

# Wells Local History Group Newsletter

Free to members  
£3.50 to  
Non-members



*Mike Page 2019*

*Talks Programme - September to December*

*The Witch of Wells*

*Wells Heritage Harbour*

*Swing Riots update*

*Where did we come from - after the ice?*

*Dorothy Baily*

*The Nursery, Theatre Road*

## Number 84 – Autumn 2023

Following the Annual General Meeting in May, our committee has now reduced to just four:

Steve Adcock – Speaker Finder

Peter Jefferys – Chairman, Archive Room & Publications

Keith Leesmith – Secretary, Treasurer & Newsletter Editor

Peter Thatcher – Social Media Correspondent

As you can see, we may well have too many eggs in our baskets and are getting increasingly desperate for some help! None of us are immortal, and here in Wells we now have double-decker buses (again) which could be carelessly stepped under.

We have over a hundred memberships and a quarter of those are couples. Surely there are people somewhere that could help. It doesn't matter whether you are in a distant part of England, or in Scotland, Wales or maybe just around the corner.

Do you have the skills to build a website? Do you have the experience to put our newsletters together? (for instance). Neither of these jobs require residency in Wells, as long as the participant has a computer and the ability to use it.

Please offer your help if you can. You don't have to have any special knowledge in Wells history, just a willingness to help, and a few hours a year available.

We are looking at improving the sound quality of the Kiln Room at the Maltings, following the generous offer from Susan Wagstaff. Unfortunately, the cost of improvements will be considerably more than we first thought, but we are still working on a suitable "fix".

We are also looking at possible alternatives to Zoom. Sometimes this works admirably, and members from all over the country can enjoy our talks. Other times, for various reasons, the system breaks down. We would like to include non-local members if we can and are now looking at an alternative solution.

**Keith Leesmith** – [keithnextthesea@gmail.com](mailto:keithnextthesea@gmail.com)

Our programme for the first half of the season is as follows:

September 6<sup>th</sup> @ 7.30pm:

**‘King’s Lynn to Wells’ – Philip West** - An illustrated talk of a journey along the Norfolk coast, ending in Wells and a look at one of its early photographers, Albert Mahomet. Local historian Phil is an old friend of the Group and first spoke at one of our meetings in 2005. A collector of local photographs and scenes, he has a wealth of knowledge to share about the North Norfolk area.

October 4<sup>th</sup> @ 7.30pm:

**‘A Dynasty of Local Doctors’ – Professor Stephen Gillam**

– A history of general practice in eight generations. Stephen Gillam is a semi-retired GP and public health specialist who has written extensively in both fields. He is the author of *‘Of Patient Bearing – A History of General Practice in Eight Generations’* and winner of the RCGP and Society of Apothecaries Rose Prize in the history of British General Practice. He comes from a line of Norfolk apothecaries and general practitioners dating back eight generations to 1770.

November 1<sup>st</sup> @ 2.30pm:

**‘Norfolk Suffragettes & Suffragists’ – Debbie Bradley**

A professional genealogist and speaker for over 10 years with a Postgraduate Certificate from the University of Strathclyde, Debbie looks at the Suffragette and Suffragists movements and how they started and introduces some of the people involved in the first groups. She explains how you can research your suffragette ancestors and provides information about the prominent ladies of Norfolk who campaigned to obtain the Vote for Women.

December 6<sup>th</sup> @ 2.30pm:

**‘The Red Barn Murder’ – Sue Parry**

In 1827, the Red Barn Murder was the shooting dead of a young woman, Maria Marten, by her lover, William Corder, at the Red Barn, a local landmark in Polstead, Suffolk.

Sue Parry is a member of the Fakenham Society and The True Crime Group of the North Norfolk U3A and returns this season to lead us through the details of the case and the subsequent trial in 1828. A member also of the Whitechapel Society, Sue spoke last season about The Trial of the Detectives, a Metropolitan Police corruption scandal of 1877, and reveals not just the London connection to the Red Barn murder case but to Norfolk as well.

## The Witch of Wells

Have you heard  
of Peter Taylor  
the  
Whissonsett  
poisoner?

Peter was  
publicly hanged  
at Norwich  
Castle in 1836,  
as an  
accomplice to  
the poisoning of  
several people  
in Burnham  
Westgate, now  
Burnham  
Market. His

story has more than one plot twist, along with a good dose of  
lust, betrayal, and witchcraft, which captivated readers of the  
sensationalist press of the time. The EDP article here gives  
much of the lurid tale, which I have tried to condense down to  
the bare essentials.



Peter was born in 1791 in Whissonsett. His family had been in  
the village since at least 1705 and were boot and shoe makers.  
They lived in the Shoemaker Cottages, opposite the Village  
Hall. Peter learnt the family trade from his father Thomas, and  
then left to work in Burnham Westgate, where he met and  
married his wife Mary in 1815.

Peter and his wife Mary lived in one of a run of three cottages,  
with neighbours Kate and Bob Frary in one, and James and  
Frances (Fanny) Billing in the other. Things rapidly got very  
'Eastenders', with Peter having an affair with Fanny, and Kate

having affairs with just about anyone. Kate then decided she had had enough of her husband Bob and taking advice from a witch in Wells embarked on poisoning him with arsenic. Bob subsequently died, along with a young girl being babysat by Kate who was given the poison by accident. It was also clear at this point that Peter and Fanny were aware of what was going on and plotted to kill their spouses too. Peter's wife Mary was first, but her death aroused suspicions in the area, especially as Fanny had been seen putting some powder in Mary's gruel. Fanny's husband James, who was well aware of her affair with Peter was thankfully vigilant, and despite ingesting some poison managed to avoid a fatal dose.

The authorities now stepped in, and an autopsy of Mary's stomach contents revealed the cause of death. Bob Frary was exhumed, and arsenic found in his body also. Kate, Fanny, and Peter were arrested, along with Hannah Shorten the witch from Wells. Peter and Hannah were released due to lack of evidence, but Kate and Fanny were tried, found guilty, and hanged on Castle Hill in Norwich, August of 1835.

Peter attended the women's execution and was overheard to be greatly satisfied by it, which enraged the mob, and he was chased away, eventually taking refuge back in Whissonsett. All this excitement brought forward further witnesses against Peter, so he was re-arrested at his bolthole in Whissonsett and sent to trial. He was found guilty, and followed his accomplices to the gallows in April 1836, aged 44.

Death masks of Kate Frary and Fanny Billing can be seen at Norwich Castle Museum, and perhaps one of the unnamed masks they hold is the infamous Peter Taylor.

**Supplied by Peter Thatcher** – gleaned from an article by Steve Lancaster of the Whissonsett Facebook Group

## Wells Heritage Harbour

During May this year, new signs were placed at the entrances to the town, proclaiming that the Port of Wells has been declared a **Heritage Harbour**. The following article by Mike Welland gives some background to the 360 years between the first Wells Harbour Act and now.

### Improvements to Wells Quay and Harbour over the centuries

Studies of historical documents reveal that the port of Wells has always experienced financial problems, and for this reason numerous Acts have been put into place over several centuries to try and remedy or improve the situation. All of them seem to have been unsuccessful.

In 1663 during the reign of Charles 11 there was an Act passed with the title **“An Act for repairing and better preserving the Quay of the port of Wells in the County of Norfolk.”** This Act set out the way duties were to be levied in an attempt to improve the situation, but despite this, and the voluntary subscriptions made by merchants and ship owners in the town, there were still large sums outstanding in operating the port, and the debt was said to be considerable. By the mid 1700s we read in part that **“the harbour and Quay must in a short time fall into decay unless some further and more effectual provision is made by Parliament for the preservation thereof.”** The answer that was devised was set out in a further Act in 1769, during the ninth year of the reign of George 111. The name to the Act was virtually the same as that of 1663.

The new act began by setting out the importance of the port to the inhabitants of the town and to the County of Norfolk and to

the Kingdom in general. It stipulated the harbour should be cleared and deepened and the Quay repaired, improved, and maintained, and that the existing debt should be discharged. The act then went on to stipulate how future revenue was to be raised in order to rectify the situation in the port. Immediately the act was passed every Master or person having command of any ship or vessel belonging to the town of Wells which loaded or unloaded at the town was to pay rates of duty that were then set down. **“For every Chaldron of Coals or Cinders, for every Last of wheat, rye, barley, malt or other grain, and for every Wey or Forty Bushels of salt, and every ton of other goods or merchandise whatsoever that shall be laden or unladen in the harbour of Wells, the sum of Six Pence respectively shall be paid.”** For Masters or Commanders of ships not belonging to the town of Wells the duty would increase from sixpence to one shilling for the same goods and weight.

All merchants or other persons importing or exporting goods into Wells harbour, would respectively pay the ships master or commander of the vessel involved in transporting their cargo half of the amounts involved, subject to a receipt being provided.

There was an additional duty payable by masters of vessels arriving or leaving the port empty and making fast by rope to any mooring posts in the Harbour. This duty was to be paid based on the capacity of the vessel concerned. The minimum capacity weight allowed was ten tons and for every ton over that capacity an amount of six pence was charged. There was a proviso in the Act in that payment for these empty vessels was to be demanded and paid once every year and not for every sailing.

The Act appointed commissioners to administer the Act and these were drawn from Ships Masters and Merchants of the town. The commissioners appointed were gentlemen of the area, merchants, men of the church such as the minister, and prominent landowners. Five or more of the Commissioners were

to meet at the *Sign of the Fleece* on the first Wednesday in January 1769, and afterwards meet there, or at any other place in Wells as should the commissioners see and decide fit and convenient. There was a condition that only one member of a company or partnership could attend and act as a commissioner at the same time. Should any of the commissioners die or resign from their positions the remaining commissioners, or the majority of them, could elect another person to take the vacant place.

The Commissioners at their meetings were authorised and required to nominate ten of the most substantial inhabitants or merchants of the town to be joined with Sir John Turner Baronet, Wenman Coke, Henry Lee Warner and George Chad, Esquires, as Commissioners and Trustees. At subsequent elections held from and when required replacement Commissioners and Trustees could be appointed. Any five or more could meet and **“direct from time to time all Matters and Things and cause the same to be done and executed as by them shall be thought required or necessary in improving and preserving the said harbour and Quay of Wells, and for other the purposes herein before mentioned.”**

All rates and duties charged and levied by the Act were to be paid at the time and place that the Commissioners decided. The Act laid down that no ship could leave the port or be cleared at the Custom House until the Master or any person having command of a ship produced a certificate from the Collector or Receiver that all duties had been paid. The Act specified that the certificates must be issued without fee or reward. If any Custom Collector, Surveyor or other person grant clearance to a ship before the duties are collected, for every offence the person responsible “forfeit and pay the sum of twenty pounds, to be recovered by action of debt in any of His Majesty’s Court at Westminster with Double Costs of Suit.” Where a fine was applied, one half of the amount collected would be paid to the



person giving information of an offence for their own use. The other half of the amount of the fine being paid to the Commissioners, the money then going towards improving and preserving the harbour and Quay.

The new Act made it lawful for the commissioners, or the majority of them, to make new byelaws, rules, orders, or regulations which were necessary for the purpose of the Act, and for them to hire workmen and craftsmen for improving and maintaining the harbour. The commissioners were also to purchase timber, stones and other material required for work to be undertaken. The Act allowed commissioners to borrow money not exceeding £1500, if needed, to carry out work, but there were specific instructions in the Act as to how these loans were to be accounted for.

It was laid down in the Act that one or more books of accounts be kept. All monies that were received or borrowed, or advanced against credit, and all amounts spent by the commissioners for any purposes were to be entered in these books with the date of each entry. The books were to be available to all commissioners for inspection at all times. The collector or receiver when appointed must also keep books containing receipts for all income and payments made under the authority of the Act.

The Act set out how the tonnage of ships or vessels entering the port of Wells were to be arrived at., together with the weight of their cargo. To do this it was lawful for the Collector or Receiver to board any ship in order to take the measure of the cargo. If the Master or Commander of the ship refused to allow the officer to take dimensions of the ship and its cargo, that ship or vessel was to be seized and detained. If after seizure the vessel was not redeemed within ten days, the officer making the seizure was empowered and to sell so much of the Tackle belonging to the said ship or vessel as shall be sufficient to

answer the Duties payable by this Act. If after the sale there was a surplus of money arising this surplus was to be returned to the owner or master of the ship, but only if demanded by them.

A further duty of the newly appointed harbour commissioners was to appoint a person to look after and take care of all buoys and beacons belonging to the harbour. The person appointed was authorised to require those having command of the ships entering or being within the port where they should moor or lie in the harbour. If any master or commander ignore their mooring instructions, they would pay a penalty of Forty Shillings. After the passing of the Act should any person whatsoever throw or empty any ballast into the harbour other than at the place ordered and instructed by the person to be appointed, or should they throw or empty any ballast, dust, ashes, stones, or any other rubbish into any part of the Channel or undertake any act of annoyance to by that person, a fine of Forty Shillings for every offence would be payable.

It would be forbidden, for any ship or vessel coming to the Quay or other landing place to deliver or load their cargoes, to light any fires due to the closeness of the houses in the town. It was stated in the Act **“that if a fire should happen, not only such ships and vessels, but also the Town would be in great danger of being destroyed”**. The regulation regarding the lighting of fires would apply to all ships making or permitting any fire to be lit for heating pitch, tar, resin, or brimstone, lying between the north end of the landing place, commonly called The Stone, and the East End of the Quay bounded by the Blacksmiths Shop of William Millington. For every fire seen or found on board a vessel, the Master or other persons would be fined an amount of Ten Shillings.

In the case of perpetrators of any of the offences detailed in the Act being financially unable to meet the fines, or not having sufficient goods or chattels to be seized to cover the amounts

outstanding together with the charges, the Justice of the Peace was to send the offender to a house of correction for a period of three months unless the outstanding amount be paid.

The next Act introduced for Wells harbour improvement was dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1835, the fifteenth year of the reign of King William IV. This Act was of far greater length than that of 1769 but made few changes from the earlier Act. As was typical of that period ten or more words were used when one would have sufficed, and to make sense of many of the clauses was like wading through treacle.

In an attempt to improve the situation, the Act of 1769 was repealed by Parliament and this new Act would grant new powers and provisions in lieu of the earlier Act. All former debts would stand, and all bonds, agreements and mortgages outstanding would have to be settled from duties and charges amended by the new Act. All Collectors, Surveyors, Harbour Master, and other Officers previously appointed would retain the positions until their deaths, resignations, or replacement by the Commissioners. The exception was the Treasurer.

Under the new Act previous holders of the offices of Clerk and Treasurer could not be reappointed, neither could any person connected to them such as those in their employ or partners in business. If it was found that any of these persons occupied those positions in future, they were to pay a sum of one hundred pounds in any of His Majesty's Courts at Westminster. All persons who had been employed under the previous Act who had received rates or duties or other money, or who had in their possession any **“Craft, Materials, Tools, Money, Books, Accounts, Receipts, papers, Writings or other things”** had to account for them and deliver them to the Commissioners. All books of proceedings that had been kept by the Commissioners, their treasurer and collectors would be

admitted as evidence in all future Court hearings, and by all Judges.

The Commissioners were then individually named in the Act. Those listed as were in fact a Minister of the Church, and the remainder merchants of the town, boat builders solicitors or other prominent members of the community. It was the Commissioners who were responsible for applying the new Act. They were empowered to appoint additional commissioners but no more than two at any one time.

Before being appointed the Act specified an oath that was to be taken and sworn by each of the Commissioners. If a Quaker was appointed the words "so help me God" could be omitted. If any person not taking the Oath should act as a Commissioner a penalty of £50 would be levied for each offence, unless they could prove that the Oath had been taken.

The Commissioners were to meet at the *Crown Inn* or any other convenient house in the Parish of Wells, on the third Monday after the passing of the Act between ten in the morning and five in the afternoon. Thereafter to meet at a place to be appointed providing at the meeting a sufficient number of Commissioners be present, two absentees were cause for an adjournment, however, a meeting could go ahead in there were five or more Commissioners in attendance. If the Commissioners present went ahead with the meeting in the absence of two members another meeting could be called by placing a notice in the Customs House at least ten days before such a meeting, or in any other conspicuous place in the town. A notice was also to be placed in a Norfolk newspaper. At each meeting held one of the Commissioners should preside and be called a Chairman. The Chairman would be allowed to vote, and in the event of a tied vote he would have a decisive or casting vote.

At least two half yearly meetings should be called on the first Wednesday in January and the first Wednesday in July at which the Commissioners should call before them the treasurer, collector of duties, the receiver and any other persons employed, in order to audit and examine the accounts. A full account in writing was to be drawn up of all sums of money collected, received, and disbursed and not previously accounted for. At this meeting the Commissioners were empowered to dismiss or replace any of these employees. In addition, the Commissioners were from time to time to *“contract with any Person or Persons, making or doing any Work which the said Commissioners may think necessary in and about the improving, repairing, or cleansing the Quay and Harbour.*

Commissioners had the right to elect a Treasurer, Collector of Duties, Surveyor, Harbour Master, and any other officers thought necessary, and had the right to replace them if they were to die, decline in their duties or become incapable of carrying out their work. It was up to the Commissioners to meet salaries of employees from revenue received under the terms of this Act. The officers appointed were responsible for providing written records and accounts for all monies received and how much had been paid out for any purpose. Vouchers were to be given to the Commissioners by all appointed officers supporting all receipts and payments. If these were not provided within fourteen days a written notice was required to be sent to that officers last place of abode demanding the return of all books and documentation held by him.

Following the passing of the Act of 1835 the Harbour Commissioners continued to ignore their responsibilities as was found when a **Royal Tidal Harbour Commissioners Court** was held at the Crown Hotel only ten years later. Joseph Southgate, clerk, could or would not produce any records of the way money had been received or spent. Southgate told the Court that money had been paid out without any professional

advice being obtained or contracts drawn. When the court president asked Southgate where the missing thousands of pounds had gone, he replied that they had “gone away”.

The findings of the President of the Court, after hearing of the total mismanagement of the Clerk and Harbour Commissioners of Wells, was that they should all be brought up before the Court of the Exchequer. The action of clerk and the Harbour Commissioners were clearly illegal and must cease immediately. The action of Joseph Southgate acting as clerk, treasurer, superintendent of steam boats, and harbour commissioner all at the same time must stop.

### **Mike Welland**



The above article ends with the Act of 1835, but in fact there was an even more significant piece of legislation passed later – *The Wells Harbour and Quay Act of 1844*.

That is a story for another occasion! - Ed

## Update on Swing Riots in Burnham Overy

Lynn Sharpe, a WLHG member and Family History expert, has provided information about a relative from Burnham Thorpe who was one of the Swing Rioters arrested in Burnham Overy by Thomas Coke on 29 November 1830. Joshua Kemp (b1803) was a younger brother of Lynn's great-great-grandfather. He was a literate farm worker who was also part-time parish clerk for Burnham Thorpe and by 1830 was married with three children. She retrieved this account of Kemp's trial alongside two other Burnham rioters in January 1831 from the *Norwich Mercury*:

*'Joshua Kemp, George Painter, and James Smith were charged on the oath of James High, farmer, with having on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of November last riotously and tumultuously destroyed a threshing machine, his property. The evidence stated that on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of November, between 11 and 12 a clock the rioters – to number about 50 persons – came to his house and said they came to break machines, which prevented an honest man's day of work. The men had hammers.'*

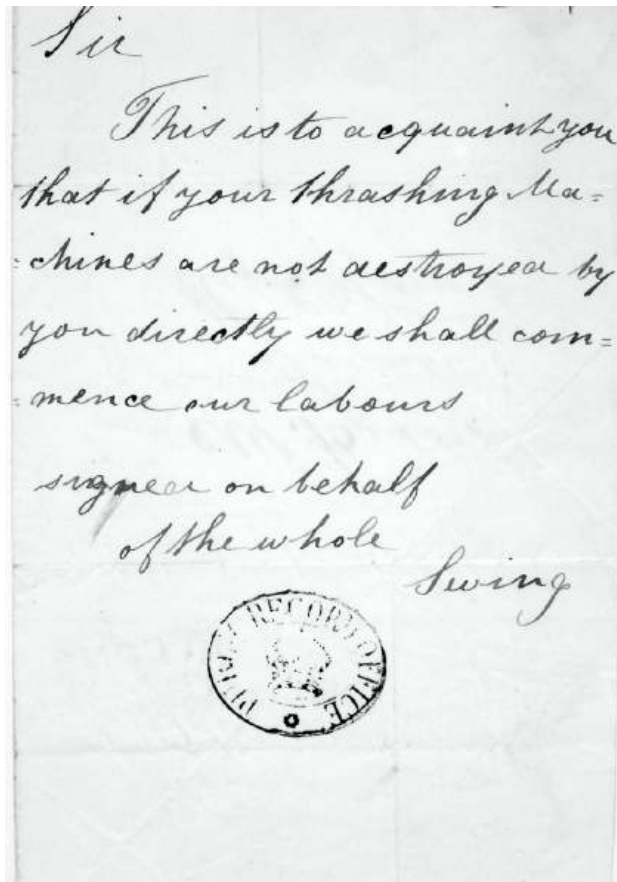
*'Smith called out for the mob to break the machine, saying "It will be used again next week." Painter and Kemp struck it with a sledge hammer and broke it: that is the horse wheel only, which could cost three to five shillings to put to repair.'*

All three were found guilty. Painter was sentenced to three months imprisonment, James Smith received nine months and Joshua Kemp to six months. His six months of imprisonment were served at Swaffham Bridewell, the last week was to be served in solitary confinement.

## Coke's bloodhounds

Coke purchased his two bloodhounds from a breeder in Oxfordshire, less than six weeks after the Burnham Swing Riots. They cost him £14, equivalent to 8 months of a farm workers wage in 1831. The dogs were so precious they travelled from Oxfordshire to Holkham via London by carriage in a locked cage with metal collars marked TWC (Coke's initials)!

**Peter Jefferys + many thanks to Lynn Sharpe**





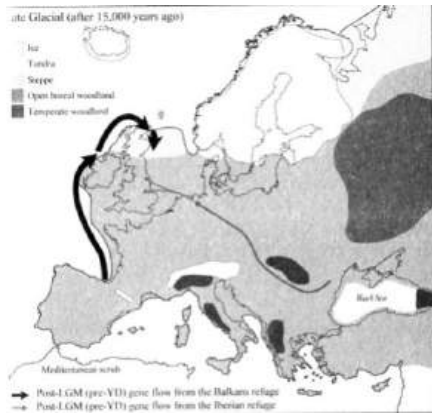
## **Where did we come from – after the ice?**

Where did we come from? I wrote some time ago about the coming of the Anglo-Saxons to this part of the world derived from place names such as the Burnhams and the Romans before them who had a fort at Brancaster. The conventional belief is that the Anglo-Saxons invaded with great slaughter, displacing the local inhabitants, the Celts, and causing them to retreat westwards to Wales. St. Gildas, a sixth century monk wrote a grim account of the invasion. Other than his early account the lack of battle sites, war graves and other signs of violence put his account in question. The battle of Baden Hill, whose locality and date cannot be identified, in which the British are said to have beaten off the Saxons, is one of the few pieces of evidence adduced. The place names cannot be denied; the use of English, a Germanic language, is plain; but the rest of the evidence is a bit thin.

Are we Saxons or not? The scientific evidence puts it in question. If the genetic evidence is anything to go by, we are neither Celts nor Anglo-Saxons but something else entirely.

If we go back not quite to the beginning, 20,000 years ago no one lived here. No one at all. That was because it was the height or depth if you will of the last ice age, the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM) which lasted from between 22,000 and 17,000 years ago. (So, I read. I am no specialist, but it is generally agreed to be so.) Scotland and northern England were covered with ice. Norfolk along with southern England and Wales was polar desert. Those who lived here, or their descendants retreated as far south as southern France and Northern Spain, the Basque region, and the Balkans to find somewhere to live sustainably. Whoever lived in Britain before the Ice Age left a blank sheet which remained for several thousand years, leaving behind only bones and a few tools.

The most certain signs of re-occupation after the ice began to melt, apparently come from Derbyshire, the Creswell Crags, dated about 15,000 years ago, where pictures of a stag, bison, and a bear can be found on a cave ceiling. There is evidence of Creswell-like culture on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. Mean sea level was, apparently some ninety metres lower than the current mean sea level. Not much chance of a tidal surge. So, where did they come from and what happened to them? How can we know?

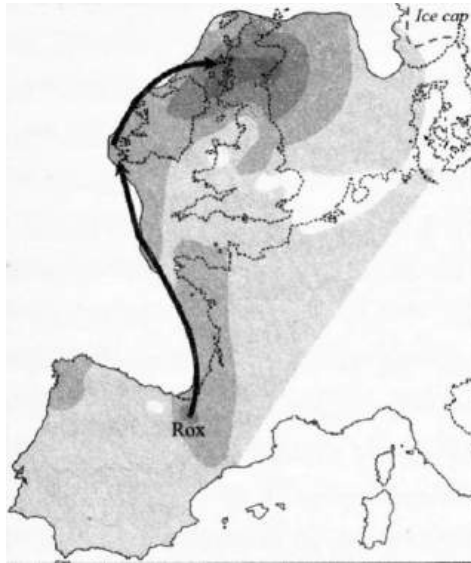


The answer to those questions gives a clue to the growing complexity of historical investigation. It has to do with DNA (as almost everything seems to these days). An idiot's guide (thus understandable to the person writing) is as follows. Human beings, like all living species, evolve; that is to say there are mutations – changes – in the cell structure that goes to make a human body. But the way that they mutate is not all the same. In particular, part of the cells of females called mitochondria, mutate at a steady rate, about one mutation every 1000 generations, passing exclusively via the female line but leaving evidence of earlier mutations. Where the modern populations of women in various places show a high proportion of a particular marker this may indicate their earlier presence. By noting places where this occurs, a route along which previous generations migrated can be determined. Likewise, part of the Y chromosome (which only males have) does not recombine with the female and again mutates at a steady rate though less reliably, again leaving evidence of the earlier stages. Since it is easy to take samples from modern individuals from mouth

swabs, the history of any individual's ancestors and the predominance of particular groupings can give a broad picture of population movements over as long a period as the last 20,000 years. (Fakenham was chosen as a town to be sampled in one study.) This is of course supplemented by archaeological finds including pottery, middens, and other artefacts. The scientific work on this has been huge and is still ongoing but what it seems to reveal for us is where the current population of Norfolk comes from and how and when they got here.

What does the genetic information show? It's pretty clear that we are all Africans. We left about 80,000 years ago. We arrived in Europe before the last Ice Age which was about 20,000 years ago when there was evidently a small human population in Britain, but which retreated as the ice advanced. The evidence, deduced from the preponderance of particular markers, still found in the likes of you and me, is that they found two major refuges, one in southern France and northern Spain and the other in the Ukraine and the Balkans.

It becomes possible to trace where they went in the centuries that followed. As the ice began to recede and tundra became grassland and eventually forest, people began to move north and west. From the results of the research described above it seems to be the case that the first of our ancestors, and the most common, returning to northern Europe and to Britain, came from the western refuge. From there they spread along the southern and western parts of the British Isles and into Scotland. So many of us are Basques! Apparently about 90% of all males in Ireland, Wales and Cornwall have gene markers which show their origin in the Basque refuge. And since there was no English Channel, they could simply have walked across from Brittany. They were hunter gatherers, following the food.



So where do Norfolk people come from? Are we all Anglo-Saxons who displaced these early peoples? If we are, the origins of the first settlers, thousands of years before are irrelevant.

The genetic material indicates that we are of course a mixture but there is evidence that the descendants of early settlers in East Anglia, the so-called

Mesolithic peoples, are still here. The evidence is that they came just before and just after the return of the ice, called the Younger Dryas event (YD), about 12,500 years ago. They probably walked along the coasts and along rivers like the Seine which at that time flowed into the Rhine. They were probably shell fishermen and beachcombers, testified to by the huge shell middens they left behind. Most of the early settlers came via the Spanish refuge; the later arrivals, fewer in number, from the east were part of the people from the Balkan refuge. Again rivers, particularly the Danube and the Rhine which then met the sea off Cornwall and Brittany, provided highways. They might walk across the grassy plain that became the North Sea. They took different directions. One study shows that we are closest, genetically speaking to the Belgians, not the Vikings or the Anglo-Saxons at all. The newcomers took different routes, some more northerly, some more southerly, and not, of course in a generation, but over hundreds of years. The land bridge between Britain and the continent finally only gave way about 8,000 years ago.

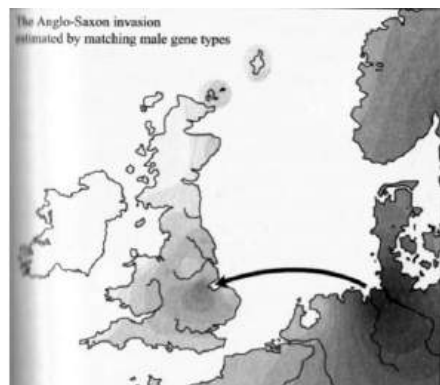
But if so, how can we distinguish the earlier arrivals from the later ones, the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings, and the Normans? Working backwards, the Normans who came with the intent to conquer were less than 5% and probably nearer to 1% of the current population of the country. The Vikings who came three hundred years earlier, intent on rape and pillage, contribute about 6% of the gene pool. As for the Anglo-Saxons, it was once believed that they too came with murderous intent and achieved a holocaust displacing the local people entirely who were either killed or fled. But the genetic evidence is that all but a few percent of male and female gene lines appear to have arrived before the historical period, i.e., long before the Saxons. If there were battles there were battles; if the Saxons became dominant culturally, as the Normans were to be later, their numbers seem to have been small. Overall, two thirds of the migrants over millennia came from the western refuge soon after deglaciation or at least during the middle stone age. Some came from the east. Most of us are not Saxons, Vikings, or Normans at all.

If the later arrivals changed the culture, so did the earlier ones. For arguably the biggest change to our civilisation came with the advent of farming. Farming seems to have developed about 10,000 years ago in the Near East, but it was slow to spread its practice. It had advantages but also disadvantages. In open grassland hunter-gathering worked well since animals could be seen at a distance. Meat was high protein. The development of projectiles like arrows will have helped. In the developing forests, once the technology of making axes had been acquired, animals could nevertheless be less easily seen and clearings while small could be made or expanded. Grain was less nutritious, but farming enabled the setting up of stable communities which could develop trade and improve technology. A mixed diet was also possible. Whatever the reasons, farming was slow to take hold in Britain where it was

first practised about 6,200 years ago. Again, the question is whether the farmers came in numbers and displaced the earlier people or whether their skills in clearing the forests, planting and harvesting were learned by the people already here, brought by small numbers. Britain was by that time heavily wooded for the most part though marshland seems to have formed in the east. The evidence is that the farmers came from different directions and that they added to rather than displacing the earlier populations. One gene line found in Norfolk is Scandinavian in origin, but again pre-Viking. A larger group originated in the Baltic, having come from the earlier refuges via Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein.

It seems as if our ancestors were a huge mixture: the earliest arrivals after the Ice Age who walked here; their successors who came some of them from around the Basque country, and a smaller number from the Balkans via western Europe, and then the Neolithic farmers who came likewise from several directions – Scandinavia, the Netherlands, but also from the Mediterranean. The indications are that the earlier settlers, the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic period constitute the majority and that the pattern of migration, whether hostile or through trade, has been such that the incomers were always a minority.

So, was there no appreciable number of Anglo-Saxons in Norfolk, in spite of the places names ending in 'ham' or 'ton'? How do we explain that and the growth of a Germanic English language? First, there were more Saxons in North Norfolk than elsewhere if the genetic evidence is anything to go by. It tells us that between



9% and 15% of us have the genetic markers which correspond with those of Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. Norfolk has more Anglo-Saxons in it than places further west. We cannot discount their arrival in numbers and, it is suggested, over a period of time. Their cultural significance suggests a dominant culture. There may have been battles; Norfolk folk have always been somewhat resentful of incomers – and still are but the evidence remains that some part of us, the biggest part, has been here for more than 8,000 years.

On the issue of language, genetics don't help but analysis of word change does. Overall, it seems, Old English owes something to an ancestral Common German lexicon spoken somewhere 'before 350 AD and probably after 3600 BC'. So not Anglo-Saxon then?

One final piece of puzzlement. The earliest settlers walked here; if they had to cross water, it would be rivers that they would cross. In some cases, they could travel downstream, down the Rhine for instance. Crossing a river is not the same as crossing a sea. After the failure of the land bridge between Norfolk and Holland in or about 8,000 ago, they would have to cross the North Sea. The Scandinavian migrants would travel much greater distances. We know little about boats during this period. The Ferriby boats found in the Humber estuary, the last of them in 1963 can be dated to about 4,000 years ago which is much later. It simply must be the case that those migrants to this country who came after Britain became an island were sailors. We know that the Romans and their successors had command of marine technology. It appears that the origins of boat building goes back way beyond what archaeology has yet revealed.

## **Roger Arguile**

*[Information largely derived from The Origins of the British by Stephen Oppenheimer (Constable 2007)]*

## DOROTHY BAILEY

We are sorry to announce the passing of Dorothy Monica Bailey who was a member of the group for many years.

Dorothy was born in Croydon but came to Wells as a baby with her parents. She did once write to the group asking if anybody could tell her anything about The Black Swan the barge which was their home in the harbour for some time. She was so pleased when eventually she was given a picture of it.



Dorothy went to school in Wells and the family—after living on the barge—also lived at Greenways Lodge at Holkham, then moving to Bungay, then coming back to Wells to The

Moorings at the East End and Westward House.

Her mother Grace was Sister at Wells hospital working with Matron Evelyn Rowley. They were both good friends of my aunt Edna and uncle Frank Ellender. Her father Harry was a painter and decorator in Wells. Joan Benton, her friend, was told by Grace that he was on the WW2 convoys at some stage and that together they had helped move rubble to assist people in London (where they met) during the Blitz. They were both keen sailors.



Dorothy was to follow in her mother's footsteps into nursing although she became a Midwife, moving to Norwich to train and staying to work there. At that time, she was not driving so her transport was her cycle. She did mention once in conversation, "Norwich is not flat!" Moving later to Belton she was to work at the James Paget Hospital as a Midwifery Sister until her retirement from there. However, she did not give up working altogether as after studies, she became an Aromatherapist, retiring only just recently.



Dorothy died on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, in the JPH after a short illness. Her funeral was well attended, and a fitting eulogy was written by her friend Rachel Price. Her ashes will be scattered at Holkham as was her wish.

She will be missed by all who knew her and remembered as a kind, supportive and thoughtful friend.

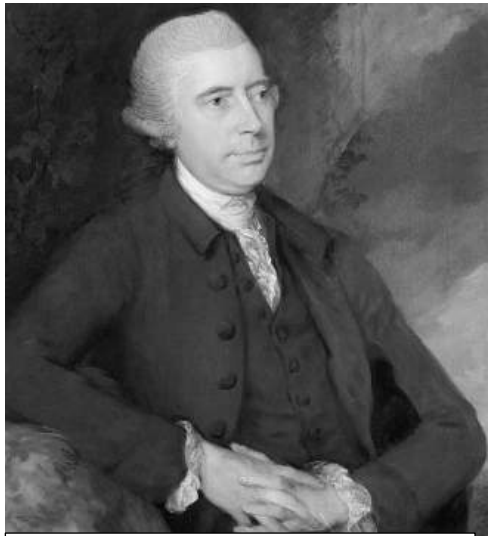
**Pauline Ellender**

**with assistance from Joan Benton and Rachel Price**

## **The Nursery, Theatre Road, Wells-next-the-Sea.**

The house and former market garden stands on part of a piece of arable land measuring almost ten acres owed by the Baronet, Sir George Chad. The land allocated number 83 in the Wells Enclosure Award was bounded by Mill Road to the south, Theatre Road to the north, Daniels Lane (now Park Road) to the west, and the property of Henry Girdlestone, now Bishop Ingle House, to the east.

The Chad family of Wells can be traced back to the earliest parish records of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Sir George was born in 1730, and among his many official positions was that of the Recorder of Kings Lynn. He had property throughout Norfolk including large acreages in Wells together with farmhouses and buildings including the Crown and Anchor Inn in Staithe Street.



*Sir George Chad, painted by  
Gainsborough*

Sir George's eldest daughter was Francis Mary, born in 1778. She married John Winn Tomlinson of Cley in 1803. Although we do not have a copy of Sir George Chad's will, it appears from later documentation that the land was inherited by Francis Mary. In her will of 5<sup>th</sup> February 1836, she named numerous executors, and it was those executors, described as tenants in common, that sold the land to Joshua Gales in November 1858. The price paid by Joshua Gales was £985. The land was not

fully described in the Abstract deed, but it extended south of what later became the nursery, as far as Mill Road.

When Joshua Gales died in 1886, he left both property to his daughter Elizabeth Gales. Following the details of *Bank House* was written *ALL THAT the Cottage Nursery Garden and premises adjoining thereto, in the occupation of George Soons unto my trustees heirs and assigns*. There were four trustees which included Elizabeth and Edwin Gales. The proviso was that all rents obtained from the letting of the house and the garden be paid to his other daughter, Ann Maria, by then a widow with three children, towards her maintenance.

I have been unable to establish the details of the George Soons referred to as the occupier. There were several in Norfolk at that time, none of them residing anywhere near Wells.

The cottage in the grounds of The Nursery Garden dates from about 1890. It was not built for Edwin Gales who was running the business and living on the Buttlands, but probably as business premises or for gardeners. Gales ran the nursery garden between about 1887 and 1891. By 1896 he was standing for the town council in Bath Somerset. After he left Wells the market garden seemed to have ceased. In the 1911

census the premises were referred to as Garden Cottage, occupied by the Buck family.



*The Nursery House in 2014 showing the east side extension. The entrance to the house was originally on the west side.*

Ann Maria Wyatt, Joseph Gales second daughter, died on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1921, and Elizabeth Bunting and Edwin Gales, the last surviving executors of Joshua Gales arranged to sell the property.

On October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1921, the premises were purchased by Mr. Sydney Belcher for £660. The property described as

*ALL THAT Messuage or Dwelling House, with the out-buildings, gardens and premises known as "The Nurseries" formerly in the occupation of George Soons and now of Frederick Woollorton, situated in Wells next the Sea aforesaid. Frederick Woollorton had a sweet shop and tea-room in the High Street, and what he did with the nursery ground he leased is not known.*

The description of the property being sold indicates that the area to the south of the nursery had been sold by Elizabeth Bunting and Edwin Gales between the time of Ann Marie's death and the sale of "The Nurseries" This description of the situation in the conveyance was as follows;- *Bounded by the Theatre Road towards the north, by land belonging to the said Elizabeth Bunting and recently sold to Edgar Ladas Smith towards the south, by property belonging to Herbert Edward Loynes towards the east, and by a roadway leading from Theatre Road to the land so sold to the said Edgar Ladas Smith towards the west.*

**The original entrance door to the west side of the house, which was bricked in when the extension, including a new door was added to the structure's east side**



On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1924, Sydney Belcher contracted to sell the property to Mr. & Mrs. James Vinnicombe for £1,220. Of this sum Belcher had to pay a sum of £600 to Barclays Bank in repayment of a loan, and a further £200 on a mortgage he had taken with Herbert Loynes in December 1923. In the conveyance Sydney Belcher was described as a market gardener of Wells, and James Vinnecombe a market gardener of Colkirk, Norfolk. At the time of the sale James Vinnecombe was occupying the property as a tenant of Sydney Belcher, and there is no record of the latter being an active market gardener. The 1911 census listed him, aged 15, living with his parents in Freeman Street.

The description of the property in the conveyance was for the dwelling-house, outbuildings, gardens, land, and premises, with Theatre Road to the north, land of Edgar Ladas Smith and Herbert Cawdron to the south, the property of Herbert Edward Loynes to the east, and a roadway belonging to Philip Joseph McBrian to the west.

James Vinnecombe ran his market garden nursery for twelve years. The trade directories of the time referred to him as a nurseryman, seedsman, and florist of Wells nurseries. He was born in Devon in 1865 so was almost 60 years old when he moved to Wells. The 1911 census of Colkirk described James as a domestic gardener and his wife Edith as a school teacher. James died in Wells in 1939, and Edith his wife in 1951 at the age of 87.

The nursery was sold by James Vinnecombe to Thomas Richard Speller in October 1936 for a price of £1,200. Speller was described as a Licensed Victualler and landlord of "The White Hart" at Shiplake-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. Speller, on the basis of his previous occupation looks to be an unusual purchaser until one looks at his background. Thomas was born in Woburn in 1894, the son of a Nurseryman. The family lived at

the “Rose Nursery” in Woburn and the age of sixteen Thomas was working as a nurseryman in his father’s gardens.

In 1937 the year following the purchase he is listed as; - **Speller, Thomas Richard**, nurseryman and seedsman, Wells nurseries, Theatre Road.

Thomas Speller remained at “The Nursery “until 1948, until in November of that year he sold the property to Leslie Lenthall Hull then living at Hall Cottage, Whatstandwell in Derbyshire., described as a nurseryman by occupation. The purchase price was £3000.

The property description showed differences from previous documentation in that the land to the south was owned by the Wells Urban District Council., the property to the east, now Bishop Ingle House was owned by Hubert Green, who had purchased it from the executors of Herbert Loynes the same year. In addition to the nursery premises the conveyance specified not only were the Glass House and other erections part of the transaction, but also “all the growing crops thereon.”



*The northwest corner of the back garden was the site of the glasshouses referred to in the deeds*

**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: Peter Jefferys – peter.jefferys@nhs.net – 01328 711980

### THE HISTORY OF THE INNS & PUBLIC HOUSES OF WELLS

The second edition of this popular book. Containing more pubs and more details. 184 pages - £12.00 – members £10.00

### 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

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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

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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  
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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**