near to street level.¹ Then professional help would have to be sought. Stuart Offord, son of the chairman, who was an

¹ *Dereham and Fakenham Times* July 6th, 1984

architect did the drawings and Garrads of North Elmham were engaged to do the block work and rebuild the ceilings. The new hall was created separately from the Wells Centre and its piano store. A modern kitchen was built which would suffer from the fact that Maltings do not have windows, only narrow louvres to control the temperature of the malting floors. Smoke extractors were thus a necessary element of the design. The upper floors meanwhile were left semi-derelict awaiting the raising of more funds. Not without objection from local pubs and hotels, it obtained a drinks on-licence. It was in truth hard to see how an organisation which would only sell drinks when there were functions could compete with regular licensed premises, but eight licensees objected.¹

The last stage in finishing off the hall, the painting of the interior, was assisted by a donation of paint from Dulux which had run a Community Projects scheme; their prize was 212 litres of paint, a saving of over £900. The vinyl floor and installation of central heating, another £3000, would complete the job. Over the time the Association had raised £25,000 which was matched by Norfolk County Council and NNDC with £25,000. WTC gave £1000 as did the Jubilee Trust. It was enough. Just.

It took nine years from when the association began to its

¹ Licensing hearing Fakenham Feb. 5th, 1985. Wilf Foyers of the Crown expressed the view that his business would become unviable' if the Maltings were allowed a license. EDP

opening in 1987 by Viscount Coke who had agreed to be its president. The vice-chairman Mike Gates, then running a cafe in town, conducted the opening; Norman Offord attended but had become unwell following a stroke. Secretary Betty Emerson, Edith Mitchell, June Wincott all under the eye of Myrtle French who was vice-president completed the group. After the opening ceremony the audience was treated to a break-dancing display by local



group the Cosmic Rockers.

In the months that followed it hosted dances, discos, banquets, and wedding receptions as well as scores of fundraising efforts. Wells Day Centre used the premises each week for the elderly and handicapped; there was a successful pantomime, a synthetic ice rink, an antiques fair, a fashion show and even a meeting of NNDC councillors. The Carnival committee used the building during Carnival Week. Not all went smoothly. Not only had

they faced opposition from local licensees; relations with the Wells Centre were sometimes rocky. In truth, the ambitions of the Wells Centre folk were of a different order from the desires of the town. The two worlds which, thirty plus years later were still distant from each other, of high art and community activity, nevertheless benefitted each other. Apart from it bringing art and theatrical events to the town, it may be that one of its important contributions to the town was in securing the lease as its greatest gift. There was also fall-out between the Carnival Committee and the Association over a double booking with a craft fair in Carnival Week, something which tended to happen. It created a rift not healed for some time.

The upper floor remained unused in the early days and needed a permanent staircase (and the area above the theatre was never used until the 2016 refurbishment). It came into use in the 1990s by a happy mischance. The local freemasons had been meeting in the Congregational Hall, but their activities were not acceptable to the incoming minister. Seeking a new meeting place, they offered to take over and refurbish the upper floor, one room of which they used for their own meetings, the Raven Room and the other the Jubilee room.

In spite of local effort, the Wells Centre finally closed in 1989 and for several years the theatre was empty and unused. In 1994 the District Council asked the Community Association to take on the lease of the Granary and the Sackhouse. Agreeing to take on the Granary but not the



Sackhouse, the Council was initially opposed to its being used as a theatre, preferring its use for bingo. The newly formed Friends of the Granary¹ took the opposite view. After some months of wrangling, it was eventually agreed that the Friends should rent it from the Community Association and began both to book theatre groups and to put on locally produced shows. The Granary Players were founded at the same time² from members of the Friends who to put on plays and other entertainments.

However, the theatre had first to be made usable. Ray Smith, a recently retired drama advisor, as manager who it was repaired the seating rake and put in some cinema seats which had been obtained from a Lowestoft cinema.

¹ Among those who became members were Ray Smith who chaired it, Helen Flanagan, Pat Bannister, Janet McNabb, Margaret Bunting, Ian Clarke, John Coleridge, Brian Sage, Bill and Ann Sibley and Jean Alison

² Ray Smith, Pete Lynn, Jean Davies, Joan Price, Suzanne Rands, Rosemary Bundy – several of whom put money into the theatre.

Toilets and a bar were provided. All of which cost money some of which was got by fundraising though some came from members' pockets. Latterly Ray Smith obtained some tip-up cinema seats from Breckland District Council and installed them at some cost. The running of the Granary was very much the work of Pat Bannister and Helen Flanagan, two teachers who had come to the town in 1981. They ran it until Helen's death after which Pat continued to manage it until its closure in 2016.

Although the Maltings and the Granary together kept the building in good use, so that apart from visiting groups it hosted various organisations in the town, it was becoming clear that a major fundraising effort was needed for, should the roof fall in, all would be lost. The Association recruited Becky Jeffcoate as a fundraiser. She and Ben Francis, a project manager originally employed by NNDC and based in the Sackhouse, began to work together with the Association to seek lottery funding for a huge development which was to result in the transformation of the Association into the Maltings Trust. The running of the organisation was thus put on a professional basis. What they were able to achieve is another story, but it was based upon the work of huge numbers of people in the town who had first saved the building from demolition and then secured its future by their fundraising, their sheer hard work and their enthusiasm.

A WELLS IMPROVEMENT BILL

(Norwich Mercury 18 May 1844)

Considerable interest is felt in this town in consequence of a bill which has lately been before the House of Commons being brought forward by a few private individuals for lighting, paving, cleansing, widening, and improving the town. The bill has passed the Commons and is in the House of Lords, but it seems that unfortunately for the projectors the standing orders of their Lordships House had not been complied with in as much as no public meeting of the inhabitants had been mentioned about the matter. The projectors finding this necessary called a public meeting of the inhabitants at the Crown Inn on the afternoon of Wednesday last, stating as their reason for doing so that the incorrect reasons existed on the subject in the minds of the inhabitants, and that this meeting was necessary to remove them; and also for adopting resolutions and a petition in support of the bill. At the time mentioned there was a very numerous meeting on the Bowling Green of the above Inn.

Mr Thomas Crofts, the senior churchwarden proposed that the Rev. Valentine Hill the rector of the parish should take the chair, which proposition was seconded by Mr James Chapman, the other churchwarden. The Reverend Gentleman, however, refused the offer. Mr Thomas Leeder immediately proposed that Mr William Elgar should take the chair, which proposition was seconded by Mr Gardiner. The motion met with a hearty response from the meeting and Mr Elgar complied with the request. The chair being taken amidst the greatest uproar the promoters of the bill and of the meeting declined offering any proposition or any

petition, but Mr Robinson Parker proposed the following petition be adopted; -

*To the Right Honourable the Lords Spiritual and Temporal
of the United
Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament
assembled –*

*The humble petition of the persons whose names are
hereunto subscribed being landowners, house holders,
and tradesmen, rate payers of the town and port of Wells
next the sea, in the county of Norfolk, assembled at a
parish meeting held at the Crown Inn, Wells next the sea
in the said County on Wednesday the 15th May, 1844
sheweth –*

*That a bill is now pending in your Right Honourable House
for lighting, paving, cleansing, widening and improving the
streets of the town of Wells, in the county of Norfolk, for
removing and preventing nuisances therein, and for
making new streets and roadings: that the trade of the port
and town has of late years suffered very materially by the
depression of the mercantile business and the poor rate
has been increased for want of employment of the
labouring classes.*

*That the number of inhabitants in the said town are about
3,500 and the houses and tenements unoccupied appear
to be near 200. That a large portion of the property
assessed for the payment of the poor rate has been legally
remitted by the magistrates of the district in consequence
of the impoverished state of the parish.*

That a public meeting has been this day called at which your petitioners have attended, and that your petitioners, being the major part in number and value of the persons present at the said meeting, do object to the said bill in its present form, and to many of the provisions therein contained, and your petitioners also deny, altogether the truth of the allegations contained in the preamble of the said bill.

That your petitioners also object to the persons by the said bill proposed to be appointed commissioners and also to the clauses therein contained relating to the appointment, qualification and proceedings of such Commissioners.

That your petitioners also object to the sum of money authorised by the said bill to be borrowed, and to all the clauses and provisions relative thereto, and that there are various other clauses and provisions contained in the said bill to which your petitioners specially object.

Your petitioners therefore most humbly pray that the said bill may not pass into law as it now stands, and that they may be heard by themselves, their counsel agents and witnesses against the preamble of the said bill, and against such of the provisions thereof as affect their rights and interests, and that they may have such relief in the premises as to your Lordships may seem meet.

The adoption of this petition was seconded by Mr Henry Neville, and was carried unanimously. It was then proposed that the names of the parties present against the said bill should be taken down, and the meeting was kept open until five o'clock for this purpose, when the Chairman declared the meeting concluded and left the chair.

The promoters of the bill afterwards assembled in a private room at the Crown and received signatures to a petition in support of the bill – the Rev. V. Hill Rector in the chair.

A very considerable degree of excitement prevails in the town on the subject.

Mike Welland

ED: The bill was of course eventually passed as the ***Wells Improvement Act*** (either in the original or a modified form) and lead to such improvements as the building of the New (Polka) Road, the Gas Works, bringing gas street lighting, and similar enhancements to the town.



***Are you interested in Wells
History, but not yet a member of
Wells Local History Group?***

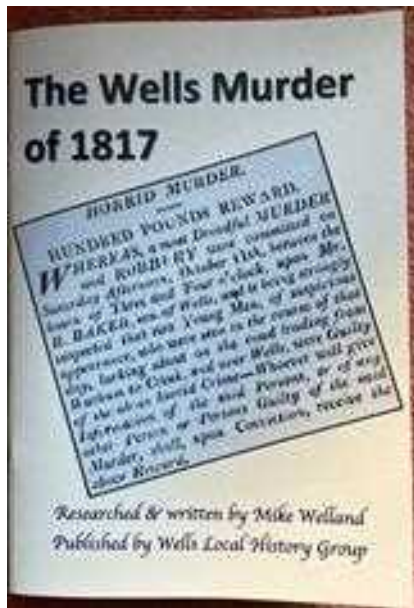
***We have over a hundred members, about
half of them “local” and the other half living
all over the Country.***

***Membership is £10 per annum or £15 for two
living at the same address. (Couples share a
newsletter)***

***Benefits of membership include three of
these newsletters each year, a programme
of talks from September to May each year,
plus discounts on our published books and
DVDs.***

***If you are interested contact the secretary:
keithnextthesea@gmail.com or write to:
WLHG, 31 Dogger Lane, Wells-next-the-Sea
NR23 1BE***

New Books – Hot off the presses!



This is a revised and updated version of the book originally published in 2012 but in the same format as this newsletter, and containing colour photographs.

Public - £5.00
Members £4.00

This is a brand-new book, containing an interesting story researched by Mike Welland

Public £3.50
Members £3.00

But members paying their subscription by standing order will receive a free copy this year



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

Associate of the Royal College of Art (ARCA) visits Wells – November 1924

The entries recorded in the Railway Hotel's Visitors Book of the early 20th century have now been scanned in their entirety and will be accessible for members to view along with the original document in the WLHG Archive Room at the Maltings once the facility can be safely accessed, in what will hopefully be the not too distant future.

The scanning of each entry has certainly highlighted the content provided by every author. However, in this particular instance it was not the signature 'W. S. Parkyn ARCA' that stood out in what is an unremarkable entry, but the next line 'Artist + Ratcatcher'.



It was an unusual entry that stood out and worthy of further investigation. Was the word 'Ratcatcher' possibly inserted later by another guest of the hotel ridiculing the grandeur

of such an occupation in post First World War Britain? It seems unlikely as the handwriting does appear consistent with that of the original author, William Samuel Parkyn of Pentine Studio, The Lizard, Cornwall. Having discovered no evidence of Mr Parkyn having been a ratcatcher in his spare time in Cornwall, my conclusion is that he must have had a great sense of humour.

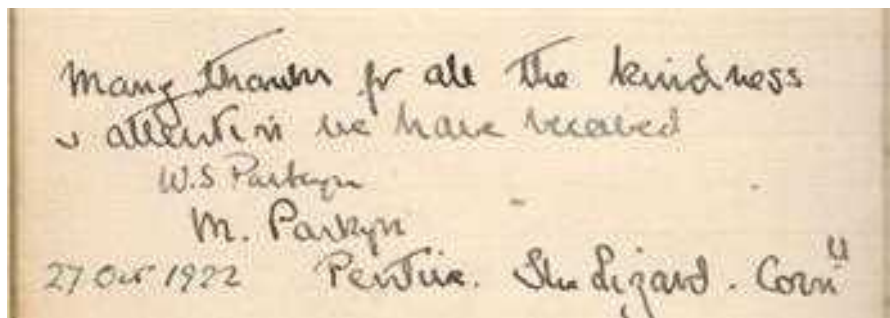
So, what was the artist doing in Wells in the November of 1924? Taking a late autumn break, or was he working? The fact he included his occupation in the Railway Hotel Visitors Book might suggest he was here to paint.

Cornwallartists.org tells us that William Samuel Parkyn, the son of an army commander, was born in Blackheath, London in 1875. Known principally as a marine painter, he worked in watercolours and oils. He was educated privately before studying art at Blackheath and Rochester. He first came to Cornwall and exhibited with Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society in 1896, living at St Ives and exhibiting again the following year at Falmouth. He studied further under Louis Grier, the famous Australian marine artist, at St Ives. In 1905 he advertised that he would hold a watercolour and oil painting class during July, August and September at the East Kent School of Landscape Painting, Sandwich. He returned to live in St. Ives c.1907, his first show being in 1908. His home was at Richborough, Barnoon, St Ives and he worked from the St Eia Studio until after the First World War. In later years he moved to the Lizard, opting for more tranquil scenes, being particularly renowned for his ability to depict sand.

From my research I have not been able to attribute any of his named works directly to the Norfolk coastline but did make a tantalising discovery through the website of Mallams Auctioneers of Abingdon, Oxfordshire, who in December 2014 sold a William Samuel Parkyn painting entitled 'Sand Dunes and Pine Trees' (<https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/william-samuel-parkyn-1875-1949-sand-dunes-and-1197-c-5cf3d93ef0#>).

Could 'Sand Dunes and Pine Trees' be the result of Parkyn's visit to Wells in November 1924?

We may never know for certain, but I did as a result go back through the Railway Hotel Visitors Book and found that he had previously stayed in Wells during October 1922.



Did this earlier visit to Wells inspire his return trip in 1924 to complete the work 'Sand Dunes and Pine Trees' or did he complete more than one painting of the Wells coastline?

Again, we may never know but could this second painting I found online be another depiction of Wells' Pine Woods?

Steve Adcock



Sand Dunes and Pine Trees



A tree lined hillock before the sand

TALKS PROGRAMME

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

2021

January 6th	2.30pm <i>Sewage in Wells</i>	Roger Arguile
February 3rd	2.30pm <i>The Black Death in Norfolk</i>	Mark Bailey
March 3rd	7.30pm <i>Binham Priory</i>	Nicholas Vincent
April 7th	7.30pm <i>Early Policing in Wells II</i>	Steve Adcock
May 5th	7.30pm <i>Blickling Hall</i>	Liz & Robert Scott
May 12th	7.30pm <i>Annual General Meeting & Members' Evening</i>	

The next Newsletter will be published around Christmas