

Wells Local History Group Newsletter



Women's Suffrage Society, Wells & WW1 Serbia

History of Wells Bowling Greens

Little London – Welsh Drovers in Wells

Pictures of Wells Past

1851 Wells Census

Peter Wilson; Brian Scott; Lesley Jarvis

Number 76 – New Year 2021

I'm sure it will come as no surprise that the committee has regrettably decided that the planned resumption of our talks programme in the New Year, will not now go ahead. It is very difficult in a rapidly changing situation to predict the future, and this subject is no exception. But I am writing this during the second lockdown, and it currently looks as if we will go back to "square-one" after it, which means that indoor meetings will be restricted to six people. Even if that is not the case, we cannot be sure about a venue, our current home at the W I Hall being closed for the duration.

If we do return to some normality in the spring; say April or May, we can quickly arrange talks using our own members as speakers – we have a few ready to go, as and when.

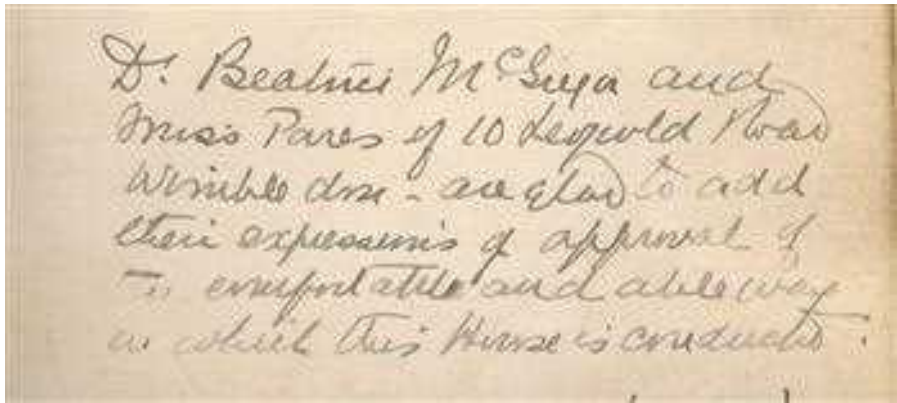
In round figures, WLHG has approximately 100 members, both individuals and couples. Subscriptions are payable annually in October, and although most members have now switched to standing order payments there are still several who pay by cash or cheque when they come to a talk. The fact that there have been no talks means that a small number of local people have not yet renewed their subscription. This issue of the newsletter has been sent to everyone who paid a subscription last year. However, you will appreciate that we will not be doing this indefinitely unless a subscription for this year has been paid. If you are one of those who has not yet paid, you will have received a letter informing you of this fact with your newsletter. Please act soon if you wish to continue receiving the newsletters.

The committee wish you all the best for the season – stay positive – unless you are being tested!

Keith Leesmith

Women's Suffrage Society, Wells and WW1 Serbia

Following on from the series of interesting articles that have been developed by Steve Adcock from the pages of the Railway Hotel visitors' book, I recently discovered a quite amazing story lying behind this entry left by Dr Beatrice McGregor and her companion Miss Pares in August-September 1913.



I found the handwriting very difficult to read in some places, in particular the surname of the author, Dr Beatrice McGregor. Being unable to decipher her surname, I focussed on their address of 10 Leopold Road, Wimbledon. Bingo! A search of the internet returned the following result from December 2018 by Julia Neville of The Devon History Society –

"10 Leopold Road, Wimbledon, the house Gertrude shared with Dr Beatrice McGregor. Gertrude and Beatrice were both involved in the suffrage movement, and Gertrude is mentioned as leading the National Union of Women's

Suffrage Societies' (NUWSS) Wimbledon Study Circle in 1913."

The Wimbledon branch of the Women's Suffrage Society was a group who were non-confrontational in their approach, pursuing their ideals by peaceful methods. *The "Deeds not Words"* of the militant Women's Social and Political Union grabbed the headlines at the time and ever since. However, there was another group of women who were equally fervent about the cause of female suffrage. Women who choose to promote their cause via peaceful and constitutional means, the Suffragists. Gertrude and Beatrice were certainly of that kind in the deeds that they were involved in.

Gertrude Pares was born 1876 at Ockbrook, Derbyshire, into a large and notable family of landed gentry. Her grandfather Thomas Pares was M.P. for Leicester between 1818 and 1826. Gertrude had never needed to work and devoted much of her life to her interest of art and supporting the Suffragettes movement. She had connections with Norfolk, having lived at Brancaster Staithe for a while and being secretary for the Norwich Diocese.

Beatrice Anne McGregor, born 1873 in Edinburgh, from a middleclass Victorian household, where education was seen as a means to self-improvement, chose the difficult path of studying to become both a physician and surgeon. At the age of 25 she had qualified with a M.B. and Mast. Surg. awarded by Edinburgh University, and was one of only 100 registered female doctors in the whole of Great Britain. By 1907 she had come to London to further her career and was involved in several health initiatives in the



Dr Beatrice Anne McGregor and Miss Gertrude Pares

locality, and in local politics as a member of the Town Council.

Whilst training to be a doctor at Edinburgh, Beatrice had met Elsie Inglis who was a forward-thinking dynamic personality and was instrumental in 1914 at the onset of the First World War, in establishing the Scottish Women's hospitals for foreign service (SWH) in an effort to offer their services to aid the war effort. Their offers of assistance to the British War Office were refused, but the Serbians were only too happy to accept their offer of help. Dr McGregor and her companion Gertrude Pares volunteered to help with the SWH in Serbia and Dr McGregor was appointed in charge of a new hospital at Mladenovac, with Gertrude Pares assistance as an administrator.

Serbia had been plunged into the opening stages the conflict when a young Serb, Gavrilo Princip, had assassinated the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo in June 1914. The result of this assassination was for the Austrian army to attack Serbia.

"The Serbians were in dire straits: the Serbian Army could only muster 300 doctors to serve half a million soldiers and casualties. The SWH worked endlessly to save as many lives as they could with the meagre resources available, more and more casualties coming by the day. As the war went on, the hospitals overflowed: within a short time, Kragujevac itself became a hospital. Thousands of soldiers & civilians were lying with injuries, gangrene, frostbites, fractures, infections, and diseases in buildings and streets throughout the city, freezing, starving and dying with so few nurses and doctors to aid them. The Serbian military were

effectively resisting the Austrian-Hungarians, but at great cost. The entire nation was exhausted. Over 170,000 people are estimated to have died by December 1914.”

“By the winter of 1915 Serbia could hold out no longer. German and Bulgarian forces joined the Austrians and again invaded, and the Serbs were forced to retreat further south. The dressing station barely lasted a few weeks before the three invading nations were within reach. It was one of the darkest times in Serbia’s history. The SWH were faced with a choice: flee for their lives in a retreat to the Adriatic Sea or remain with the Serbs and risk capture or death.”



On the 5th of November 1915, Dr McGregor, Gertrude Pares, and the nurses of the SWH joined the Great Serbian Retreat. The following account of that retreat is an extract from the diary of a member of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals -

“The procession, as it dipped into the hollow and reappeared on the crest, to dip and reappear again, looked like a great dragon wandering over the countryside, stretching from one end of Serbia to the other, and one realised that this was something more than an army retiring: it was the passing of a whole nation into exile – a people leaving a lost country.”

The trek out of Serbia, over mountain passes in deep snow and ice was arduous and full of hazards, caught up with the retreating Serbian forces and civilians, they were witness to many distressing scenes. The journey lasted several weeks until they finally reached the port of St. Giovanni di Medua on 12th December. They were fortunate to get a passage on a small Italian cargo steamer to Italy, and eventually reached England on 23rd December 1915.

After such an eventful episode in their lives, Beatrice and Gertrude stepped down from further eventful commitments. They were both awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal and French Red Cross for the part they played in the war.

Their visit to the Railway Hotel, Wells Next the Sea, was perhaps a stay to enjoy the town and countryside as a short holiday, and it looks as if they were well pleased with the accommodation offered by my grandparents. Little did they realise what life had in store for them in the next few years of their lives.

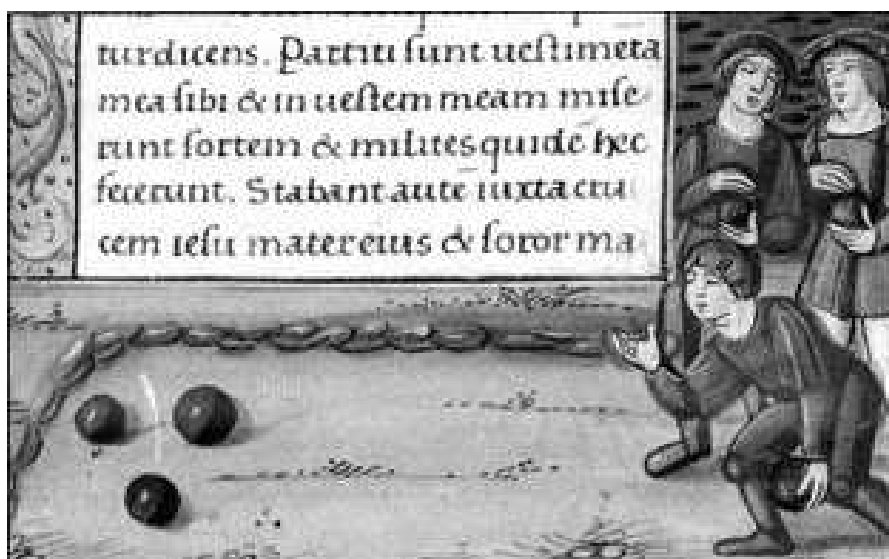
Peter Thatcher

How many bowling greens have there been in Wells and can you assist in the count?

Written as part of a project to establish the origins of Wells Town Bowls Club

Title of the '*World's Oldest Surviving Bowling Green*' is attributed to Southampton's Old Bowling Green, which is situated on the corner of Lower Canal Walk and Platform Road and is believed to have been first used in 1299.

The sites of Wells' two surviving bowling greens that are currently used by Elsmith Bowling Club and Wells Town Bowls Club were not established until 1922 and 1934 respectively, but the game was certainly being played in the town during the eighteenth century and extensively throughout the nineteenth. Whilst those modest recorded roots of the game in Wells are some 400 years after the impressive claims of Southampton's Old Bowling Green, it is not that surprising when considering how the game evolved over the following 300 years.



From the time of Edward III (1312 – 1377) the game was restricted by royal decree to *“Noblemen and others having manors or lands”*. The ban was lifted but quickly reinstated when gambling became a major attraction within the game. King Henry VIII banned the sport for those who were not wealthy or *“well to do”* because *“Bowyers, Fletchers, Stringers and Arrowhead makers were spending more time at recreational events such as bowls instead of practising their trade to help the war effort”*.

Henry VIII ensured it was a game of the rich, by requesting that anybody who wished to keep a green pay a fee of 100 pounds and the green could only be used for private play. He forbade anyone to *“play at any bowle or bowles in open space out of his own garden or orchard”*.
<http://www.errolbowlingclub.co.uk/brief-history-of-bowls/>

In spite of these deterrents, the popularity of bowls had become widespread by the early eighteenth century. This was evident by newspaper notices of sale or let of Inns that clearly saw the requirement of a bowling green to attract customers. One such advertisement in the Stamford Mercury on 29th September 1720, concerning the letting of the Inn of Gunwade-Ferry near Peterborough stated – *‘being a well-accustomed Inn, on the Road from Lincoln to London.... Note, there is a good Bowling-Green, and all conveniences for Entertainment of Gentlemen and Travellers.’*

In his book, *The History of the Inns & Public Houses of Wells*, Mike Welland writes, *‘John Betjeman, the poet and building expert, wrote in one of his books on buildings of England that if one wanted to find one of the oldest*

buildings in a town or village, look no further than the tavern built opposite the south entrance gate of the church. This is indeed the position of The Bowling Green, and despite its present appearance it is known to be a very old public house.'

*'The earliest licence for the establishment so far found was issued in 1673. It was issued to Thomas Curson and the public house remained with the Curson family until 1759. In the will of Ann Curson, who died in 1757, the following description of the property is included, 'All that my Publick House with its stables, outhouses, yards, gardens, orchards, **bowling green**, land and ground commonly called or known by the Name or Sign of The Bowling Green situate in Wells aforesaid near the Church.'*

As in the case of the Inn of Gunwade-Ferry, The Bowling Green public house in Wells was able to boast having all the conveniences for the entertainment of gentlemen and travellers and was probably named accordingly. As an attraction to travellers, The Bowling Green was strategically placed at the eastern approach to the town.

To date I have found no supporting documentary evidence to suggest any other Wells hostelry was able to provide a bowling green at that time with which to attract 'gentlemen and travellers', but substantial evidence does survive to indicate that this position was about to change in the early nineteenth century.

Firstly, in October 1821, the Norfolk Chronicle of 13th October, tells us that after seven years residence at the

Royal Standard Inn, Wells, Samuel Ellis had '*removed to the Ostrich Inn in Burnt Street, Wells, which he has fitted up in a style of comfort and accommodation that he hopes will ensure him a continuance of the support he has hitherto experienced.*'

Having established the Ostrich Inn within a stone's throw of The Bowling Green on the main eastern approach to the town, Pigot's 1830 Trade Directory tells us that the *Nelson* coach was departing for Norwich from the Ostrich Inn, every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday morning. Carriers had previously departed from the Royal Standard Inn. However, it would appear that the bowls green was not laid on the land lying to the rear of the Ostrich Inn and to the south of what became the Crown Inn, until after the latter was purchased by Samuel Ellis in 1824.

The Crown Inn's bowling green fast became the prominent green in the town and if evidence of the game's popularity was needed, the following article that appeared in the Norfolk Chronicle on Saturday 30th August 1834 provided that endorsement, describing the six local participants of a match on 14th August as 'celebrated players' – '*On Thursday, the 14th inst. a match at bowls took place on the green at the Crown Inn, in this town, between celebrated players, Mr. Isaac Newson, Mr. Geo. Ellis, and Mr. Wm. Leeder, against Mr. Joseph Baker, Mr. James Bambridge, and Mr. Seppings Hook. It was easily won by the former in three games out of five. On the Wednesday following, the return match was **played on the green at the Sun Inn**, and again won by the former in three games out of four.*'

This is the earliest record uncovered that not only reveals the existence of another bowls green connected to a licensed premise in the town, The Sun Inn, but also identifies six Wells bowlers of the time – Isaac Newson, George Ellis, William Leeder, Joseph Baker, James Bambridge and Seppings Hook.

Only one other record has been found that refers to Sun Inn's bowling green and that relates to the sale of The Sun in May 1867 after the death of its owner, Robert Leeder.

By the mid-nineteenth century bowls competition had certainly progressed beyond matches between players of the town. In August 1862, the Norfolk News reported on a return match between *'the gentlemen of Wells and the gentlemen of Holt'* at the Crown Inn Bowling Green. *'A well contested match terminated in favour of Wells. The score at the finish stood – Wells 19, and Holt 9.'*



This early undated photograph of bowls being played on the Crown Inn Bowling Green shows the location of the green behind the northern boundary wall of Ostrich House

It has not been possible to establish when bowls ceased to be played at The Bowling Green, but development to the rear of the public house occurred as early as the 1840s, which is approximately when some of the buildings including Ebenezer Cottage were constructed. Brenda Parkes, who lived at Ebenezer Cottage throughout her childhood, cannot recall neither her father or grandfather mentioning a bowls green on the site. Her great-grandfather, Robert Adcock, was landlord of the Bowling Green from 1879 – 1881.

It may therefore be no coincidence that a Norfolk Chronicle advertisement in September 1852, in which the Bowling Green was advertised for let, no mention was made of the premises having a bowls green – *‘THE BOWLING GREEN INN, at Wells comprising an excellent Public-house, with good stabling, a large Yard, and an extensive garden, well planted with Fruit Trees, and in a first-rate state of cultivation.’*

It is certainly possible that by the mid-nineteenth century there was no longer sufficient local support or requirement for a bowls green at The Bowling Green. The Crown Inn bowling green was flourishing and the green at the Sun Inn was also attracting competitive teams.

It was then a little surprising to discover a Norfolk News article from September 1868, which revealed a third bowls green was clearly up and running in Wells during that decade – *‘BOWLS. – The members of the Vine Green met for play on the afternoon of Wednesday last, and several spirited and well contested games were played. In the evening a large party of gentlemen sat down to an excellent*

tea provided by Mr. Parke, the worthy host of the Vine, and a convivial evening was spent.'

Robert Parke was landlord of The Vine, High Street, Wells from 1863 – 1871 and the premises are now of course a private residence, Angus House.

This level of popularity for bowls in the town would not last and an Eastern Evening News article in May 1909, illustrated the wain that had occurred since its hey-day just forty or so years earlier – *'Wells-next-the-Sea. – After a lapse of several years a strong attempt is being made to revive the game of bowls in the town.'* The article went on to outline how at a public meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. William Cornish, The Wells Bowling Club was formed.



William Cornish, engineer and manager at the Glebe iron foundry, would remain a central figure of the club as captain until after the move to the Mill Road site in 1934. He captained Wells Town to victory in the Norfolk and Suffolk Bowls Union challenge cup in 1914, defeating Norwich Gibraltar 78–52 on the Cromer green.

**William Cornish – captain of the Wells Town first team
until his death in 1939**

Another player for the new club, which played under the name of Wells Town before the move to Mill Road, was the local wine and spirit merchant, Herbert Cawdron, who in 1921 with Edgar Ladas Smith, acquired the piece of land between Theatre Road and what is now Gales Court, to lay out a bowling green, tennis and croquet courts. Mr. Edgar Ladas Smith was at the time chairman of F. & G. Smith Ltd. It was his idea to lay out a bowls green and club house for the company employees. The Elsmith Bowling Club, which opened in July 1922, is of course named after Mr. E.L. Smith.



The above photograph is owned by the Wells Bowls Club and is entitled "Elsmith Green – 9 July 1922". It is thought to show Edgar Ladas Smith standing at the shoulder of his Mother Florence Mary Smith bowling the first ball at the opening of the new Elsmith green.

Edgar Ladas Smith, the donor to the town of the Bowling Green, Tennis Courts, and Croquet Court which still carries his name.

He was at the time the chairman of F.&G Smith Ltd., the Maltings company.



The successful attempt to revive the game of bowls in 1909, would suggest that the game was no longer being played regularly on the greens of The Vine and The Sun, although the former retained its bowls green for a long time after the closure of the premises as a public house in 1965.

Despite the move of Wells Town to Mill Road in 1934, the Crown Hotel remained the home green of a Wells Crown team, who played alongside Wells Town and Wells Elsmith in the North Norfolk League and the Norfolk County Cup throughout the 1930's.

It is not known when precisely bowls ceased to be played on the green at the Crown Hotel. Any information about the closure of this green would be greatly appreciated.



The old Crown bowling green today. Located off Crown Lane, which provided vehicular access to the Crown from Burnt Street

The current site of the Wells Town Bowls Club on the junction of Mill Road and Clubbs Lane was originally leased from the owner of that land, Herbert Edward Loynes, the prominent local solicitor, who was also president of the Club. The green is situated to the far south of his home, "*The Lawn*" Clubbs Lane, which Mr. Loynes had purchased in 1908. The property has now of course been renamed "*Bishop Ingle House*". Work on construction of the club pavilion was commenced immediately at a cost of £50, the contract being awarded to Mr. R. Claxton.

A sincere message of thanks to John Tuck who gave me access to his extensive collection of old photographs, which includes a number depicting bowls matches and players from the town. These have provided the catalyst for the project to establish the origins of Wells Town Bowls Club.



Amongst those photographs was this picture which is believed to be members of the Wells Ladies Bowls Club.

Can anyone assist in identifying the ladies pictured and the year their club was formed?

The minutes for the Wells Town Bowls Club annual general meeting on 28th March 1957 state - *"The ladies bowls club were to be allowed use of the green for matches subject to they not interfering with evening play and on payment of 12/- per match."*

The Wells Ladies Bowls Club continued to thrive throughout the 1960s and 70s, but it was not until the AGM of the Wells Town Bowls Club on 25th January 1980 that a request was made to the committee for the Wells Ladies Bowls Club to join. The following day a letter was sent to Mrs. Muriel Claxton, informing her that *"... after a long discussion, it was decided to open the Club to lady members. We regret that the ladies wishing to enrol, must play as individual members, and not as a team. There will be 3 selectors who will pick 4 blocks per game on merit, but also ensuring that all members get an equal number of games."*

Forty years on and Wells Town Bowls Club retains a policy of ensuring game time for all members.

Steve Adcock



Little London

In March 2021 the government will be carrying out the latest census, something that has been going on every ten years for the last century and a half (except in 1941 – for obvious reasons!). But before these “official” counts, local churches often carried out their own; presumably to ascertain who was and who wasn’t “keeping the faith”. And there would be no opportunity to register yourself as being of the Jedi faith at that time. In 1793 the local curate, Samuel Horsfall completed a census of the inhabitants of Wells.

As the Secretary of the Group I get all sorts of enquiries and requests from people all over the country. Most of these are to do with the building of “family trees”, but there are others. A few years ago, I received an enquiry from a chap which referred to the 1793 census. He had discovered that an area of the town in the census was known as “Little London”. He had tried to find out where it was but couldn’t find it on any maps. I didn’t know either, and as I so often do, I turned to the “font of all Wells knowledge”, Mike Welland, who informed the two of us that it was part of Wells Heath. This was the area between the Town Cemetery (now) and Cuckoo Lodge, which at that time was common land. Not for long, as in the Enclosure Act of 1812/13 it would be carved up and snaffled by the local big landowners of course.

The motive for the enquiry was that my correspondent was tracking down “Little Londons” all over the country. And this was for a good historical reason.

You will recall from school history lessons that Edward 1st invaded Wales and spent a lot of tax-payers' money building castles all over the place. He harried the Welsh in other ways too, and although if you visit North Wales now you will find all the hills covered in sheep, at the time of Edward's incursions, you would be more likely to see cattle. Strangely, although the hill farmers were being harassed by the English, they decided that their best course of action was to move away from Wales, and to set up on our side of the border. Wherever they went, their new settlements were called "Little London" which is actually a corruption of the Welsh "Utlenden". And if you check in an English A-Z atlas, you will find dozens of Little London's – even a handful in Norfolk.

In Wells, they set up on common land near the confluence of the East and West droves. This meant that they could take their cattle down to the marsh for easy and free grazing and get them off relatively easily in the case of a marsh tide. They would also be at the point where they could easily travel south to sell their beasts at the markets in places like Fakenham and Norwich. One of their largest markets (nationally) was apparently the monasteries, and so it was probably when Henry VIII closed them down that the Welsh pulled out, presumably going back home to look after sheep. The names "Little London" however, live on, and although not known in Wells now, was still in use in 1793 when Samuel Horsfall took his census.

Keith Leesmith

Also see www.llundainfach.co.uk

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 is 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 by Hew Purchas

£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

THE WELLS MURDER OF 1817

Revised edition by Mike Welland £5.00 members £4.00

THE HOLKHAM MURDER OF 1851

Brand new! By Mike Welland £3.50 members £3.00

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

Some pictures of Wells past

Church Plain at different times in the 20th Century. Roger Arguile is putting together pictures of Wells over time, which will possibly turn into a book or perhaps a series of small booklets.



A heavily posed picture around 1900 shows houses in good order



The same houses thirty years later looking rather sad and down at heel



This aspect of Church Plain was drastically altered by the knocking down of houses to be replaced by the Church Rooms in 1912



A large house with a hay loft next to the Eight Ringers Public House was replaced in the 1980's

The 1851 Wells Census.

Although there had been earlier census documentation available, the one of 1851 was the first to give detailed information about the town and its inhabitants. The previous return of 1841, which was the first collated nationally, gave approximate ages to the nearest five years, details of birthplace only by county, and sketchy information regarding employment.

The 1851 census of Wells was taken on the 30th and 31st of March. The town was divided into five divisions for the purpose of census taking, these were designated with the numbers 10a to 10e. Wells was shown on the returns as part of the Walsingham Union. The first area numbered 10a was described as *All that part of the Parish of Wells – next-the-Sea called the East End from Staithe Street on the west (including ships in the Harbour, the Mill House in Northfield Lane and the Brick Yard.)*

The purpose of the census was to collect detailed information on each person who spent the night in individual households, their name, relationship with the head of the family, marital status, age last birthday, gender, occupation and birthplace.

Forms were distributed to each household a couple of days before the day of the census, and the completed forms were collected the following day. People travelling were recorded with the household where they had spent the night. The final record was only as good as the form was completed. One must also bear in mind that the heads of many households could neither read nor write which must have made the census takers job quite arduous.

On the very first line of the census there is a small error which could cause a problem for researchers. The head of the family at the Mill in Northfield Lane was listed as Austine Dewing, a miller aged 32 born in North Elmham. Dewing's first name was Augustine not Austine. When a form had not been completed the census taker would have written down what he heard, or thought he heard, people say maybe in a broad Norfolk accent.

Examples of other errors which can mislead researchers can be found in a later census for High Street. An engine driver was lodging at the Prince of Wales public house after completing a driving turn to Wells, and he was duly shown on the document for the public house. However, his wife completed the form listing him at his home in Norwich. On the 1901 census Albert John Mahomet, the Wells photographer and preacher is shown at home with his family in Theatre Road, his occupation listed as photographer. On the same day the census for Merthyr Tydfil in Wales lists him at a lodging in that town with the occupation of Methodist Evangelist. His wife had filled in the form without realising the correct procedure. Another pitfall in census research is accepting incorrect information from details compiled by the Mormon Church and put onto CDs which can be purchased. In the 1851 census James Ramm, the well-known High Street butcher, has his name shown as James Ramsey. The Wabon family are shown with the surname Watson in the transcribed documents.

Reverting back to the 1851 Wells census, Wells High Street was included in section 10b which covered an area from Church Marsh to Elgar's Row (now known as Shop Lane.) The section was then entered onto 28 pages in the Census book, compiled from the completed forms.

I examined the details for High Street in this section with several objects in mind. The first was to try and get an overall view of the street in the mid eighteenth century together with its residents and shops. (There were no street numbers allocated to properties in Wells until the 1920s.) I then wanted to try and trace the movements of the census taker who gave each property a designated number as the order forms were collected. It is often difficult to trace a census taker's route to ascertain whether he went up one side of a street and down the other side, or whether the route was in one direction crisscrossing that street as he proceeded. To get some idea the location of a certain proportion of the property positions, such as public-houses and shops must be known first. Although the section of the census listed properties and residencies in High Street that description also included the premises in what is now called Church Plain, a name first recorded in 1891, Whalebone Yard, School Alley, and the properties in Chancery Lane. Also included under the designation High Street was the row of recently built shops running between the south east corner of Staithe Street and Bolts Close., after which the street continued to the Railway Hotel as Tinkers Corner. I ascertained that within his route the census taker had walked up the west side of High Street before walking along to the Railway Hotel and then down to Church Marsh. He then returned and walked up the east side of High Street.

In 1851 ten houses in High Street alone were shown as uninhabited out of a total of 81 in the town. This was at the time of the town's maximum population, a total of 3635 were recorded on the census. It is odd that at that time so many houses or cottages in Wells were standing empty.

Mike Welland

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

We have over a hundred members, about half living locally, and the others living all over the country

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

Benefits of membership include three of these newsletters a year, a programme of talks from September to May (in normal years!) 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

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Regrettably, not all of our members made it to the end of 2020. The following pages contain notes written by friends of three people who have ceased to be with us. Two of them were keen members; one of them had terminated his membership, but was very active in helping to set up the group in its early days. There may be others, that have not yet come to the attention of the committee.

Peter Wilson 1932 - 2020

Peter Wilson's connection with Wells goes back a long way but he was born of ex patriot parents in Kuala Lumpur in 1932. His father was killed in an air crash when he was four, so he was sent to boarding school in Sumatra. His mother earned her living in a fashion dress shop. When the Japanese invaded, she managed to get him back to Malaya to catch one of three boats evacuating the wounded back to England. Two of the vessels were torpedoed. Peter's boat alone arrived home.

With his mother's background in clothing, she got a job at Marshall & Snelgrove in Leeds. So, after another boarding school in Shropshire and National Service, Peter was sent to work as a trainee at Dickins & Jones in Regent Street in London. It was at the management college that Peter met Jennie and they were married in 1957. Peter proved rather good at training staff so, after he had joined another clothing company, he moved around the country training staff in new stores. At every move he would join the local tennis club, cricket club and church.

He first knew of Wells when he was in London before his marriage, through his landlady who was Jack Cox's sister-in-law Joyce Clarridge; but his eventual move to Wells came about because Jennie's father had retired here. When they retired to Wells in 1989 it was to Waveney Close, his in-laws' home.

Knowing Wells from visits he loved retirement. He loved shopping in Staithe Street; he loved bird watching; he enjoyed driving for Heritage House; he loved tennis; he could be seen on his bike smiling at the world. He retained his forceful personality almost to the end, finding his diminishing powers hard to accept, but his ebullient cheerfulness will be missed.

Roger Arguile

Brian Scott

24 April 1926 - 13 August 2020



Many of you will remember Brian Scott who died, peacefully, in August aged 94. Born, raised and educated in Cambridge he was a natural scientist and agriculturist who spent much of his working life with the Ministry of Agriculture. He met his wife-to-be, Wells bank manager's daughter Margaret Rainsford, when they both were working at the Norfolk Agricultural Station at Sprowston. After a busy working life they finally returned to Wells in 1986, only to become involved in an even busier retirement.

Brian was a long-time member of Wells WEA and its Treasurer for a time; a volunteer driver at Heritage House for many years; a member of the Wells Discussion Group (and its Chairman for some years); and of course a founder member of WLHG. He was a committee member from the start, initially as Treasurer and later as Chairman. In 2004 he was 'persuaded' to become newsletter editor and one of his lasting memorials will be the four town walks booklets that he produced in collaboration with Guy Warren and containing sketches by Hew Purchas. Brian and Margaret were also involved with many other local organisations, among them the Granary Theatre, Screen-next-the-Sea, the Twinning Association, the Wildlife Trust and NAFDAS (now the Arts Society). Both he and Margaret, who sadly died earlier this year, will be fondly remembered.

Nigel Dark

Lesley Jarvis

6 October 1948 – 29 September 2020

Lesley Jarvis sadly died recently, having contracted cancer during the early part of the year.

Lesley was employed as a teaching assistant at Wells next the Sea Primary and Nursery School until she retired. We say retired but she never really retired, instead she lived life to the full until the end.



She had been an active member of Wells Local History Group for many years, and in the last year had become a committee member, becoming very involved behind the scenes in helping to prepare the Archive Room in the Maltings.

Lesley was involved and supported many other community activities. If it was in Wells you could rely on Lesley to help. She embraced retirement with open arms, and she filled her days walking with Millie her spaniel, sewing, decorating her home and gardening, 24hrs wasn't enough for her to pack it all in.

Lesley was extremely proud of her daughters and relished her role as a grandmother.

Always kind and willing to help anybody, she was involved and supported many of the groups about the town, a kind and well-respected member of the community she will be sadly missed.

Cathy Gates and Lynne Bishop