Wells Local History Group Newsletter

Free to members
£3.50 to
Non-members

Hydroplanes in Wells
The Torrey Canyon Disaster
Foundry House, Theatre Road
Robert Paston, Viscount Yarmouth
Pubs of Wells & Breweries of Norfolk
Concert to raise funds for new (Polka) School
Sale of Fisher Theatre after closure

Number 80 – Spring 2022

The committee has decided that it should be safe enough to resume “live” meetings with talks. The first of these was at the beginning of March (sorry if you missed it!). There will be others on 6 April and 4 May followed by the AGM on 11 May, which will also have a short presentation following the formal business.

We have now moved to the Maltings, which was our former home until the redevelopment took place there. We have done this because they have a good broadband connection which will enable us to *Zoom* talks out to members who live some way from Wells, many of whom have joined us during the past 18 months or so. As before, meetings will be at 7.30pm on the first Wednesday of the month and will take place in the Kiln Room. This is on the top floor of the building but there are lifts available if you need them!

There is now no charge for members at these meetings, and non-members are also welcome to attend at the price of £5. From September, when the 2022/23 season starts, our meetings will be advertised by the Maltings, and their box office will be able to supply tickets for non-members. For this reason, we will be enclosing tickets for members with the newsletters. Make sure to keep them safe if you are planning to attend.

One of the advantages of using *Zoom* is that we no longer have to restrict committee membership to members living in Wells. With this in mind, we welcome a new committee member in Peter Thatcher. Peter has a long association with the group, and with the former Railway Hotel (now sadly being converted to a private house). Peter has also supplied articles for the newsletter. He lives in Gorefield near Wisbech.

Keith Leesmith

6 April – The Paston Footprints Project – Peter Stibbons

4 May – A costumed talk by “Thomas Paine” – Rob Knee

11 May – AGM followed by “Wells in the year 2000” (photos)

Wells Local History Group

Formal notice of Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the group will take place in the Kiln Room of Wells Maltings at 7.30pm on Wednesday 11 May 2022 and also on *Zoom.*

All paid-up members may attend and vote.

If you wish to nominate a member (including yourself) to serve on the committee, please advise the Secretary by the end of April. The committee consists of seven members, who between themselves nominate the required officers of the group. At present there is one vacancy.

If you wish to raise any issue for discussion and/or voting, please advise the Secretary by the end of April.

Keith Leesmith

Secretary

Wells Local History Group

Wells Motorboat & Hydroplane Club

One use of the harbour was for hydroplanes. In the 1950s, the harbour was untroubled by moorings for yachts; when the tide was in it was the fishermen and the pilots who knew where the deep water was. Buoyage was irregular. The expanse of open water seemed to invite shallow drafted vessels onto the water. Dinghies were one thing: hydroplanes another.

The Wells Motorboat and Hydroplane Club was formed in November 1951. Its progenitors were a group of boat enthusiasts and garage owners, men like Derek Revell, Stacey Walsingham, and Sid Warren. Initially the boats had inboard engines, often marinised car engines; gradually outboards made an appearance. The 'planes' themselves were manufactured of plywood in sheds and

gardens, the outboards no more than 1200cc capacity. They were to skim across the water, and so needed scarcely a foot of depth to meet their needs. On the other hand, they were less controllable than vessels having greater purchase on the water skidding round marker buoys.

Women like Evelyn Walsingham were as good a bet as drivers as men, partly it was said because they were lighter. In the years between the 1950s and the 1970s they monopolised the harbour on summer Sunday afternoons watched by large crowds kept informed by the loudhailers announcing a forthcoming race and the results of previous one. Vessels were handicapped according to their recorded maximum speed; some were capable of up to 30 mph. They were less admired by dinghy sailors for whom they posed a threat, liable as they were to run off course. (One ran into a fishing boat severely damaging it.)

The noise of tannoyed announcements on a Sunday of all days did not please everyone but the social life which developed around the club and its presentation evenings was a feature of the

town. They would meet in the upstairs room of the *Shipwrights*, accessed via an external staircase. One of the reasons advanced for the decline and disappearance of hydroplanes was the silting up of the harbour attributed to the gravel extraction in the channel. Certainly, there were some unhappy experiences of planes going aground, their propellers digging into the sand.

Roger Arguile

THE TORREY CANYON DISASTER

Most of us will have heard of the Torrey Canyon. Built in 1959 she was originally classified as a 'large' crude carrier (810' long and 66,000 tons deadweight). She was owned by a subsidiary of the Union Oil Company of California, registered in Liberia, and had an Italian crew. However, by the mid-1960's she was small compared to more modern tankers, so she was sent to Japan to be 'jumboised'. This involved cutting her in half and inserting a 164-foot section amidships, which increased her length to 974' and her weight to 118,000 tons. This made her the largest oil tanker in the world at the time, a super tanker.

The final voyage

What turned out to be Torrey Canyon's last voyage began in mid-February 1967. The ship was chartered by BP (a name that will crop up again) to carry 120,000 tonnes of light crude from Kuwait to Milford Haven. She was fitted with a long-range radio navigation system (this was in the days before satnav) but it wasn't working so the crew were navigating the traditional way using astronomical fixes, dead reckoning and radar when close to land.

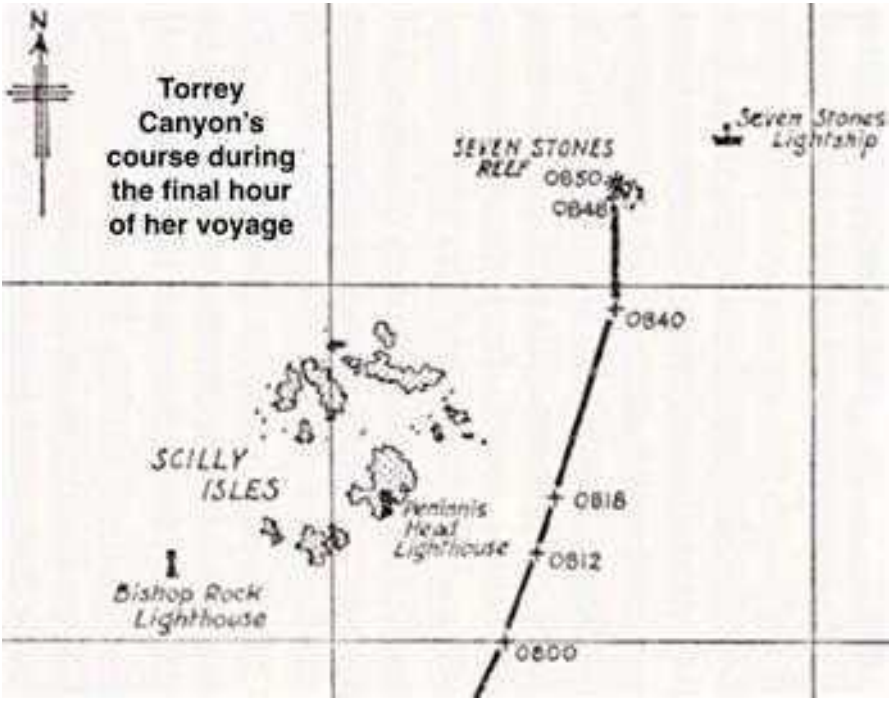
A month and 13,000 miles later, at 4:00 am on Saturday March the 18th, Torrey Canyon was about 50 miles SW of Land's End. There were two people on the bridge, the First Officer, and a helmsman. The ship was on automatic pilot - a fact that will become significant as this story unfolds - heading NNE and travelling at 16 knots. Her captain, Pastrengo Rugiati, was in his bunk. The expectation was that the ship would pass west of the Scillies and arrive, on schedule, at Milford Haven at 4:30 pm that day. This timing was critical because the vessel sagged amidships and before entering Milford Haven on the 11:00 pm high tide oil had to be transferred to get her on an even keel.

Torrey Canyon was fitted with a lever operated Sperry automatic pilot with three types of control: 'automatic' (lever fully back), 'manual' (lever in mid-position) and something called 'control' (lever fully forward), a back-up system that provided control of the ship if either of the other two systems failed. With the lever in the 'control' position, i.e., fully forward, the ship's wheel was inoperative, but the ship could be steered using a handle located on the wheel housing.

But back to March the 18th. At 6:00 am the First Officer called the captain to report that he could not yet see the Scillies on radar (bear in mind that he was expecting to see the Scilly Isles off his starboard bow). Half an hour later the Scillies did appear on radar but on the port bow. A surprised First Officer immediately altered course to port, without informing the captain. To do so he moved the steering control lever to the 'manual' position. The ship was now heading towards the SW corner of the Scilly Isles. His assumption was that, when he told him, the captain would order a further course change to port. Instead, he was reprimanded for changing course and told to put the ship back on its original course.

There are two accepted ways of negotiating this stretch of water when heading north: by passing west of the Scillies, the normal route for large vessels and the one Rugiati originally intended to take; or by going through the 12-mile-wide channel between Land’s End and the Seven Stones reef.

At 8:00 am, when Torrey Canyon was 5 miles SE of St Mary's, the watch changed, and Third Officer Coccio and Helmsman Scotto joined the captain on the bridge. Coccio was an inexperienced 27-year-old and both he and Scotto were new to the ship. At 8:12 Coccio began taking fixes. By now the captain



had decided that he was going between the Scillies and the Seven Stones reef, a 5-mile-wide channel that is not recommended for large vessels. With that in mind he started a slow turn to port.

Coccio's next fix was taken at 8:38 and it was immediately obvious to Rugiati that it was wrong by at least a mile. He ordered Coccio to take another fix which, when plotted, put the ship just 2.8 miles from the nearest of the Seven Stones. Rugiati then had two options: turn right into clear deep water or turn left, where there were nets and two French fishing boats. Presumably because he was still fixated on getting to Milford Haven by 4:30 that afternoon he decided to turn left. He did so himself by disengaging the autopilot and moving the control lever to the mid-way manual position

Once the ship on her new course Rugiati re-engaged the autopilot by moving the control level fully back - or so he thought. Meanwhile Coccio was taking another fix. He ran to the radar to get the distance but forgot the bearing so had to take another. The position he then plotted put Torrey Canyon less than a mile from the nearest rocks. At that point Rugiati realised the danger he was in. He ran from the chartroom yelling for the helmsman, who was on lookout, and ordered him to turn hard to port. Scotto put the wheel hard over, but nothing happened, the ship continued a northerly heading, and it took Rugiati nearly a minute to realise that something was wrong.

His first thought was that a fuse has blown, so he checked the fuses. He then thought that the servos operating the rudder might have failed so he rang the engine room. Only he didn't, he mis-dialled and got through to the officers' mess where a solicitous steward asked him if he was ready for his breakfast! As he was re-dialling, he noticed that the steering control lever, instead of being in 'manual', where it should have been, was fully forward in the 'control' position. In other words, the ship's wheel was disconnected from the rudder. Rugiati immediately slammed the lever into manual and he and Scotto turned the wheel hard to port. The ship started to turn, but it was too late: at 8:50 am Torrey Canyon, still steaming at 16 knots, ran aground on Pollard Rock, the largest of the Seven Stones.

On the rocks

The grounding of the Torrey Canyon didn't go unobserved. It was seen by the crews of the two French fishing boats and by the crew of the Seven Stones lightship who belatedly fired warning flares. It was even seen by people on St Martins, the nearest of the Scilly Isles.

The First and Second Officers made their way to the bridge where they found Rugiati and Coccio “wild-eyed, silent and pale faced'. The First Officer went to inspect the damage. When he returned, he reported that the ship appeared to have grounded in three places and was both taking on water and leaking oil. For 10 minutes or so nothing much happened, and nobody thought to call for help. Eventually the master of one of the trawlers did make a call, first to a shore station in Brittany which was busy and then to Land's End Radio. He didn't declare an emergency, he simply reported that an oil tanker had gone aground on the Seven Stones.

Once it was known that the ship had gone aground Land's End Radio sent out an SOS call and at least six ships responded, among them three salvage tugs (there are always salvage tugs hanging about in the Western Approaches waiting for just this sort of thing to happen). The nearest of these was the Dutch tug Utrecht. Plymouth Command was also alerted, and a destroyer was despatched. She was followed later in the day by two other ships with as much detergent onboard as could be found at short notice, which was very little.

At 9:28 the St Mary's lifeboat was launched. When it arrived alongside Torrey Canyon the coxswain hailed the ship and asked what help was needed. Captain Rugiati replied that he

wasn't abandoning ship but would like the lifeboat to stand by him. The naval air station at Culdrose, where I was stationed as a helicopter pilot, was also alerted and two of my squadron's aircraft were sent out.

One of our pilots was winched down to the ship where he was met by the captain and briefed by the Chief Engineer. After a tour of the ship, he radioed Culdrose and reported that more than half her tanks were ruptured, that she was hard aground and that the machinery spaces - including the pump room - were flooded.

By now the Dutch salvage tug Utrecht had arrived. She couldn't get close because of the water depth so two men transferred from the tug to the lifeboat, which could get alongside, one of them carrying the Lloyds 'no cure no pay' salvage contract which Captain Rugiati would later sign. The contract was with Wijsmuller, one of the world's leading deep-sea towing and salvage companies and the potential reward was considerable: if Wijsmuller could refloat the Torrey Canyon they would be able to claim 10% of the ship's value, around $1 million, but all the risk would be theirs and so too responsibility for the cost of the salvage operation.

The salvage attempt

By the morning of Sunday, March 9 both the wind and the sea had increased, there was a 10-mile-long oil slick running south from the ship and there was concern that the constant movement might spark an explosion. For that reason, Captain Rugiati agreed to 14 non-essential crew members being taken off by the St. Mary's lifeboat.

Soon afterwards, in a near gale, a first attempt at refloating was made. A towing cable was run between Utrecht and the Torrey

Canyon, and the tug took the strain. Unfortunately, the cable didn't, and it snapped. The problem was that the ship had settled during the two intervening low tides and rocks had penetrated her hull to as much as half its depth. She was effectively nailed to the reef.

Because the weather was deteriorating the captain reluctantly agreed to the rest of the crew being taken off. He would stay of course but of the 21 crew members remaining only three volunteered to remain onboard with him - his steward and two seamen. This second evacuation was much more difficult because there was a sea running and, after some hair-raising jumps between tanker and lifeboat, one of our helicopters was called in. This left six people aboard Torrey Canyon, the four crew members and two Dutch salvage men.

During the day two more tugs arrived to assist Utrecht and a third was on its way with compressors. The plan was to seal all the deck openings and pump air into the tanks to lighten the ship. Meanwhile the slick was spreading, and a growing armada of ships was spraying detergent on the oil and then steaming back and forth through the mixture.

The detergent the Navy was using was, ironically, something that BP had produced and would soon sell to the British Government in vast quantities. Rather quaintly it was called BP 1002. Someone at BP had thought it would be amusing to name it after a famous carpet cleaner (you'll remember the jingle "1001 cleans a big, big carpet for less than half a crown"). Well, this was 1002. Less amusing, and not widely known at the time, was the fact that BP 1002 killed at least 30% of any marine life it encountered, a price the Government considered acceptable to save the Cornish tourist industry.

Speaking of the Government, Harold Wilson had by now sent a minister to Plymouth to oversee operations and the matter was

to be debated in the Commons next day. Three courses of action were suggested by the Navy: pump oil from Torrey Canyon to another tanker; set light to the oil in the ship; or salvage the ship and what remained of her cargo. The first two were rejected on safety and legal grounds so the Navy, rather reluctantly, had to go along with the salvage option. It was all in the hands of the Dutchmen.

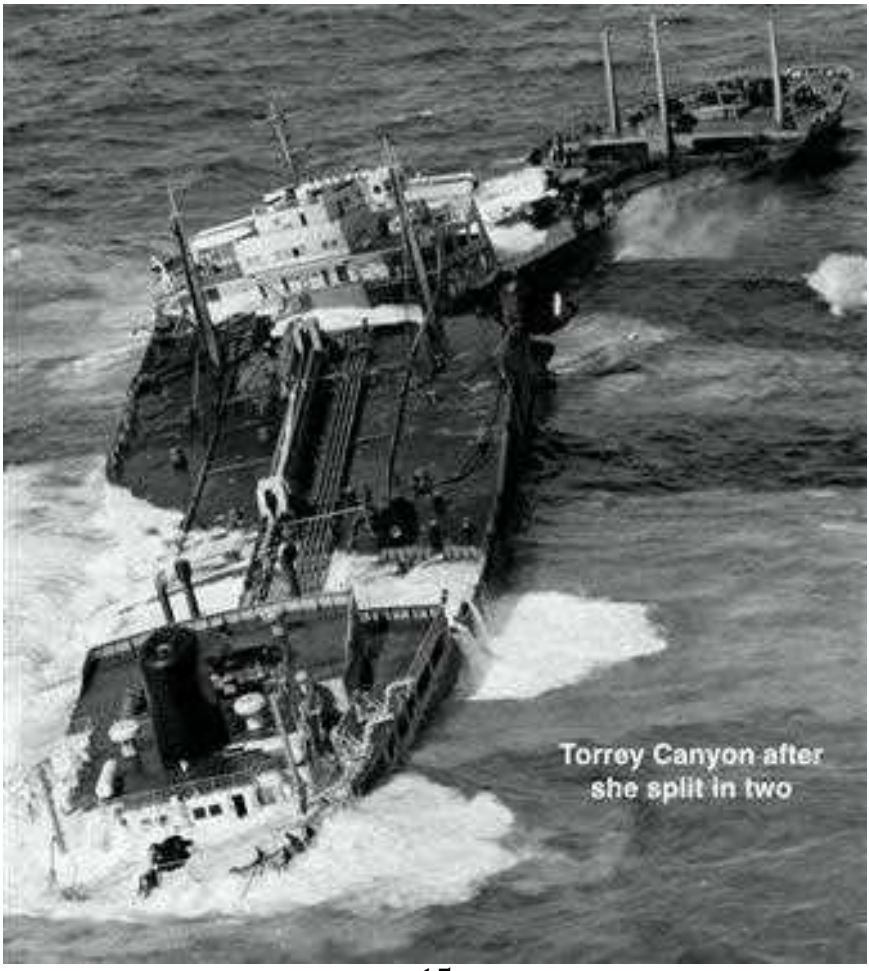
Monday the 20th was a fine day and pumping began. All went well to start with but on the Tuesday morning fumes in the engine room were ignited, probably by a spark created when somebody opened an access hatch. A huge explosion ripped up through the ship, seriously injuring Wijsmuller's Salvage Chief, Captain Stal, who was crossing the main deck. He and another member of the salvage team were blown overboard. Two crewmen dived in to rescue them and all four were recovered to the tug Titan.

It was time to go. By 12:45 pm the Torrey Canyon had been abandoned and Titan was on her way to mainland. A naval doctor was winched down to the tug, but Captain Stal's injuries were so serious that he couldn't be moved and, sadly, he died before Titan reached Penzance. Despite this Wijsmuller still thought the ship could be salvaged because Torrey Canyon had grounded on a neap tide, and there were going to be spring tides the following weekend.

On Thursday the 23rd Wijsmuller began pressurising the ship's hull. During that day and the next the wind shifted from the north to the SW and began to increase. This was a matter of concern - and not just to Wijsmuller: the wind was now pushing the oil towards the mainland. It arrived there just after midnight on Easter Saturday.

At midday on Easter Saturday lines were passed between the three largest tugs and the Torrey Canyon. Towing began but the

tanker would not come free, she just pivoted on the rocks that held her. A planned attempt next morning was abandoned because a near gale was blowing, so the next attempt was made on the afternoon of Easter Sunday. This time four tugs were used, two forward and two aft. At 5:00 pm the towing cable between the Torrey Canyon and the two stern tugs parted and the attempt was abandoned. But the stresses inflicted by the tugs - and by the weather - had taken their toll; at 6:45 the ship broke in two just aft of the bridge and another 30,000 tons of oil poured into the sea.



Torrey Canyon after she split in two

Next day, Monday the 27th of March, cracks appeared forward of the bridge in the bow section and during the afternoon that too split in two. The ship was now in three sections and even more oil was escaping. The Government meanwhile was being accused of indecisive action; ten days had passed during which they had done nothing positive to tackle the problem at source. Even the spraying programme, although judged worthwhile, wasn't a success because of the vast amounts of oil and the limited availability of detergent.

Early on Tuesday morning all that changed. The Government decided that the oil remaining in Torrey Canyon should be set alight using electrically fired 'oxygenated bricks' lowered from helicopters: if this failed the ship would be bombed. The ship's owners and insurers were immediately informed of this. At 9:30 am Wijsmuller abandoned their salvage attempt and soon after that the ship's owners gave up their claim to the wreck. The way was now clear for the British Government to take action.

The oxygenated bricks were in effect giant firelighters that were ignited electrically. They'd only been invented the week before and had performed well in trials, but they needed to be tested at sea. Several bricks were deployed that morning from one of our aircraft, but they didn't work, the oil just would not burn, so at midday orders were given to bomb the wreck.

The Bombing

Buccaneers from the naval air station at Lossiemouth dropped a total of 36 bombs that afternoon, 23 of which were direct hits. But within half an hour the fires had gone out, extinguished by the sea, and at that point I was sent out with more oxygenated bricks. They didn't work either, but I did get to see the wreck.

There was more bombing on the Wednesday and (local

connection coming up) RAF Hunters from No. 1 Squadron at West Raynham were sent out with napalm - jellified aviation fuel - in their drop-tanks to keep the oil alight. Because Britain had never previously admitted possessing napalm, a weapon that had gained an infamous reputation during the Vietnam War, the West Raynham aircraft had to fly a very indirect route to their target - up to Cromer, down the east coast, through the Channel and then the whole length of the south coast - so as not to be seen until after they had dropped their payload.

More bombing followed but the oil just would not stay alight. Eventually it was judged that all the oil in the wreck had gone, and Torrey Canyon was left to the sea. A month later she had disappeared completely.

The black tide

When the oil reached the Cornish coast 1,600 troops were deployed and hundreds of local people turned out, many of them children, to help clear the beaches, either with detergent

Local children help to remove the oil from Cornish beaches

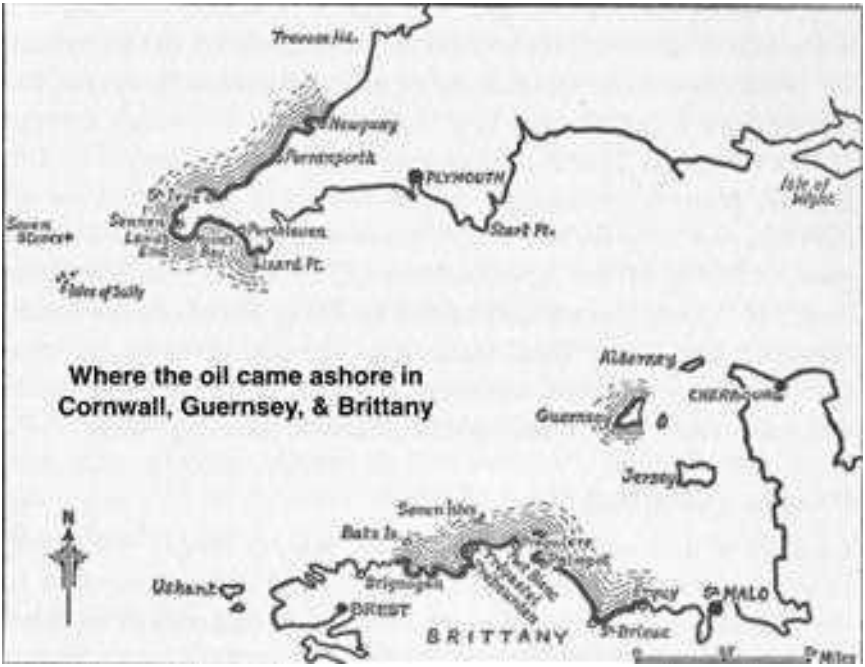
or by shovelling it into buckets. In all 120 miles of the Cornish coast was affected by an estimated 25,000 tons of oil but, surprisingly, within a week most of the main beaches were clear.

Different techniques were used when the oil reached Guernsey on April 7. By then the toxic nature of BP1002 had become known so the islanders used road tankers to suck up the oil as in came in on the tide and then, when the tide was out, they removed any sand that had become contaminated. About 3,000 tons of this oil/sand mixture was then dumped in a disused quarry where some of it still remains.

On April 10 the oil reached Brittany, where the French also opted not to use detergents - initially at least. Although less of their coastline was affected, about 50 miles, the French had three times as much oil to deal with, about 75,000 tons, some of which arrived as an emulsified sludge after the Brits had been at it with detergent. To deal with this the French deployed 9,000 troops, 200 naval vessels and 400 other ships, and they too relied on local civilian help. Within a month most of the oil was gone.

Environmental damage

One very obvious and quite upsetting result of the oil spill was the effect it had on marine bird life. It's estimated that 75,000 seabirds died in all, a third of them in the UK. Night after night there were pictures on the television of people bringing them into bird cleaning centres. About 8,000 birds were brought in to be de-oiled but fewer than 100 survived. Whether it was the oil that killed them or what was used to clean them is a moot point, but the latter seems most probable.



The aftermath

The British government was strongly criticised for its handling of the incident which, at the time, was the costliest shipping disaster ever. The Navy was also criticised because, quote “25% of the bombs dropped missed their enormous stationary target”. However, it must be said that for much of the time that “enormous target” was completely obscured by smoke.

Claims were made by the British and French governments against the Torrey Canyon's owners. They were very aware that the two governments were after them, but they managed not to notice when the Lake Palourde, one of Torrey Canyon's two sister ships, put into Singapore several months later. A young British lawyer based there was deputised to arrest the ship on behalf of the British government. He

managed that by attaching a writ to her mast - but only because the ship's crew let him onboard thinking he was a whisky salesman! A year later the French also caught up with the Lake Palourde.

Two inquiries were held into the disaster. The outcome of the first, the owners' inquiry, has never been published but the second, a Liberian inquiry, found Captain Rugiati to blame because he discounted alternative and much safer routes round the Scillies and chose instead to take his ship between the Scillies and the Seven Stones reef.

One of the few positive outcomes from all this was that changes were made to the international shipping regulations which now impose liabilities on ship owners without the need to prove negligence. Another was the 1973 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. Many of the measures used today to prevent oil spills - for example double hulls and duplicate navigation controls - can be traced back to the Torrey Canyon disaster of 1967, but it took the grounding of the Exxon Valdez 12 years later (a much smaller spill of 37,000 tons but in a far more sensitive area environmentally speaking) to make Sperry re-design their autopilot controls.

Lessons were also learnt about how to deal with oil spills. The British had used 5 million gallons of detergent to emulsify the oil at sea and on the beaches whereas the French had concentrated on dealing with the oil before it reached land. They used booms to contain the oil and absorbent materials such as straw and sawdust to mop it up both at sea and along the tideline. They only resorted to an eco-friendlier detergent late on to get their main tourist beaches pristine, and then used only 500,000 gallons of it.

And the cost? To the marine environment: massive - and perhaps still ongoing. To the tourist industries in Cornwall and Brittany: in the short term immense mainly because, in the UK certainly, the visiting public thought that the whole Cornish coast had been engulfed by a sea of foul-smelling oil. To the fishing industries in both countries: huge because of a collapse in customer confidence, largely due to scare reports in the press (there was no real evidence that fish or shellfish were badly affected by either the oil or the detergent). And the monetary cost to the two governments: Britain put a figure of £3 million on it, France slightly more than that, money that both governments did eventually recoup by slapping writs on the Lake Palourde.

Nigel Dark

Foundry House, Theatre Road

I lived in Foundry House from 1942 to 1950. The Cornish Foundry itself was actually on Glebe Road, but at the back was the house with faced Theatre Road. About 1947 – 1950 one day I heard a crash, and it was the empty abandoned old and decrepit foundry building's roof which came crashing down. The day we arrived to take possession in 1942 Mrs Cornish was waiting to hand over. The Cornish's were the last owners of the foundry. They had probably taken it over from John Woods during the 19th Century. The Styman family had recently become the new owners of the house, having brought it for £750. Mrs Cornish gave my father two well-filled scrapbooks of places which the family had visited in Europe including that most desirable City of Biarritz. They would have been much appreciated to have today but have long since vanished.

John Tuck

Robert Paston, Viscount Yarmouth – Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk

As the Monarch's personal representative in the county, today the post of Lord Lieutenant is largely a ceremonial one. In the 17th Century, with poorer communications, it was rather more important.

At that time the most important part of the job, as the Monarch's local representative, was to organise the county militia and keep it trained and ready to deal with foreign invasions or local insurrections. In early 1676 Robert Paston, who three years earlier had been created Viscount Yarmouth, was made Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk. The post had previously been held by Lord Townsend, but King Charles II fell out with this gentleman when he backed the "wrong man" in a King's Lynn by-election. Robert Paston was of course resident at Oxnead Hall at that time. The Pastons had originally had houses all over the county and were certainly one of the richest families in Norfolk for a time. But the civil war, and their

alignment with the Crown lost them most of their wealth. The Parliamentary cause didn't just kill off their rich opposition, they rendered enormous fines which were useful in their continuing fight, as well as curbing the ability of their opponents to resist them. At the restoration, the Pastons, amongst others, regained their status, but their enormous wealth was gone for ever.

The post of Lord Lieutenant is an unpaid one, and always has been. But in the 17th Century it was a necessary part of the job to undertake lavish and regular hospitality of those who would be the officer cadre in the county militia. Another aspect of the job was presumably either to appoint local Justices of the Peace or to recommend their appointment – hence the following letter. It is written to Robert Paston by Robert Coke who was the great-grandson of Sir Edward Coke, the Lord Chief Justice, and his wife Bridget Paston. Robert Coke was to be the grandfather of Thomas Coke, the builder of Holkham Hall and the 1st Earl of Leicester (1st creation). The letter is written from Godwick Hall, but Robert Coke was presumably already spending time at the old house at Holkham – from the content of the letter.

Godwick
9 July 1676
From Robert Coke to Robert, Viscount Yarmouth

My Lord,
since Mr Bedingfield's being out of commission for the peace, that part of the country is likely to bee at a losse, Captain Gibbons being the onely justice of the peace thereabouts, who is too remote from Wells which is a contentious sea port towne, the dayly disorders that happen there make it necessary that some gentleman who is near them to have a commission to keep them quiet & to determine the differences that arise among them. Mr William Armiger of North Creak who is a counsellor at

law & I presume not unknown to your lordship is a person very fitt for such a trust, I therefore beg of your lordship to use your interest with my Lord Chauncellor to get a commission for him. I know him to bee an honest gentleman & make no question but hee will manage the trust with prudence, and except your lordship obtaine this favour for mee I shall find the townsmen of Wells very troublesome neighbours. Your lordship hath been pleased to bestow so many favours upon mee, which have een made mee presume to beg this. My wife and sister present their services to your lordship & my Lady Yarmouth, which I desire your lordship to accept of, from my lord

Signed your lordship's humble servant & kinsman
Robert Coke

Keith Leesmith

The original Oxnead Hall before its demolition in 1732
The drawing is by John Adey Repton, son of Humphrey Repton and tenant of Oxnead after the Paston family had died out.

Pubs and Breweries in Wells

The history of Wells pubs is very much tied to the history of Norfolk breweries. Three breweries acquired interests in most local pubs, Bullards, Morgans and Steward and Pattesons.

Morgans were established in 1873 taking over the King Street Old Brewery in Norwich which dated back to 1720. So called common brewers had developed during that century before which much brewing was conducted by farms or by public houses themselves. Morgans, having become a limited liability company in 1887 proceeded to acquire 178 licensed premises that year. By 1904 they controlled 600 licensed houses. The King Street brewery was rebuilt after war damage in 1945 and was sold to Watney Mann in 1961. The company was acquired jointly in that year by Bullards and Sons Ltd. and Steward and Patteson.

Bullards were established also in Norwich in 1836, founding the Anchor brewery in 1837. They became a limited liability company under the name of Bullard and Sons Ltd in 1895 having 441 tied houses. The previous year they had bought The Wymondham brewery of William Cann and Elijah Eyre's brewery of Kings Lynn. The company acquired Bidwells of Thetford in 1924, Higge and Seppings of King's Lynn in 1928, Youngs, Crawshay and Youngs of Norwich in 1956. As above they acquired Morgans in 1961 and were bought out by Watney Mann in 1963. They ceased to brew in 1969.

Steward and Patteson dates back in the person of John Patteson to 1793. He had a series of business partners until four members of the Steward family of Yarmouth joined him in 1820. Their name altered over time as different partners joined. In

1837 they became Steward, Patteson and Finch taking over Finch's 55 houses added to their own 120 and the 77 of George Morse's brewery also in Norwich. They acquired the Reepham brewery of Bircham and Sons with 50 more and Swaffham brewery with 51 licensed houses in 1895. They registered as Steward and Patteson Ltd. in July 1895. The company proceeded to take over Fakenham brewery, Dereham brewery and William and Thomas Bagge of Kings Lynn in 1949. As above they took over Morgans jointly with Bullards in 1961. The whole set up numbering 632 tied houses was sold to Watney Mann in 1963 and continued to operate until 1968 when the Pockthorpe brewery which Patteson had opened in 1793 ceased to brew.

All the above at different times owned pubs in Wells. Whether they did so directly or by acquiring smaller brewers is unknown. So, for instance smaller brewers included Fakenham brewery. Whether they owned any pubs in Wells is not known but Elijah Eyre of Kings Lynn certainly did.

Bullards owned the *Shipwrights,* the *Ship* and subsequently the *Ark Royal*, the *Park Tavern*, the *Prince of Wales, the Railway/Tinkers* (which it acquired in 1903) and the *Eight Ringers.*

Steward and Pattesons owned the *Queen Adelaide* on Freeman Street bought in 1889, the *Vine* on High Street which they took over from Morgans when they acquired the latter.

Other regional brewers took on pubs in the town. Greene King bought the *Globe* from Peatling and Cawdron in 1953.

The purchase of both Bullards and Steward and Patteson by Watney Mann in 1963 was part of a wider process. Watney's

had been a regional brewer in the 1930s. In 1959 they responded to a takeover bid by expanding using their undervalued assets, making a number of acquisitions including Bullards and Steward and Pattesons. They continued to brew under the name of **Norwich brewery** using the Morgans brewery site at Kings Street Norwich which was modernised between 1969 and 1971. Watneys were bought out in 1972 by Grand Metropolitan Hotels and the Norwich brewery ceased to brew in 1985.

The closure of pubs in the town had various caused, some related to the tightening of licensing legislation at the beginning of the twentieth century but arguably others related to regional and natural policies in the 1960s onwards. The survival of the *Globe*, the *Edinburgh*, the *Crown,* and the *Bowling Green* may have had something to do with their being independently owned. Among those closed by Watneys after the takeover were the *Vine* in 1965, the *Prince of Wales* in 1966, the *Eight Ringers* in 1970, the *Park Tavern* in 1973 and the *Shipwrights* in 1985 when the Norwich brewery closed. The *Ark Royal* which had taken over the licence of the *Ship* on Freeman Street was sold and survived in the ownership of Enterprise Inns after the Beer Order of 1989 until 2019. The ownership of the *Fleece* before it came into the hands of Punch taverns may have something to do with the Beer Orders (which forced the national brewers to release pubs from their tie. No brewer could have more than 2000 tied houses.) The *Railway/Tinkers/Lifeboat* was sold by Watneys to Pub master probably after the Beer Order and sold into private hands in 1994. It closed in 2020.

Roger Arguile
(with assistance from John Arguile & 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.

Contact:
Steve Adcock – kadcock@talk21.com 07455 893114

TOWN WALKS: (4 available)

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£2.00 each, - members £1.50

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1836 November 26

CONCERT and BALL

AT THE

THEATRE WELLS

UNDER THE

Direction of Mr. J. Tyzack

THE PUBLIC are respectfully informed that the above will take place in DECEMBER NEXT, under the Patronage of

The Lady Anne Coke	T. W. Coke Esq.
The Viscountess Anson	Sir J. Astley. Bart.M.P.
Lady Astley	Sir W.J.Folkes Bart. M.P.
Lady Folkes	Sir Roger Martin, Bart.
Mrs. Spencer Stanhope	The Hon. Rev. T. Keppel
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Being in aid of the Funds for establishing an

INFANT SCHOOL at Wells.

The Orchestra will be complete, consisting of Gentlemen from Norwich, Mr Fisher's Orchestra, and the Wells Harmonic Society. Glee Singers and Miss Mann of Norwich (Pupil of Mr. Hall,) are engaged.

Leader , Mr C. Fisher, Piano Forte, Mr Martin, Conductor, Mr. C.P.Jonas.

STEWARDS FOR THE BALL

THE HON. MAJOR KEPPEL,

CAPTAIN FITZROY

CAPTAIN CURRY, R.N.

Gentlemen's tickets 10s. Ladies 7s 6d. including Tea and Coffee. The Theatre will be aired, and the Pit boarded over level with the Stage.

The inhabitants of Wells and the neighbourhood are called upon to give their support and interest on this occasion; the Ladies especially are solicited to exert their wonted benevolence in behalf of the above Charity.

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The next Newsletter will be published late Summer

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