

Wells Local History Group Newsletter

Free to members
£3.50 to
Non-members



**New Lambs at
New Farm**

Bob Brownjohn

Houses for Wells - Fred Rodwell, UDC Surveyor

Fun on Wells Beach in the 1930's

Wharf & Warehouse on the Quay

Wells - Agricultural Town

Number 81 – Autumn 2022

Bob Brownjohn



While it is sad to lose any member of the group, it is particularly unfortunate to see the passing of Bob, who died in May. Bob had been one of our founder members and had been actively helping until the end by sitting in his room

at the nursing home and updating the computer database which we use in the archive room. The photograph above shows him sitting at his computer where he built and maintained a website for the whole of Wells before organisations such as the Harbour and RNLi had their own. WLHG was a part of this. In the early days of the group, we received many enquiries from people all over the world who wanted to trace their family trees. The group purchased several microfilms of the Parish records and Census returns. Bob then copied the details of these on to spreadsheets which people could access. This sounds easier than it was, because each spreadsheet has tens of thousands of lines of data, each of which Bob copied from microfilm to computer.

He became widowed some years ago, his wife finally succumbing to dementia. When he contracted cancer a few years after, despite several hospital procedures, his health slowly deteriorated and very sensibly he booked himself into a nursing home in Sheringham where he spent the last year of his life.

Bob had been on the committee of WLHG for many years and became Chairman until he moved to Sheringham. Because our committee meetings had moved to "Zoom" during Covid, Bob was able to join us, and we were able to draw on his technical expertise in computer matters.

It was typical of Bob that he decided that after his death he wanted to be cremated without ceremony, although this deprived his many friends of a formal goodbye. However, on Tuesday 18 July a “wake” was held at the Maltings, which was closed to other activities at the time. Despite being the hottest day of the year (at that point) over thirty people turned out to say “goodbye”.

As well as WLHG, members of the Discussion Group, the Surgery Patients Forum, Wells United Charities, and other groups were present, each of which had had the benefit of Bob’s active membership in former years.

KL

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

On page 19 you will find details of the committee meeting held after the AGM at which several decisions were made to ensure that the Group continues and flourishes. Other nearby groups such as Binham and Fakenham have sadly fallen by the wayside, mainly due to a lack of volunteers to operate them. We are confident that for the next year at least we will continue.

The following is the talks programme which Steve Adcock has arranged for the autumn period. He is now working on talks for after Christmas, and we expect to be able to announce these in the next Newsletter. Please make a note of these in your diary because we will not be issuing membership cards as in the past, as our letterpress printer has now retired.

September 7th - Sandringham Secrets – *Susan Barnett*

October 5th – Rise & Fall of Local Democracy – *Roger Arguile*

November 2nd – History of Coastwatch – *Clive Mattson*

December 7th – **2.30pm** – A Pilgrim’s progress to Walsingham

- *Scilla Landale*

Keith Leesmith

Houses for Wells – the work of the District Surveyor

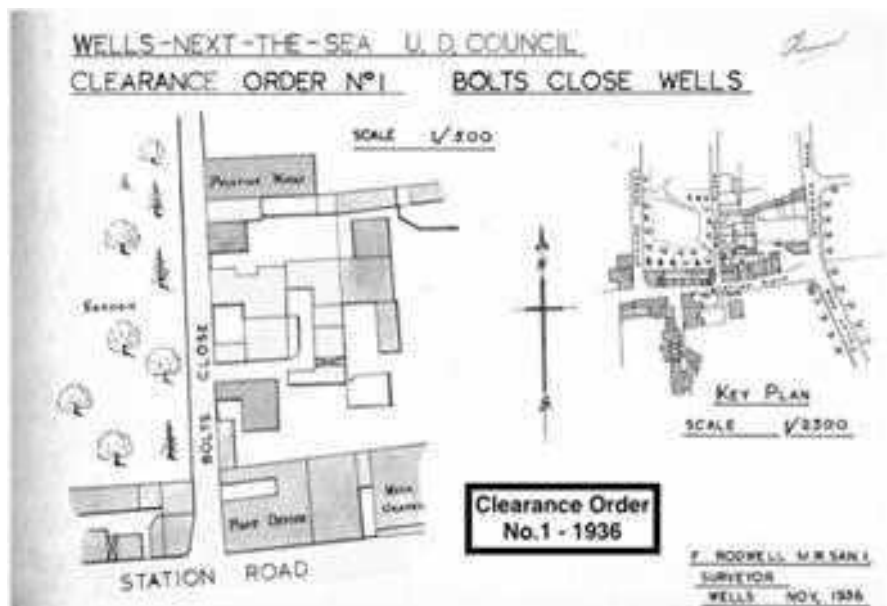


Sub Officer Fred Rodwell (front centre) with fire service colleagues

Fred Rodwell was District Surveyor for the town from 1927 to 1961. He was also the sub-officer at the local fire station until 1950. He took over the Surveyor's job not long after Samuel Bloy who was, very likely, sacked for doing his job too well. He was to oversee the biggest housing programme Wells had ever seen.

The issue of poor housing had long been recognised as far back as 1900 when John Mellish, the town's Medical Officer of Health commented on it. The yards which run down to the sea were well known as being cramped and insanitary. But they were not the only places where such conditions obtained. Some of the

worst were in such as the top end of Croft Yard behind the Post Office, the yard behind the Bowling Green on Church Street, a close of cottages to the east of Market Lane, and Masseys Yard – which still exists as a private yard – again on Church Street. Others were on Staithe Street – further up the hill from the Maltings, off Plummers Hill at the bottom of the Buttlands, where the Health Centre now stands behind Station Road. Others again were on Jolly Sailors Yard. Houses with two rooms downstairs and two up, with an outside earth toilet shared with several other houses, a shared washhouse with a coal-heated copper, with neither gas nor electricity, with limited cooking facilities - a cast iron range at best and commonly shared cooking facilities: this was the condition of life of the majority of the people of Wells to which Sam Peel, as is well-known, drew attention and who began the process of re-housing them.



Hammonds Yard, now scarcely more than a memory, at the top of Jicklings Yard was one such habitation. Looking at it now one can scarcely believe that eleven properties were contained in its small space. It was among the first to receive Rodwell's attentions after his appointment in 1927; its houses were to be demolished. Despite Peel's work, opposition to such actions had not ceased. George Turner Cain, a local garage owner who had married into the Smith malting family and was a councillor was particularly hostile to interference with the market economy in housing, but he was not alone. Opposition to town improvements was longstanding. As the technical expert, Rodwell would have to submit his proposals for approval by the Council. But whereas his predecessors had contented themselves with inspection and repairs, he, now armed with new legislation, could put forward schemes to remove whole areas of cramped, insanitary, and ruinous properties. He had still to face the resistance of councillors who were almost all of them businessmen in the town and who stood to lose from expensive developments which would need to be covered by local taxation, but increasingly they too saw the need for change. The Council voted 7-2 against Cain's opposition to the Rodwell's housing policy. (Cain was subsequently elected as chairman of the council by four votes to none with seven abstentions. No one else wanted to be chairman.) Following the elections of 1930, recently retired headteacher Frederick Raven was elected chairman and Rodwell's proposal for twenty more houses on Mill Road was approved.

1930 saw the passing of a new Housing Act which gave the Council increased powers. It enabled the creation of what were called Clearance Areas, in which houses could be designated to be of such dangerous, dilapidated, and insanitary condition

that they should be demolished. Rodwell set about identifying such areas in the town. Each was tiny, between one and six houses but they existed all over the town as noted above. The trouble was that, as so often with powers granted by government, a process had to be gone through. The passing of a resolution declaring a close of houses to be in need of clearance was followed by the proposal being sent to the



Minister concerned, in this case the Minister of Health. It had to be shown that alternative housing either had been or would be provided for the occupants and that the Council had the funds to pay for the action. The legislation was one of a series of acts dating back to 1844 when the predecessors of the District Council, the Improvement Commissioners were appointed but they all allowed landlords to object and to agree to put the houses in good repair. These new measures had only to get through the Council and to obtain the approval of the Minister for the Council to be empowered to act.

This took time. It was in December 1933 that Rodwell's submission of three Clearance Areas was approved by the Council. These were on Bolts Close, Church Street, and Burnt Street. Another ten were to follow. They began to be implemented only three years later. At that point Rodwell

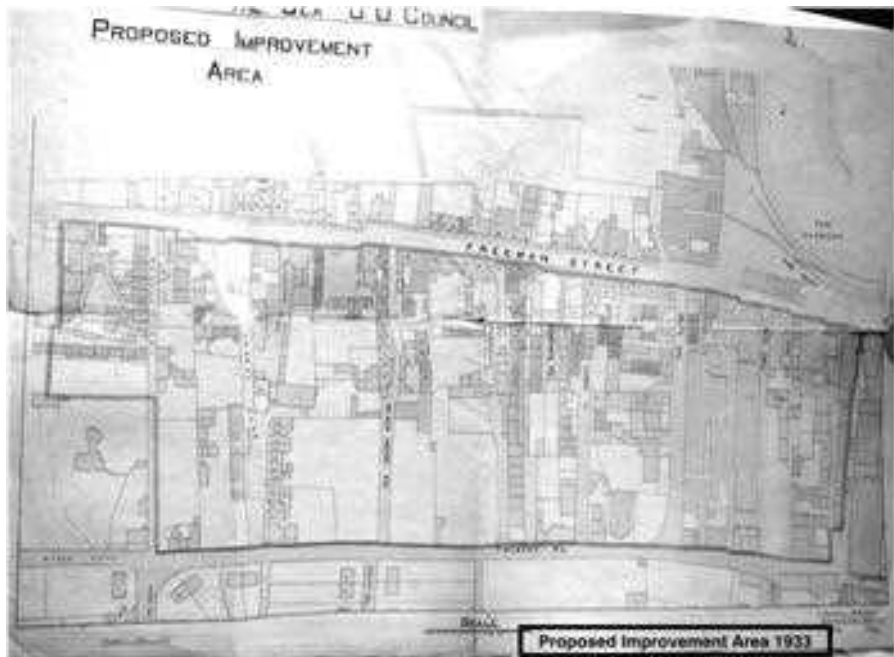
proposed that another thirty-one families be re-housed on Northfield Lane their current accommodation being cleared. The last Order to be approved which dealt with housing to the east of the Bowling Green on Church Street was agreed only in November 1938. Demolition was to follow. The first began at the beginning of 1935; the last were still being ordered as war broke out and all housing work ceased. By 1955 still five of the pre-war clearance orders had not been implemented. In the event there were yards where derelict houses remained and where open spaces between houses were used as temporary parking spaces or for the keeping of caravans removed from the Pinewoods site for the winter. Grass grew long and weeds flourished even as late as the 1970s. The land did not belong to the Council and landlords did not see the potential for development.

Returning to the events of the 1930s, the 1930 Act required that alternative accommodation be provided. Two sites had recommended themselves, one near the gasworks on Mill



Road, the other on Northfield Lane. In this case George Turner Cain, still a councillor voted with the majority for the former. A loan was obtained from the Leicester Lodge of the Order of Oddfellows, which had just sold its premises on Clubbs Lane for a cinema, and work began on what were to become Westfield Avenue and Bases Lane.

The Act also allowed for the creation of what were called Improvement Areas. These were areas to be designated for the removal of houses which were beyond repair, the reduction of overcrowding and the repair of houses which could be retained. Rodwell had been industrious in his proposals for one of these in the town. The north end of the town consisted of now derelict industrial buildings intermingled with cottages whose development would have to wait until the 1970s; but to the west of the Glebe, there was a number of yards running down to Freeman Street which consisted almost entirely of small poor cottages which seemed to fit the bill completely. At the same meeting of the Council in December 1933 Rodwell laid out his scheme for the improvement of the whole area running from the Glebe to Dogger Lane. As provided for, some houses which were beyond repair would be taken down, others would be repaired, and yards in which there was overcrowding might be selectively cleared. Twenty-six houses inhabited by eighty-two residents were identified as needing to be taken down. Faced with such proposals the response of landlords was understandable. They wished to protect their investment. So, when fourteen houses, containing forty-one people were proposed for demolition, the landlords offered to repair them. Even if they failed to do so and some did, this produced delay. A more serious cause of delay was the decision of the Ministry of Health two years later to reject the entire Improvement Area



scheme. Rodwell had to offer piecemeal solutions, but he appears to have recognised that the west end of the town required a major intervention.

There were more than a dozen houses between Dogger Lane and the Glebe which were beyond saving, A new Housing Act in 1935 placed a duty on the Council to undertake a comprehensive review of its housing stock with a view to eliminating slums. Why Rodwell did not include any of the yards off Freeman Street in Clearance orders is unclear. Perhaps he thought only a large-scale scheme would meet the needs of that section of the town. The effects were to be unfortunate as we shall see.

Meanwhile, those displaced by Clearance Orders had to be accommodated elsewhere. Initially, in 1934 twelve houses were

to be built on Westfield Avenue. Another six were agreed the following year. The overall programme was hugely ambitious. The obvious place for new houses was along the old Northfield Lane which ran eastwards south of the old ropewalk and the land around it. To help pay for it all, some eight houses on Northfield Avenue were sold at the then market price of £350. The land itself had to be bought and pretty much all the land around the town belonged to Holkham estate. In those days the Earl was very much the controlling figure in its affairs who had taken a personal interest in the town. It was he who opened the first public housing in the town on Northfield Avenue in 1915. He proceeded to offer land on Northfield at £100 an acre. He subsequently offered another ten acres for £850.

The implementation of the Clearance Orders continued throughout the 1930s as did the house building. The meeting of June 1937 approved twenty houses to be built on Northfield Lane. Additional houses on Northfield Avenue were agreed. The next year a further ten houses were approved on Northfield Lane. Some houses on Lugger Yard were demolished, presumably under existing older powers and, as noted before, the land lay derelict. In 1938 the building of Northfield Crescent was proposed; approval was sought for sixteen houses. Tenders were submitted as late as August 1939. Instructions were given for the demolition of the remaining houses subject to the Clearance Orders two months before. In the October however, instructions were received from the Ministry of Health that all housing matters were to be postponed indefinitely. We were at war and normal processes would cease.

Except of course that they did not. Rodwell had been the sub-officer of the local brigade since 1927 when he came to Wells. History does not record his part in the upgrading of the

service. Fear of incendiary bombs must however have concentrated his mind on this above his Council responsibilities. The local service had been upgraded in 1936 with motorised appliances; fire hydrants had been installed throughout the town. The service now acquired trailer pumps to ensure a good supply in case of large fires. Fire watchers were deployed to protect industrial buildings, another responsibility for the sub-officer. Even so, he could not avoid his other duties. He had to report to the Council on water consumption in the town, on the state of slaughterhouses and the health of farm animals. He was, like his predecessors, the town's sanitary inspector as well as its surveyor. He was a busy man.



Ideas and even draft proposals for the post-war development of the town were being mooted as early as 1943. Fourteen and a half acres of Holkham land adjacent to Northfield Lane were proposed for more housing – Northfield Way. So, by 1945 the town was possessed of housing estates in Northfield Avenue, Mill Road, Gales Road, Westfield Avenue and Northfield Lane to which would be added more houses in Northfield Lane,

Northfield Crescent, Northfield Way and Knitting Needle Lane. By 1948 there were 206 council houses with another 28 under construction. There would be more.

Another story altogether is his work on the provision of mains water in the 1930s and mains sewerage in 1950s. Another story too is the conclusion of his attempts to develop the Freeman Street yards. He had in 1957 obtained a compulsory purchase order for the yards between Stearmans Yard and the Glebe and proposed the clearance of the whole of the original Improvement Area, to build an arterial road from the Quay to Mill Road. This would give easy access to large vehicles coming from the south and west and leave space to build new houses to replace the 86 houses which had been declared unfit in a survey in 1955. Following his retirement in 1961 Arnold Rogers who replaced him, and who was described as a serial moderniser, failed in the attempt to implement his vision. In 1970 the Council agreed that now long-demolished housing should become a car park. No road was ever built and, apart from infilling, the Council subsequently built very few more houses. Eventually, due to government legislation the whole housing stock was lost to the town. That indeed is another story.

This account is taken from work towards the telling of the story of Wells in the twentieth century to be published sometime later in which I hope to tell a little more but not the whole of the truth about the town.

Roger Arguile

The Thatcher family in the 1930's having fun on Wells Beach



Henry Edmund Thatcher
– retired proprietor of the Railway Hotel



From left to right: Ferdi, the eldest son of Henry Edmund and his wife Hermine Thatcher, with his wife Grace. Ferdi was a teacher from South Essex. Henry Thatcher, second son, taught at Becontree High School also in South Essex.



Ferdi and Harry Thatcher with an unknown friend



Ferdi and Harry with unknown guests in front of their beach hut





A different occasion showing in the top picture, Harry on the left, with an unknown friend, and Harry paddling.

The next picture shows Ferdi with his wife Grace and the unknown friend





Here George, the youngest of the three Thatcher brothers, with Harry's wife Peggy, (Margaret) and Ferdi with his wife Grace in the front.

The final picture shows Harry with his wife Peggy (Margaret) in the tree, and Ferdi with brother George at the base



Pictures supplied by
Peter Thatcher

COMMITTEE FOR 2022/2023

As is normal, soon after the Annual General Meeting a committee meeting was held to decide “who does what” during the coming year. The following positions were agreed:

Steve Adcock	Speaker Secretary & Book Sales
Maureen Dye	Treasurer & Vice-Chair
Peter Jefferys	Chairman & Archive Room
Keith Leesmith	Secretary & Newsletter Editor
Peter Thatcher	without portfolio

There are two committee vacancies

At the same meeting it was agreed that we publish a second edition of ***The History of the Inns and Public Houses of Wells***. This book remains popular but has been out of print for some time. When published in 2012 new information immediately came to light and Mike Welland will incorporate this into the new edition.

It was also agreed that future meetings would continue to be held at the Maltings and simultaneously on Zoom. As before, the meetings would run from September to May with no meeting in January. The December and February meetings would take place in the afternoon, with other meetings being held in the evening. Meetings are free to members, and non-members may also attend, with tickets (£5) being available at the Maltings Information Desk

Wharf & Warehouse on the Quay – Award No 373



The Enclosure Award allocated to Sarah Jones – *One piece of land containing by measure five perches marked on the map or plan with the number (373) and bounded by the Harbour of Wells next the Sea towards the North the East and the West and by the Burnham Road towards the South*

1771 5th April The first document sighted was an indenture of conveyance from Ann Wortley to Thomas Greaves and John Robinson. Wortley was a very common name in Wells, and it is thought that Ann was the wife of John Wortley who died in 1770.

1774 11th May Indenture between Thomas Greaves and George Molloy (*Possibly mortgage*)

1777 October 10th Release by Thomas Greaves to Thomas Jones and his wife Sarah. (The land was still owned by Sarah Jones at the time of the Award of 1813)

1823 8th & 9th August Lease and Release Valentine Brett Dennis to Thomas Bennet Rust

1829 13th 14th July Lease & Release Thomas Bennet Rust to Mr George Crofts. Wharf of Joseph Springall Southgate on the west. Sale price was £105.

1831 16th May William Ransome, described on the Indenture of release as a Wheelwright, sold the property on the Quay to Michael Robinson Parker, Merchant of Wells. The description of the property read as follows; - *All that Wharf or Quay situate in Wells next the Sea opposite to a coalhouse belonging to the said William Ransome containing by measure five perches more or less and marked with the number 373 on the Map or Plan of the Award bounded by the Harbour of Wells aforesaid towards the north, east and west, and by the Highway called the Burnham Road towards the south.*

The indenture did not make reference to any buildings being erected on this piece of ground neither did the 1813 Award or other documentation prior to this transaction of 1831. It appears that it was Michael Robinson Parker who then erected the warehouse on the land following this purchase. Michael Robinson Parker, born in Great Yarmouth in 1797, was a man of many parts. He was a ship builder, ship owner, Lloyds Agent, and Corn Merchant, he lived in what is now called East House in Wells.

William Ransom who featured on the above transaction was a wheelwright who lived in Dogger Lane. He was born in Wells in 1790, his father was also a wheelwright and blacksmith. There is no reference to him being a coal merchant and it is likely that the reference to his coal house in the indenture was to a coal store to the west of the land being conveyed. William died in 1873 at the age of 84.

1832 3rd January Release of a piece of Ground in Wells by the Assignees of George Crofts to the Commissioners of the Harbour at Wells. (George Croft declared bankrupt 1831.) The assignees consisted of Sampson Foster of Fakenham, William Elgar of Wells, Grocer, William Sheringham of Fakenham, merchant, and George Crofts, merchant. Bargained

and sold to the Commissioners. Price of £125 paid by Harbour Commissioners.

1843 27th November On that day plans were lodged for the development of the Wells Quay and the erection of a stone wall extending the length of the Quay and beyond it to the East End of the channel. This plan contained details of the existing property to be demolished along the side of the Quay including the premises erected by Parker. The premises and land were allocated the number (16) on the plan. The Schedule included with the plan referred to the premises consisting of *Coal houses with Granaries over and a small wharf, the property of Robert Parker, (The name should have been entered as Robinson Parker)*

1855 4th June The Harbour Commissioners sold the wharf to James Chapman Jnr. for £84

1859 11th February Conveyance of a wharf on the Quay at Wells by Mr James Chapman Jnr. to Mr Richard Parker for a sum of £120. *All that piece of ground or wharf formerly the property of Valentine Brett Dennis abutting on the Wells Channel north, the common Staithe to the south and east and upon another piece of ground or wharf formerly in the occupation of Joseph Springall Southgate and afterwards to of Richard Lord and now belonging to the said Richard Lord.*

1859 25th April £300 Mortgage at 4% interest taken by Michael Robinson Parker, Ship owner, and Samuel Waters of Little Walsingham, Gentleman, *All that Wharf or Quay situate in Wells, opposite a coal yard late of William Ransome, marked with the number 373 on the Award map, and also all the Granary and newly erected bonded warehouse coal house and buildings lately erected and built on the last described wharf or Quay by the said Michael Robinson Parker and now in the occupation of Richard Parker the under tenant..*

1867 25th May The property was conveyed by Mrs. Sarah Parker, the wife of Michael Robinson Parker, deceased, to their son Richard. Richard Parker was born in Wells in 1825, and after serving as a clerk in his father's business went into the trade himself. In the trade directory of 1853 Richard was described as a corn merchant with his business on the Quay, and in later editions as a Corn, Seed, and Cake merchant on the Quayside. He died in **May 1868** aged only 42.

1874 15th August Samuel Waters died

1875 March 11th The outstanding mortgage of £300 taken in 1859 was repaid by the trustees of Richard Parker deceased, to John Walters farmer of Burnham Overy and executor of Samuel Waters estate.

1889 12th October Conveyance from Messrs. Alfred Kendall and James Philip Green the trustees of the late Richard Parker's estate, to Mrs. Anne Smith



All that wharf or Quay situate in Wells next the sea aforesaid opposite to a coal house late of William Ransome containing by measure five perches more or less and marked with the number 373 on the Map or Plan of the Award, bounded by the Harbour of Wells aforesaid towards the north, east and west and by the Highway called the Burnham Road towards the South And also that Granary and bonded warehouse, coalhouses and buildings erected on the last described Wharf or Quay which said premises are now in the occupation of the said Anne Smith.



Building of the east end of the Quay wall c 1930. This piece of ground on which the warehouse stood is that allocated number (373) in the Award.

Mike Welland

References - Bundle of deeds and documents held at N.R.O. Reference BR320/2

Wells – an agricultural town (1)

Wells could be described as a post-industrial town. Comparing it with Holt, as some folk did in the 1840s, it lacked its wide streets and grand houses. Its own large houses were fewer and dated from a hundred years earlier. Compared with Cromer and Hunstanton, its sea front lacked a promenade and ready access to the sea which made them into seaside resorts. Instead, it had a quayside fronted by industrial buildings; even after the collapse of the malting industry in 1929 it continued with grain merchants and, post-war, the rise of the coastal trade; vessels bringing in animal feed and fertiliser. The flour mill by the railway station operated until 1981.

But there is another story entirely, which the above account gives a clue to. Because it predates folk memory, it is often forgotten. Wells was an agricultural town. It did not have a market. It had lost it long ago and the short-term revival in the 1880s would not last. Norwich and Fakenham were the biggest agricultural markets. They survived even until 1960. Its industries were, however, agriculturally related. The Lime Works supplied the means of sweetening the soil. Eastern Counties Farmers' Cooperative filled the gap left by the maltings in acting as sellers of cereals and providers of both seed and animal feed up until 1970. The coasters that came across the North Sea were supplying the farms with chemical fertiliser and soya to feed their livestock. There had been saddlers and harness makers in the town, partly of course because horses were the main means of haulage until the arrival of petrol driven vehicles but also to haul ploughs, harrows, and reaper binders.

But the reason why these industries existed was to serve the local farms whose stories are important nationally as well as locally. Recently I have obtained access to the farm records of the three major farms around Wells, Manor Farm, Mill Farm and New Farm. I knew something of the long-ago history but little of the twentieth century. What follows gives some of the background and then offers some initial information about one of these, Manor Farm. I hope to provide a fuller picture over the next few months.

The land round Wells was owned by Holkham Estates, acquired over a long period by the Coke family of whom the first earl of the present creation was the most energetic, picking up pieces of land following the 1813 enclosures. Most of it was tenanted and there was some degree of fluidity as to who farmed particular fields.

It was also volatile in terms of its employment relations. The country was heavily agricultural in the nineteenth century, Norfolk in particular, but the terms of employment were insecure. The century saw the casualisation of employment and the related rise of trade unionism. At one time farm workers would be accommodated on the farm; some would eat at the farmhouse kitchen table. That had all changed and from the end of the harvest to the spring planting men would have little employment. Even when they were in work, wages were low, about half the wage of a Norwich industrial worker and strikes became endemic. Surprisingly, the headquarters of the National Agricultural Union was in Fakenham. Poor employment relations were worsened by the various crises afflicting the industry. Mechanisation, the introduction of the threshing machine, had produced the riots of the 1830s. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw one agricultural

crisis after another. The advent of cheap imports of wheat, from Canada mostly, began in the 1870s and while barley was less affected than wheat, the main import, many men were laid off; some left and emigrated to the colonies. The balance of power was briefly altered by the Great War which took men from the land in huge numbers so reducing the harvest. This inevitably played into the hands of the union and led to higher wages but the reductions that followed the war led to industrial action in which 10,000 went out on strike, 900 of them in north Norfolk alone.

It is a story that needs telling in more detail on another occasion. For the moment I want to concentrate on one of the three major farms in the town, Manor Farm.

Ernest Flint had acquired the tenancy of Manor Farm from Holkham in 1911. It could be described as a mixed farm though it was, from early days, a dairy farm. He grew wheat, barley, beans and beet and, at various times brassicas and carrots. He had poultry, hens, and ducks. He grew cabbages, broccoli, sprouts and lettuce for local consumption. From time to time he bought in piglets to fatten up for the market. During the war he even grew flax on contract with the government. Apparently, it was used for aircraft fuselages, but dairying was his major output.

During the locust years between the wars, his was a success story. After 1921 the resumption of imports from overseas was accompanied by the collapse of land prices and sales on a scale never seen before. The greater gentry across the land, those who owned less than 10,000 acres sold out in considerable numbers often to their tenants. At Holkham by 1932 the level of arrears was 8.5%; at nearby Blickling it was 29%. Barclays Bank

in Norwich was, by that time, carrying debts of £3.5 million. Land fell out of cultivation. Labour costs were cut by mechanisation undertaken by those who could afford it. Most farms, while they still had horses, now had a tractor. But dairy farming was one means of recouping the losses incurred as a result of low prices.

Dairying was labour intensive. Until 1942 Flint's herd of fifty plus milkers were milked by hand. Twice a day, the cattle were walked down Church Street to the dairy at Manor Farm. Later the dairy would be moved down the dry road. His workforce, by no means representative, nevertheless shows an increase over the years. In 1933 his payroll numbered twenty-five. In 1939, with increased acreage, it had risen to thirty-six not including 'sundry workers'. It would rise to fifty-five by 1947, including ten Italian POWs. By this time, he had acquired a milking machine and a bottling plant.

Demand for milk was consistent and, with limited refrigeration was bound to be a home product but productivity was a vital factor too. Friesian cattle, well known for their high milk yield had been introduced into the country and in 1930 Flint went over to them. The effect was to double his milk yield and he took the British Friesian Society's trophy three years running from 1932 to 1934 thus winning it outright.

Sugar beet, which he grew in some quantity proved to be a useful adjunct. The introduction of a government subsidy on the crop in 1932 was a welcome break. As one Norfolk farmer said, sugar beet provided the income to buy cattle; cattle provided the manure to fertilise the fields. The Norfolk dairy herd doubled between the wars. The same year the creation of the Milk Marketing Board raised standards of production as well as

providing a regular income, the monthly milk cheque. Flint added to his income from the sale of liquid milk, which went down to North Elmham by train to be treated, and by establishing an ice cream parlour in the town which flourished until the war came. As for the sugar beet, the improved prosperity of Wells came to the notice of the *Times* newspaper in 1933 when a contract with British Sugar Corporation resulted in the beet being taken to Selby by ship from the Quay. 'Return to Prosperity' was the headline against a picture of the Quay with piles of beet lying on it waiting to be loaded. Alas, the contract, for three years, was not renewed and representations by the town council were not successful. With war, however, came the loss of trade with the continent but also the loss of shipping across the Atlantic and the need to increase home production. Flint obtained contracts to supply the Corporation's plants at Peterborough, Kings Lynn and Wissington but this time, the beet went by rail.

Post-war, and within living memory, the change was dramatic. By 1971 Manor Farm had five employees and that year gave up milking. Flint himself died in 1957 and his widow sold off his two hundred Friesians in 1962. In the years that followed it became a purely arable farm, growing wheat, winter barley, spring barley and sugar beet. Across the county, the number of dairy cattle fell from 44,000 in 1945 to 16,000 in 2010.

Among the many changes in those years was the means of motive power. Flint acquired his first tractor in 1930; a combine harvester arrived in a packing case from Canada in 1942. Before that everything was driven by horses. Across the country in 1939 there were 600,000 horses in agriculture and 56,000 tractors. Those who bought tractors might use them for ploughing but for other purposes, harrowing, drilling, reaping

and so on they might use horses. In 1940 Flint had thirteen horses. By the 1950s he would have none.

The progress of mechanisation is visible for all to see who drive down the lanes hereabouts, huge specialist machines for every kind of product. The heads of combine harvesters are now massively wide. It is hard to think that until the 1960s cattle were driven twice a day down Burnt Street to be milked. Nothing has been said about sheep, which Flint did not keep, but John Temple at New Farm did. As late as the 1980s his shepherd Percy Phillips would drive fifty and more sheep up Standard Road accompanied by his dog and, the only concession to modernity, followed by a Land Rover. Looking at the alpacas on Ramm's marsh the casual visitor might not guess that post-war Arthur Ramm the butcher kept animals he had bought in ready for slaughter. We still have one abattoir in town; there used to be several. No one goes gleaning any more to feed their hens; some may not know what the word means. It seemed a good idea to tell those who think that Wells has not changed much that, in this as in many other respects, it is dramatically different from how it was.

Sources: Alun Howkins, the Death of Rural Britain (Routledge 2003); Manor Farm Records; DEFRA Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK 2021

Roger Arguile

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)

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

NB – A second edition of The History of the Inns and Public Houses of Wells is now being written (First edition out of print) will contain new pubs and new information – Expected publication Spring 2023

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