

Wells Local History Group Newsletter



Number 78 – Autumn 2021

And still we do not know where we are going or when normality will resume to the extent that we get back to where we were 18 months ago. I am writing this in early July, with “Freedom Day” expected on the 19th, but with the number of Covid infections rising at an alarming rate. WLHG, like other social groups will just have to *play it by ear* and make the best of a bad job.

Things have changed during 2020 and 2021. Our Zoom talks proved very popular, with as many or more attendants than we would normally expect at the W.I.Hall. Not as many local people were present online, (presumably non-computer users) but this was balanced by many of our “distant” members joining us. Maybe in the future some sort of hybrid meeting might be possible, with local people being able to attend in person, but others watching a “broadcast” at the same time or perhaps later.

Many of you will know that our Chairman, Bob Brownjohn, has not been well for some time, although he made the effort to attend the Zoom meetings. As a widower, Bob lived alone and with his deteriorating health has now decided to move himself into a nursing home in Sheringham. Although Bob will remain a member, we have lost not only his Chairmanship, but also the enormous amount of effort that he put into computerising the Group’s records. Many years ago, this consisted of writing tens of thousands of lines of data for the BMD and Census records. More recently he has been indexing the collected information in the archive room, including over 10,000 photographs. Roger Arguile, as Vice-Chairman will step up to the Chairman’s role for the time being.

Speaking of the Archive Room, the Maltings has now reopened, but for the time being we will not resume the regular opening of the Archives that we had planned. We will, however, for the time being, try to provide an “ad hoc” service to locals and visitors wanting information from the Archive Room. Enquirers can book a time at the Tourist Information Centre in the Maltings.

Keith Leesmith

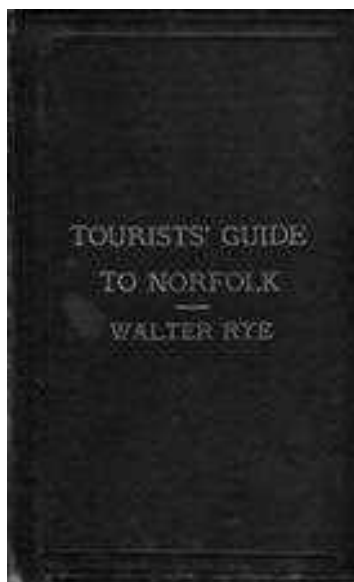
Early Guidebooks to Wells

The heyday of guidebooks to Wells was the 1960's when the Wells Urban District Council promoted the town, and specifically their campsite at Pinewoods. After NNDC took over (lock, stock, and paperclip) in 1974 the much-reduced Town Council continued to produce a guidebook for a while, containing information about the town plus lots of advertisements from local shops and B&Bs etc. Pinewoods is noticeable by its absence and one can only speculate as to whether NNDC, the new operators, declined to place an advertisement, or whether they were not invited to do so.

But the object of this article is not the above publications, but those that appeared at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. These tended to be guides to large areas and therefore they were happy to be generous to some places, and less so to others, often including Wells.

The earliest of those that I have come across is **The Tourist's Guide to the County of Norfolk** by Walter Rye and published by Edward Stanford of London in 1880. This tries to cover the whole of the delights of Norfolk in 122 pocket-sized pages. Hence Wells-by-the-Sea (couldn't get that right!) only covers a half-page:

The town is lit by gas and boasting a very fine stone quay and commodious harbour. Outside the harbour are great mussel and oyster beds, and a considerable trade is kept up in corn, timber, and coal.



A branch of the Great Eastern Railway runs south from here to Fakenham and East Dereham and another west to Hunstanton, and so on to Lynn. The church, like most of those of these half-decayed ports, was a very large and handsome one, perpendicular with fine square tower and clerestory, but was unluckily almost entirely consumed by fire last year, having been struck by lightning. Note the beautiful tracery to the aisle roofs and fine carved vestry door. There are several good inns; the "Globe", the "Crown", the "Railway Hotel" being all comfortable enough; but the town itself is extremely sleepy and quiet, and a stay of any length would have a distressing effect on the traveller. Outside the harbour good sea trout-fishing and fair but muddy bathing can be had, and on the staithe excellent oysters at most moderate prices.



A book which covers most of Eastern England in just over 400 pages is **Highways and Byways of East Anglia** by William A Dutt published by Macmillan & Co in 1901. I have the first "pocket edition" from 1923. Dutt has travelled north and then west, arriving in Wells via Blakeney and Stiffkey:

By a lonesome road, here and there affording glimpses of distant ooze flats and sea creeks growing chill and grey as the daylight wanes, I find my way to Wells,

which I reach just in time to mingle with the latest loiterers on its quaint old quay. Wells calls itself a seaport; but for all one sees or hears of the sea from the quay tonight it might be miles away. A flood tide, however, is filling the river; and a few small sea-going craft loading at the wharves plainly prove that it is possible to sail from Wells to the waters of the deep.

By daylight I find that wide and oozy marshes lie between the town and sea; and I hear a story of a man who was lost in a fog on the marshes and not found until he had spent a day and night there.

That Wells is a dull little town there is no denying. The fact that it is a seaport contributes little to its attractiveness. There are towns miles up the Broadland rivers which possess nearly all the maritime features which Wells can boast, and a greater wharf space by the riverside. But the country inland and east and west of the town, though not as lovely as the Vale of Stiffkey, is remarkably interesting. Presently I leave Wells by a road running almost due south, and a few miles' journey will bring me to the ruins of the famous shrine of Walsingham.

In 1894 local firm Jarrold & Sons published a book **Sunrise-Land** (subtitled *Rambles in Eastern England*) by Annie Berlyn. This tries to cover the whole of the eastern counties, but only by taking discrete sections of geography and ignoring the vast amount. Never-the-less Wells is featured; it looks as if thanks to a bit of bribery by the proprietress of the Crown:

Wells is at last in sight, and again the wonderful variety of trees becomes a striking feature of the landscape, that by degrees grow not beautifully less, but decidedly less beautiful. It is with



something like dismay that the dreary marshy shore and depressing quay are viewed for the first time, but once within the comfortable, hospitable, and picturesque old "Crown Inn" hopes revive, and wonder diminishes that visitors ever come hither for a summer holiday.

To be doomed to stay in Wells, and elsewhere than at the "Crown" would be a punishment for which one can conceive no adequate crime. But with Holkham and Burnham Thorpe and Stiffkey to explore and study, and with the "Crown" as headquarters, Wells becomes endurable. Here in a real old garden, a veritable wilderness of sunflowers and hollyhocks and stocks and sweet peas, one speedily becomes reconciled to the decayed and uninteresting port. The shady old bowling-green is now a tennis-lawn, and visitors between the sets gather their own dessert from among the tangle of raspberry canes, old-fashioned blossoms, strawberry layings, and currant bushes surrounding it. The church, much more attractive without than



Garden of "Crown Inn."

within, for it is a sad specimen of the bare, open-one-day-a-week order, peeps through the trees, and makes a picture at once of the "Crown" garden, wherein, says its hospitable and cheery hostess, have walked many worthies, whose names would seem to belong more rightly to the visitors' list of a fashionable resort than this slumberous little town.

It is not easy to realise without the undeniable evidences of a playbill produced by the intelligent Mrs. Glazebrook that Wells once revelled in a theatre of its own, and that the "legitimate" was played here. The fact is undisputable, however, in the face of that long, heavily leaded bill, dated 1826, and by degrees Wells appears in the light of a gay theatrical centre; for presently, from among the treasures of the house, other relics of the good old days of the Drama are produced.

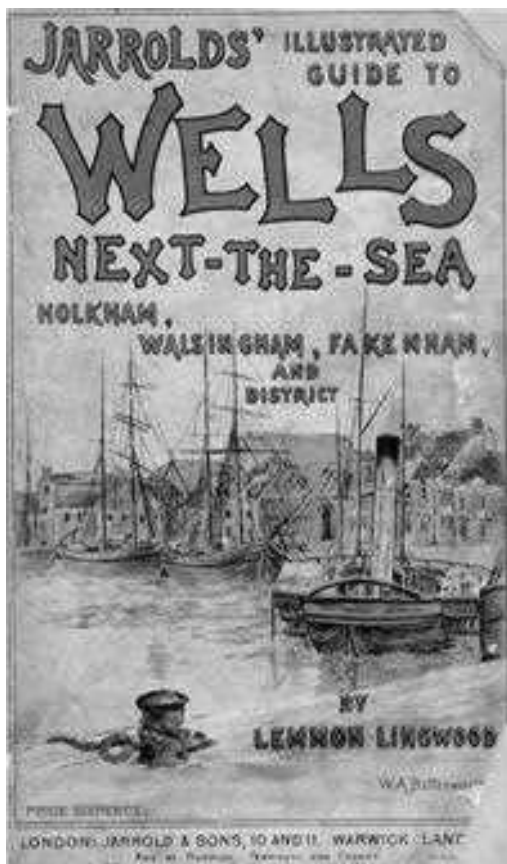
Wells Quay, lined with malt-houses and tumble-down beer-shops, suggesting by such signs as the Dogger, the Lord Nelson, the Ship, and the Anchor, the marine character of their patrons, and the long dreary walk along the marshy level to Holkham village combine to engender in a pedestrian with a disordered liver a frame of mind calculated to render him dangerous alike to himself and his fellows. No London fog could ever produce such profound melancholia and blood-curdling thoughts as the promenade of Wells-next-the-Sea.

When the pretty red-brick model village of Holkham comes in view life once more seems worth living.

Ok so she wasn't that keen!

At the time of publication photography must have been expensive, hence the illustrations in the book are line drawings. Several different artists were employed, (none of them actually acknowledged), but one of them is clearly Arthur Rackham. Presumably his work was good enough to convince Jarrolds to employ him almost exclusively in the next publication mentioned here. Some years ago, when Jarrolds were closing their print division Wells Local History Group was kindly given about fifty original sketches of Rackham's work. Realising that these were intrinsically valuable, they have been deposited at the Norfolk Archive Centre, where they are kept in the best possible conditions.

Jarrolds illustrated guide to Wells-next-the-Sea and district. By Lemmon Lingwood. The edition that I have was published in 1897, but there was another edition, with a different cover illustration, printed in 1905 and again in 1910. Like most guidebooks printed at that time, this has a large collection of advertisements at the beginning and end of the book. According to the advertisement for The Crown Mrs. Glazebrook was still in charge, although it doesn't look as if she managed to get at this author! She does, however, tell us that her "family has owned this hostelry for centuries" which would be difficult as it had only existed as an inn since 1831, and The Glazebrook family only took it over in 1869! There are over 30 pages of description of Wells, before the book goes on to depict nearby places including Holkham, the Burnhams, Stiffkey and Walsingham amongst others. Because the guide gives a "snapshot" of the town at the time, I have quoted extensively from it. Perhaps this can be said to be the first all-embracing guidebook to the town.



Wells, or Wells-next-the-Sea, an irregularly built seaport, must now be classed among the East Coast Watering-places. It is not at present so well known as Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Cromer, or even Hunstanton; but for the cheery inhabitants, and those who have favoured Wells with a visit, and have been charmed by the surrounding scenery, are confident that with the same amount of publicity which has been given to the more popular places, this small, quiet, and unpretentious town will speedily develop into an attractive and important holiday-resort. The people of Wells are to be congratulated upon the immense progress that has been made during the last twenty years.

The town for a long period suffered from commercial depression, and it is pleasing to know that its inhabitants are now experiencing a revival of trade. Those persons who are tired of the modern over-crowded watering-places may find in Wells and the district genuine pleasure, exhilarating air, and delightful scenery. Indeed, all that can possibly be desired while spending a few days from home may be found in this quaint neighbourhood.

The average annual rate of mortality here is only 12 per 1,000. The rate in 1893 was 14, but this was an exceptional year in many places. Many are still living in Wells whose ages run from 80 to 96 years of age. These facts favourably compare with any other watering-place. Its parish, which boasted 2,316 inhabitants in 1801, and 2549 in 1891, contains 2,025 acres.

Wells is not only a summer resort, but it has proved popular in the winter. In its vicinity excellent wild-fowl shooting is indulged in, to a very large extent by the nobility and gentry of East Anglia. This renders Wells unusually attractive for those who enjoy winter as well as summer holidays.

Wells was in early English history, and even at the beginning of the present century, an incommodious seaport; but in 1845-6

the Commissioners appointed to carry out the provisions of two Acts of Parliament, obtained in 1844, borrowed £22,000 of which they expended £10,000 in erecting a substantial stone quay, 250 yards in length, and £9,500 in paving, lighting, and improving the town and harbour. The port owns a steam tug and a dozen fishing boats. The chief export is corn, and the imports are coal, timber, linseed cake, and manure.

The Customs House is on the quay. A Customs Officer, harbour-master, and three pilots are employed. We must not omit to mention a fine embankment, one mile in length, which runs parallel with the channel from the quay to the beach, the top of which is level and gravelled. It forms a beautiful promenade with a carriage drive at its base. At the beach end of the embankment may be seen a rustic Beach House. Here first-class refreshments are provided at reasonable charges; special arrangements are made for school treats and private parties. A building has been erected on the premises for the accommodation of visitors, capable of seating from 170 to 200 persons. Stables have also been erected at this junction; Mrs. S. Wooltorton, the energetic proprietress, also has the letting of bathing tents.

A pleasing feature at this quiet resort is that both the bathing and boating facilities are excellent, and no one need desire better accommodation in this respect than is offered at Wells. The visitor may enjoy three miles of perfectly smooth boating before entering the open sea. There are lofty sand hills facing the sea, and a good sandy beach that is both firm and extensive. In an issue of the "Wells Herald" of July 1889 (a paper, which unfortunately is not now in existence) is found the following paragraph respecting the beach:

"And then our beach! A gentleman called upon us the other day and said "a year ago I chanced to have an idle day here. I took the train to Holkham and walked round by the beach to Wells. I never enjoyed anything half so much. The immense tract of

sand, the shriek of the wild birds, the murmur of the ocean, the glistening of the waves, the sails of fishing or other vessels, appearing as specks upon the horizon, and withal, the bracing air, had such an effect in invigorating the body and calming the mind, as I, at any rate, have failed to find elsewhere.”

Unfortunately, this fine beach is a mile from the town and principal hotels. We have, however, pleasure in noting that there is a proposal to run a tramway from the town to the beach. This will be a great boon to visitors, and will, we are confident, tend largely to increase the popularity of the place.

Leaving the beach and its many attractions, we must note that Wells is the chief Coastguard Station between Hunstanton and Cromer, on a coastline of 40 miles, containing eight stations. Lieutenant E A Richmond is the inspecting officer. The staff under him comprises two chief officers, eight chief boatmen, fifteen commissioned boatmen, twenty-three boatmen, and one divisional carpenter.

One of the chief items of interest in any seaport town is the lifeboat. It always forms an engaging and attractive subject for those who reside inland. During its history Wells has had three lifeboats. The first one, called “Eliza Adams”, after the name of the donor’s wife was presented to the town, and supported by voluntary contributions.

During a gale on October 29th, 1880, this boat was capsized, after its sturdy oarsmen had been the means of rescuing one ship’s crew, and whilst they were returning to save a second, eleven of the men were drowned. After the wreck of the first lifeboat, a new one was provided by the National Lifeboat Institution, and was launched on July 10th, 1882, by Miss Charlotte Nichols. This was superseded in July 1888 by another named the “Baltic” fitted with all the latest improvements.

The foreign trade of this port has within the last few years much increased and is nearly double what it was in 1879. The mussel industry is in a very flourishing condition, and cockles and whelks are also plentiful. Wells possesses few streets, yet though the two business thoroughfares are cramped and narrow, the shops in appearance and style are well up-to-date, and are supplied with goods of superior quality. In years gone by there was a weekly market on Saturdays, and also races were held yearly; both, however, have long since been discontinued. In 1888 a fortnightly market was established for the sale of cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses. It continues to be held every alternate Monday in the "Ostrich Inn" yard, under the management of Mr. George Andrews, Auctioneer. A fair is still held on Shrove Tuesday for toys, sweetmeats, and all kinds of fancy articles.

There are two branch banks in the town, namely "Gurney and Co." who have an office at the top of High Street, and the "London and Provincial Bank Limited", located at Mr. Rump's, Chemist, Staithe Street. The Oddfellows Hall deserves attention. It was erected at a cost of £1300 in 1885, and is a spacious edifice of red brick, in which concerts, theatrical, and other entertainments, and public meetings are held. In 1875 a School Board was established in the town. Chiefly at the expense of the late Countess of Leicester the British School, with house attached, was built in 1838. It was, however, transferred to the School Board in 1875, which has, since that date, expended £1,150 in enlarging and improving the school. The average attendance is between four and five hundred.

The old historic parish church of Wells was struck by lightning on August 3rd, 1879, and almost totally destroyed by fire. The church that now stands represents the church of long ago almost in every particular. It was built by Mr. S. C. Parmenter of Braintree, Essex at a cost of £7,000 and was reopened on April 17th, 1883. It may interest the reader to know that during the

time which elapsed while rebuilding, services were held in an iron church. In 1860 a new churchyard of about an acre and a half was laid out and entrance gates erected.

The only way to get to Wells is by the Great Eastern Railway. This Company merits the praise of all who travel, inasmuch as they have done their utmost to encourage trades in all centres of population, however small, on their system. Wells now owns direct railway communication with London and the Eastern Counties via Wymondham or Lynn, also with the Midlands and the North via March or Peterborough. The excursion rates were begun in the Jubilee Year, 1887, and it is a gratifying fact that the number of visitors to Wells greatly increases every season.

As evidence that Wells is moving with the times, it may be mentioned that recently a Golf Club has been formed. With E. B. Loynes Esq., as permanent Chairman of its meetings, and Messrs. J. A. Davidson and A. J. Napier as Secretaries, the Club promises fair to become a popular institution.

The first questions that arise in the mind of any intelligent person as soon as he chooses the place in which to stay on his holiday are, undoubtedly, "Where shall I stay, and at what cost?". These questions shall be fully answered in the following paragraphs, and all may rely on the statements being correct, inasmuch as the writer has personally visited the places he mentions.

For hotel accommodation the "Crown", is the best and most comfortable in Wells. By all means put up at the "Crown", for you will be splendidly attended to, and your every fad will be considered if you only let the landlady (Mrs. Anne Glazebrook) know your likes and dislikes. For the visitor or for the commercial it is unsurpassed. It stands in a central position of the town on "The Buttlands", facing a very pleasant open green. The frontage is, to use the words of one writer "in the very current of pure, fresh air, as this valuable compound comes fresh and

pungent off the great ocean's bosom." Extensive grounds and gardens are connected with the Hotel. It has been in the "Glazebrook" family for over a century and is an old-fashioned hostelry. The visitors' book is full of flattering notices from beginning to end. One runs in rhyming strain as follows:

*"Our visit here of seven weeks
Has given us great pleasure,
The food is good, the beds are soft,
Our hostess quite a treasure.*

*Reluctantly we leave at last
For smoky, foggy town,
May other folks who come to Wells
Long linger at the Crown".*

Frequently do we come across such splendid notices as "Sixty-seventh half-yearly visit; well pleased all through and hope to come again." The cost of staying at this Hotel is, on the whole, very reasonable. A comfortable bed can be had for about 1s. 6d. a night. Meals are served and charged according to the taste of each individual.

There are two other smaller Hotels in the place, namely, the "Globe" and the "Railway". Apartments are plentiful and cheap at Wells; rooms run from the rate of 7s. 6d. to 10s. a room per week. This, of course, includes attendance, and when we consider the excessive charges made at boarding houses at larger places, we conclude that Wells is not only a healthy but a cheap holiday resort.

After the interesting subjects of hotels and apartments comes the equally engaging subject of the shops. Considering that Wells only has a regular population of 2,550, shops are in abundance; they are also large and conspicuous. Staithe Street and High Street are the two principal thoroughfares.

At the top of Staithe Street we observe the office of Mr. George Andrews, Auctioneer, Valuer, and Estate Agent. He has a large connection with the neighbourhood and does a first-class business. It is owing much to his spirit and enterprise that the town stands in as prosperous a condition as it does now. On the left we notice a chemist's shop occupied at present by Mr. Rump, who is also the able and energetic local manager of the London and Provincial Bank. He has an old-fashioned and well-conducted business. A little further down is Mr. Edward. C. Cawdron's, Watchmaker, Jeweller, Silversmith, and Optician. He hails from the West End, London, and has in consequence the advantage of London style in every description of repairs in connection with the trade.

On the right may be seen a neat china and earthenware shop, conducted by the Misses Thurgar. A fine and well-selected stock of goods is kept, and pretty souvenirs of Wells can be



bought in great variety. We next observe the shop of Mrs. Newson, Bookseller, Newsagent and Stationer. Mrs. Newson claims to be the sole agent for the principal London and Norwich dailies. The Visitors List is published every week in the "Dereham and Fakenham Times" and "Lynn Advertiser". These can be had of Mrs. Newson. A good stock of local views is also kept.

Opposite is Mrs. Stroughair's Fancy Repository. A specialty is made of wools, which can be had at reasonable charges. Mr. Deeks, Tailor on the Quay is prepared to supply all goods on the shortest notice. A splendid article may be relied upon, and every confidence can be placed on Mr. Deeks.

The provision trade is well represented, in which principal traders are Mr. A. W. Ralling, Mr. Bunting, and Mr. Leggett, all of Staithe Street. At these places high-class provisions can be quite equal to those found in the best London houses, and there is now no occasion for visitors to bring their hampers down with them to Wells, as everything they require in this way can be conveniently obtained at most reasonable charges.

The butchering trade finds able representatives in Mr. Mallett, of Staithe Street, and Mr. Ramm, of High Street. The prime meat can be had of either of these tradesmen, and Mr. Mallett has also shops in Stiffkey and Blakeney. Mr. Ramm is licensed to sell game, and he has always on hand a good stock of poultry.

Mr. T. Harris, of High Street, and Mr. Leggett, of Staithe Street are the chief drapers. Every feature of the trade is actively attended to, this meeting the convenience of all visitors to Wells who may desire to replenish their wearing apparel.

Mr. Brightmer, who has a Pianoforte Depot in Railway Road, personally superintends the tuning of all musical instruments.

At the top of High Street, we notice the establishment of Mr. J. W. Richford, Bookseller, Stationer, Machine Printer and Binder, Birmingham and Sheffield Warehouseman.

Mrs. Mack has a pretty fancy shop in High Street. This Lady has the privilege of being the sole agent for Poulton's Views of the neighbourhood. She has a well-assorted stock of books, stationery, and fancy articles.

Mr. Fred Hagon, an enterprising London hairdresser, has established a business here, at whose hands visitors will meet with prompt and polite attention.

The confectionery department is admirably attended to by Mrs. Woollorton, whose shop is also situated in High Street, and who, as previously stated, is the proprietress of the Beach House at the end of the famous embankment.

Mr. W. F. E. Mann, General and Furnishing Ironmonger, Bar, Iron, Oil, and Colour Merchant, has a conspicuous, well-furnished shop in High Street, and next door to this will be observed the fine furnishing depot of Mr. Plowman, who can supply everything that is necessary to make a house cosy and comfortable.

On the Church Plain Mr. W. T. Matsell figures as a Saddler and Harness Maker, and, having a few horses at his disposal, conducts a posting business during the summer months on most reasonable terms.

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Apart from the fact that today's shops are not as diverse, not that different from today – 120 years later!

Keith Leesmith

Wells Tugs

The proposed return of the Albatros is a reminder that until the 1960s commercial sailing vessels were a feature of the harbour and had been for hundreds of years. At one time we even built our own wooden hulled sailing vessels. Originally, squared sailed, the use of fore-and aft sails enabled vessels to sail closer to the wind so that they became much more manoeuvrable. Even so, lacking even an auxiliary engine, they depended on the right wind. The best was a south westerly to get out of the harbour; the same wind would make it difficult for incoming vessels to get up to the Quay. A northerly wind would keep them in harbour; a southerly might prevent them from sailing into the harbour.

A solution was found in the purchase, in 1840 of a steam tug, the *Economy*, from shipbuilders on the Tyne. She could tow vessels inwards and outwards should the prevailing wind be in the wrong direction. She was bought understandably enough by a number of merchants of the town, George Cross,



merchant, Robinson Parker, shipbuilder, Joseph Southgate spirit merchant, William Elgar, grocer, John Chapman, merchant and John Parker, another merchant. All five of them were to be members of the Harbour improvement commissioners at Wells formed in 1844. The *Economy* was driven by paddles which because they could be operated independently, one forward and one reverse, enabled her to turn virtually on her own length.

Vessels were customarily sold in 64 shares and there was a certain amount of buying and selling over the years. At one time all 64 were owned by William Gardner a local farmer who thereupon sold who sold 32 of them to two other merchants. She lasted until 1867 after which she deemed to be worn out and was broken up. She was immediately replaced by the *Olive Branch*, more than twice the size, this time built in North Shields. The initial purchase was made by James Beeching, described as a shipbuilder, acting as agent for local businesses. He sold on part of his shareholding, 43 shares, to maltsters F. & G. Smith, Robert Leaman and the Marriotts of Narborough.

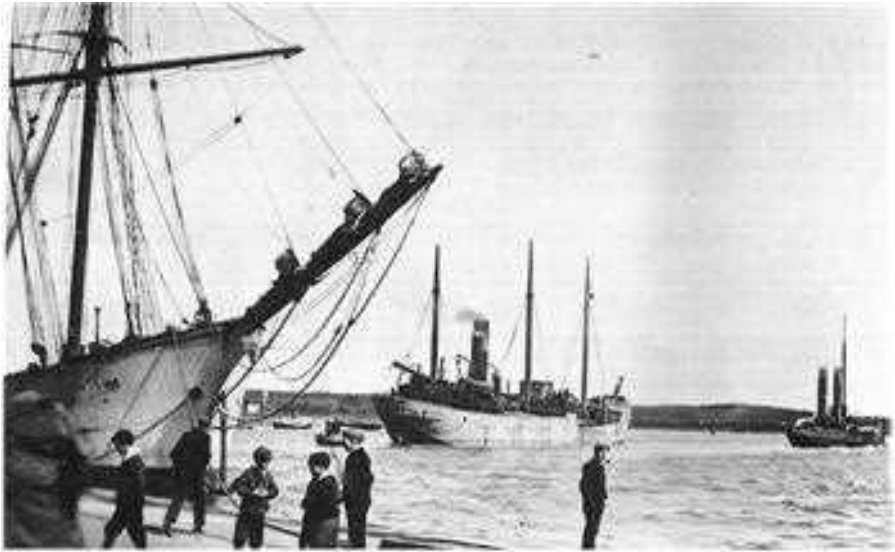
The *Olive Branch* was in turn replaced by the *Provider* again from North Shields, this time 67 tons as against *Provider*'s 42 tons. She was to play an important role in the Eliza Adams lifeboat disaster. The lifeboat was, at that time housed in the present Harbour Office and, in case of adverse winds, would be rowed out to sea to assist a vessel in distress. Rowing against strong winds could prove an impossible task and *Provider* was deployed to tow the lifeboat out to the brig *Shannon Rose* and then later to the *Ocean Queen* when the Eliza Adams was overwhelmed and capsized drowning eleven of her thirteen crew. (*Provider* is described in an old photograph as the *Promise* but the Ships Register says otherwise.) *Provider* was finally sold back to the north east in 1888 when she was bought by Nathaniel Hopplin, a Sunderland ship-owner.

The last of the tugs was the easily identifiable *Marie* whose two funnels can be seen in a good many photographs. The harbour was in decline as the railway assumed greater importance and her purchase by the Smiths and Marriotts could be justified by the malt and coal trades which still brought vessels into the harbour. Smith's sold malt to Guinness in Dublin and, on the way back picked up Welsh anthracite, a high carbon, smokeless coal, from Swansea which was ideal for the kiln process by which the malt was dried and roasted. It was in pursuance of that trade that Smiths, who owned a length of the Quay built by the now iconic granary in 1905. The *Marie* was again used to tow not only sailing vessels but also the new steamers to ensure safe egress from the port.



Her usefulness became an issue when Smiths decided to have her reboilered in 1912 after which she was reduced to a single funnel. They were at first inclined to sell her. Wartime brought a reduction in malting, controlled by a government determined to ensure the sobriety of soldiers and the country at large. Thus in 1917 she was sold for £800. She did not last long in the hands

of her new owners, she was apparently requisitioned by the navy and sunk by a mine.



Paddle steamers were extremely manoeuvrable, but they were also very inefficient compared with screw driven vessels. But while they were no longer needed to tow vessels in the days of steam and subsequently diesel driven vessels, the harbour remained difficult to enter and pilotage, which had been provided in the harbour going back into the early nineteenth century was to continue in the latter part of the twentieth. Today it is the harbour authority which both leads and sometimes tows vessels to a safe mooring on the harbour pontoon even though these days sailing boats have auxiliary engines.

Roger Arguile

Wells & Son, Staithe Street

Alfred George Wells was born in East Dereham in 1861. He was the son of a Tailor, George Wells. Alfred's early training was as a boot maker, and this was his occupation shown on the marriage certificate when he married Elizabeth Meacham in January 1885. Alfred set up in business as a draper in 1910 when he moved to 28 High Street East Dereham. The 1911 East Dereham census lists Alfred George living at 28 High Street with his son Donald then aged 16 assisting him in the business, and daughter Grace Elizabeth listed as a Milliners Apprentice. His wife was not listed. In 1916 Alfred moved from Dereham, purchasing a shop in Staithe Street, Wells.

Donald was the youngest of three sons, and it was he that was later a partner in the business, Wells & Son, a name that was to remain after his father's death. In 1916 Donald registered for military service. On his recruiting papers he listed his occupation as Draper, but this description was then altered to Metal Turner. He served as a mechanic in the Army until being discharged in



September 1919, when he returned to Wells as a partner in his father's business. In August 1920 he married Florence Drury in Wells Church.

The picture seen above is as the first Wells & Son shop first appeared in Staithe Street. Alfred George Wells in the doorway with his staff

Within a few years of moving and establishing his drapers and outfitters shop the adjoining confectionery shop, number 74 Staithe Street was purchased, and the frontage completely rebuilt. The bow windows were removed, and the new signage described the shop as a Tailors and Hatters.



The photo left shows the shop window which also contained various items of footwear. The date of the purchase and the rebuilding is not known, but the first trade directory to show street numbers in 1929 has the entry;- Wells and Son, drapers, 74-76 Staithe Street.

In addition to the conversion of the confectionery shop, the frontage of the original premises was altered. The doorway was made wider, and the window on the right side was made into an

additional entrance. On the gable wall a display annex was added.



76 Staithe Street shop after conversion.

Alfred George Wells died in 1926 aged 65. The family home was "Floradona" on Mill Rd.

This advertisement was placed in a publication of 1937, and in addition to showing the 74 and 76 Staithe Street store it referred to the Furniture Shop Opposite. That store, number 71, was prior to being purchased by Donald Wells from the East Anglian Electric Supply Co. Ltd. managed by Adam





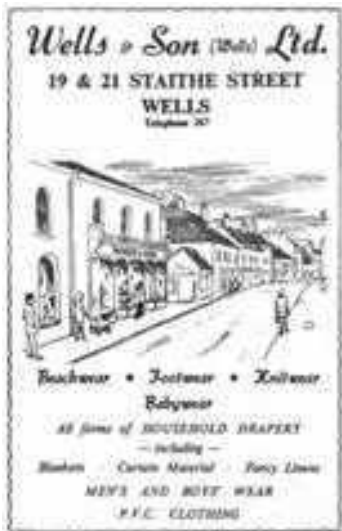
Stewart. Shops and offices of the company opened in localities throughout the east of England in the 1930s, offering cheap rates for supplying electricity and their offer of providing free meters. Electricity charges were payable by consumers at these local offices.



The East Anglian Electricity Company occupied the 71 Staithe Street premises for only a few years before accepting Donald Wells offer to purchase. Part of the purchase agreement was that Donald Wells would take on the position of agent for the company which involved the arranging of supplies to residents, and the collection of charges from consumers, which were to be paid at the furniture shop. This shop was purchased between 1935 and 1937 as

the entry in the latter years trade directory read;-

Wells & Son, ladies, gents & children's outfitters & clothiers & drapers 74 & 76, and complete house furnishers 71 Staithe Street.



The main business competition to Wells & Son was the shop at the opposite end of Staithe Street run since the mid 1920s by Herbert Mark Butcher. Butcher died in 1943 and Donald Wells possibly thought that the site of Butcher's former shop was more advantageous for his business. The date that he moved to that shop, 19 & 21 Staithe Street, is not certain, but for a time on subsequent advertisements he included the following words;-

Wells & Son incorporating **H. M. Butcher.**



After purchasing number 19 & 21 Donald Wells retained his shop at number 76 but parted with number 74. The drapery side of the business transferred to the late Herbert Butcher's shop, while number 76 traded in

Souvenirs, Fancy Goods and Toys.

Advertisements included the fact that Wells & Son was;-

A Department Store to which all Visitors are cordially invited. There are Three Main Shops and Twelve Departments where an up-to-date stock can be inspected in comfort and convenience.

In the 1950s there was no reference to the furniture Store at number 71, with number 76 trading in items such as Toys and camping equipment etc. but no drapery or clothing. Advertisements of the late 1960s, like the one on the right in 1967, again referred to the sale of CARPETS AND FURNITURE at number 76. The amount and size of the furniture must have been limited by the size of the shop.

It is not yet known when Donald closed his furniture and carpet store



at number 71. Some advertisements such as the one above dated 1970 did not include any reference to the sale of furniture other than numbers 19 & 21, and it is likely that by then both numbers 71, and then in the early 1970s number 76 also had been disposed of.

The following picture dates from the early 1970s when the adjoining premises were occupied by J. Cadamy's radio and television shop.



Donald Wells died in August 1984 at his home in Mill Road and was buried in the Market Lane Cemetery

WELLS, Donald George of Floradona Mill Rd
Wells-next-The-Sea Norfolk died 20 August 1984 Probate
Ipswich 12 October £152801 8481303363R

Mike Welland

The First Wells Fire Engine

Over the years leading up to the 20th century there were numerous accounts of fires in Wells. When these were extinguished, it was usually done by the local inhabitants with the aid of ladders, buckets of water, and whatever was readily available. A typical example was that of Mr. Sandford's shop in Staithe Street around 1908 when neighbours were able to put out what threatened to be a disastrous fire before the arrival of the Walsingham engine.

It was several years prior to the above fire at 61 Staithe Street that the question of the lack of a fire appliance for Wells was brought up at the Town Council. At



the December 1901 meeting the Chairman reported that he considered it most necessary that the Council should provide some means to guard against fire. He stated that a steam fire engine would be the best option, but alternatively a good manual machine could be purchased for about £200.

A committee was set up to investigate, but Councillor Kersley said that he would not serve on it as he was not enthusiastic over a fire engine. Councillor Temple also declined. What the outcome of the committee decision was, we do not know, but no fire engine was ordered.

It may have been the Staithe Street fire that finally spurred the Council to take some action. A fire engine was finally purchased from Messrs. Merryweather's in October 1908, seven years after the original proposal. On a Saturday afternoon the following month a series of drills were carried out under the direction of an instructor from Burnham Market. Coincidentally, after Kersley's resistance to purchasing a fire engine, the training was carried out at Messrs. Dewing and Kersley's mill, adjacent to the railway station. It was reported that "the engine gave a good account of itself, forcing water over the large building with comparative ease".

Incidentally, in a press article reporting the above fire in Staithe Street it was stated that a telegram was immediately sent to Fakenham, requesting the assistance of their fire engine. Wells then received the following reply: "Wire who responsible for payment and if fresh water to be had. Salt water no use." A reply was sent "Stay where you are. Assistance coming elsewhere". They then sent a request to Walsingham, but the fire was out by the time that they arrived!

Mike Welland

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:

Steve Adcock – kadcock@talk21.com 07455 893114

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

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 coming from
all over the country

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

Benefits include three of these newsletters each
year, a programme of talks from September to
May, plus discounts on our published books and
DVD's

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

The next Newsletter will be published around Christmas