

WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER No. 13 - DECEMBER 1999



*YOUR COMMITTEE WISH ALL READERS
A HAPPY CHRISTMAS
AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR*



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

By the end of November 119 people had joined or re-joined the Group for 1999/00, a sign of continuing confidence in our programme of activities. The three monthly meetings so far have been as usual very well attended, and we have enjoyed the professionalism of three very good speakers.

However, we of your Committee are concerned that, for most people, involvement seems to stop there. We have had virtually no new recruits to the existing Special Interest Groups (subjects and names and 'phone numbers of Leaders are on the back of your Membership Card). Phil Champion, our Vice Chairman, will be reporting the results of the Millennium Review study at our January meeting. Walk-Round Guides I and II are written and typed but unfortunately not yet in print. No. III we hope to prepare in the New Year, and new helpers will be especially welcome. Oral History recording is progressing, but it is a time consuming activity.

But there are many other topics which we could all be usefully pursuing. If you wish to volunteer for a group, or better still lead one, please get in touch with Mike Welland (01328 710080).

The suggestion was made last year that we might visit Blickling, out of season and with an expert guide. This has proved to be very difficult to arrange and we have abandoned the idea. Other possibilities for next year might be: the Stanford Battle Area, the Yarmouth Museums, Wisbech, Wymondham, Bury St. Edmunds, and, in Norwich, Dragon Hall and Strangers Hall which is at present

open to only conducted parties. Can we have reactions and/or other suggestions please?

See you in the New Year!

Brian Scott

EARLY WELLS POSTAL SERVICES

As early as the 15th century, the Royal Mail was carried by couriers who delivered on horseback to widely scattered addresses.

At that time also came the introduction of the rare Haste Post Haste: letters of extreme urgency authorised by top officials. These were carried non-stop to their destination and signed along the way at each Post House by the Postmaster or Innkeeper, with the time of arrival.

It was during the late 18th and into the 19th centuries that the Royal Mail and passenger coach and horse teams arrived on the scene. This brought about a great improvement in the state of roads in the British Isles, particularly on Royal Mail routes.

However it was not until c. 1820 that the first official Post Office opened in Wells, situated in High Street with Hannah Southgate as Postmistress, the first of a long line of the Southgate family to be in charge of Wells Post Offices. She remained there until 1851 when the Post Office moved to Staithe Street where now is situated Howells the butchers half way down the street.

It was then that John Southgate took over as Postmaster. Whites Directory/Survey of 1854 shows him as Postmaster and Insurance

Agent for the Guardian Insurance Co. He was followed by Francis Burnham Southgate, Postmaster, Guardian Insurance Agent and Gas Manager, until 1892.

In 1896 Jane Southgate is recorded as Postmistress, who probably took over from Francis in 1892. She remained there until 1912 when the G.P.O. built an entirely new Main Post Office, which today is situated in Station Road and was officially opened in 1913. This new Post Office provided a full postal service to Wells and surrounding districts, employing twenty staff. Jane was still Postmistress for a short period and was responsible for Counter Staff, Sorters, Postmen and Telegraph Boys.

Today it is a Sub-Post Office branch of Post Office Counters Ltd., whose East Anglian H.Q. is at St. Albans, Herts. Staff employed there, now under the Postmaster Mr. C. Bookee, are ten in number including Counter Staff, local and district Postmen. Mail is sorted at Regional Centres and collected for Wells from Fakenham Postal Depot.

Phil Champion

TIMES PAST

The Church Room as a focal point of social activity has now passed into history. How was the opening greeted? This is what the Eastern Daily Press of Thursday, April 16th, 1914 reported.

“The formal opening of the new church room, which has been keenly looked forward to by the members of Wells Parish church, took place on Tuesday afternoon when a large congregation met at the church for a short service prior to the opening ceremony. The service was choral and Miss Ingle presided at the organ in the absence of the organist (Mr. Edg ar Smith). In addition to the Bishop of Norwich and the rector (the Rev. G.H.N. Ingle) the following clergy were present: The Rev. C.T. Digby (Warham), the Rev. H.M. Elliot-Drake Briscoe (Rural Dean) (Burnham Thorpe), the Rev. A.L. Hunt (Thursford), the Rev. H. Davidson (Stiffkey) and the Rev. C.E. Hains (Burnham Sutton). The service was conducted by the Rector. The first lesson was

read by the Rev. C.T. Digby, and the second lesson by the Rev. A.L. Hunt. An impressive and eloquent sermon was preached by the Bishop who took his text from St. Luke XXIV 48 “Ye are witnesses of these things”.

After the service an adjournment was made to the church room, which stands on an excellent site, almost opposite the western door of the church. The Earl of Leicester was expected to perform the opening ceremony, but owing to his being at Lord Suffield’s funeral he was unable to be present. There was a very large assembly at the new room, and on the platform were the Bishop of Norwich, the Revs G.H.N. Ingle, C.T. Digby, H.M. Elliot-Drake Briscoe, A.L. Hunt, H. Davidson and C.E. Hains. Mr. A.Q. Watson (hon. secretary to the Committee), Mr. E. B. Loynes, Mr. H. E. Loynes and Mr. Eggleton of Lynn (architect) and Mr. T. Hinson (Wells) (Builder).

The Rev. G.H.N. Ingle said they had all regretted the absence of Lord Leicester, and he would ask the Bishop to perform the opening ceremony. He had been rector of Wells over twenty years, and it had been his ambition to see the church room completed before he came of age in the parish, and his hopes were now realized. The work of collecting funds was started in 1907, when penny cards brought in about £40. A bazaar in Wells had realized about £100 and two bazaars in Holkham Park about £200 each. The Earl of Leicester had allowed them the use of his grounds, and the Countess had also assisted by taking a stall. Sir Alfred Jodrell had also been a great help, and all Church people had worked hard. Altogether they had realized about £545. The purchase of a suitable site had been a difficulty, but thanks to Mr. H. A. Dewing they had been able to purchase the exact spot they wished for. About £400 would be required before the payments for the building and purchase of furniture would be complete and they were going to hold another bazaar in Holkham Park during the summer. He thanked the builder and architect, and also certain members of the choir and ringers, who had been a great help. Mr. W. Savory had done the whole front of the building and he wished to thank him and all who ably assisted.

The Bishop said it gave him great pleasure to

act as substitute for the Earl of Leicester. He had listened with much interest to Mr. Ingle's remarks, and he thought a public room was very essential. He congratulated the committee upon obtaining so admirable a site, and also upon the excellent building. He was very pleased to hear so many personal services had been rendered, and he hoped the debt would soon be wiped out. He then formally declared the room open. A vote of thanks was accorded to the Bishop on the proposition of Mr. E.B. Loynes."

Two days later, on Saturday, April 18th 1914 the Eastern Daily Press carried a further report.

"To celebrate the opening of the new Church Room, entertainments were given on Wednesday and Thursday, and a parochial tea was also given on Thursday, all of which was successfully carried through. The Misses Everitt had charge of the arrangements for the entertainment which was quite sufficient to ensure that everything connected with it would be a success. The entertainment of Wednesday evening was given to the school children, who were granted free admission, and very heartily the youngsters enjoyed the performance. The proceedings opened on Thursday with a parochial tea, and the hall comfortably seated about 200 persons, in addition to some 30 or 40 helpers.

The tea was followed by a repetition of the previous evenings' entertainment, and the hall was filled to its utmost capacity. The first part of the programme was of a miscellaneous character and all the items were enthusiastically received, the two action songs by the children, under Mrs. Brabhams charge, being very prettily rendered. The second part of the programme consisted of a farce, "Popping the Question", in which the characters were excellently sustained by the Misses J. and L. Everitt and A. Calthrop, Mrs. Brabham, and Messrs. R. Middleton and J. Calthrop. The programme of Part 1 was as follows: Pianoforte duet, the Misses Ingles: action song, the Misses J. Calthrop, C. Mudie, E. Laird, D. Bell, M. Simpson, J. and Mr. Fisher, Masters R. Calthrop, G. Laird, R. Mudie, F. Fisher and C. Simpson: song, Miss A. Calthrope; humorous duet, Messrs. R.

Middleton and G.E. Dewing: song, Mr. R. Edge: song, Mr. G. Ingle: song, Mrs. A. Bell: song, Mr. G. Dewing: action song, the children. The accompaniments were in the hands of Miss Sewell, Miss Ingle and Mrs. Brabham."

Quite an insight to the origins of the Church Room and social entertainment 85 years ago. The style of reporting presents a literary picture of events without the visual aids of today.

D.A. Perryman 8.10.99

RULES

Wells Local History Group Rules

The Wells Local History Group has its origins in the Wells W.E.A. and it is that body that we must thank for our current position. In those early days it was recognised that a proper constitution was necessary if "charity" status was to be achieved. A very comprehensive lengthy document was prepared covering all eventualities (almost to the extent which way committee meeting tea was to be stirred!!).

In 1997 it was realised that "charity" status was a long way off and simple Rules would suit the Group and give parameters within which to operate. These Rules were adopted at the A.G.M. held on 13th May 1998.

At the May 1999 A.G.M. a member raised a point regarding the calling of an Extraordinary General Meeting. The new committee looked at the Rules and agreed that it was valid constructive comment and then realised that following an A.G.M. the Group is without essential officers until the first Executive Committee meeting. Assuming the previous Executive Committee stood down in total who would organise it?

It is proposed that the following amendments to the Rules will be presented to the A.G.M. in May 2000 for approval. (It may be that Group members would wish to adopt them before May by calling for an E.G.M.)

However, it is hoped that the wording can be debated and, if necessary amended, within a few weeks so that time consuming lengthy discussion can be avoided at the A.G.M.

Please read the new proposed additions to the Rules and let the Secretary have your comments so that the Executive Committee may consider the matter further.

The proposed additional Rules are:-

1) Executive Committee

Nominations for Executive Committee membership shall be submitted in writing to the Secretary, at least 21 days prior to the date of the A.G.M. Existing members of the Committee shall confirm to the Secretary whether they are willing to continue membership of the Committee for a further 12 months at least 21 days before the A.G.M.

2) Continuity of The Executive Committee

Immediately following the A.G.M. the "new" Executive Committee shall assemble to appoint the following Acting Officers 1) Chairman, 2) Vice Chairman, 3) Treasurer, and 4) Secretary.

The occupants of the above posts for the previous 12 months will be expected to liaise with their successors for a period not exceeding 21 days.

3) Extraordinary General Meeting

Notice of an E.G.M. called by The Executive Committee will be given to all members by direct delivery.

If any member of the Group believes a need has arisen for an E.G.M. a request for such a meeting shall be made in writing to the Secretary with a copy to the Chairman of the Group (or, if more appropriate, to the Vice Chairman) giving reasons, and countersigned by six other "paid up" members of the Group. The Executive Committee shall respond to the request within 28 days of receipt of the letter.

The existing Rules will need to be renumbered to accommodate the additional rules.

My own comment, as Editor, is that an E.G.M. should never be needed unless the Group

runs out of funds, The Executive Committee resigns or members deplore the actions of The Executive Committee.

I repeat, please comment on the above to the Secretary a.s.a.p.

You may like to note the following :-

a)The A.G.M. is held in May.

b)The first Executive Committee meeting is held in late May or early June.

c)The subscription year is 1st October to 30th September.

d)Subscriptions paid after 1st May count towards the following 1st October to 30th September subscription year. (Summer is a quiet time for the general membership.)

e)"Established" members can pay subscriptions up to 31st December but after that date membership is deemed lapsed.

f)The first newsletter is produced in September and is issued to all members and past members where address details are known.

D.A.P.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Oral History

Over the past two years, in fits and starts, a small group of members has been conducting oral history interviews. Oral history records not only the facts but also the accents and thoughts of the speakers, so putting flesh on the bones of the facts.

Wells is changing rapidly as people move around for work and retirement and the number of people living in the town who were born here is dwindling. The group is aiming to talk to as many 'locals' as possible and for obvious reasons we have started with the

older generation.

So far we have spoken to residents generally about life in Wells when they were young and specifically about the two floods, shops in Staithe Street and High Street, fishing and the lifeboat. We have also been treated to Freda Howell reading many of her poems. We would like now to talk to people about occupations in the town, like farming, worm digging, the railway, whelk and mussel fishing and the harbour.

Our tape recorder which is of professional quality, was bought with the help of a grant from the Norfolk Rural Community Council and is easy to use (I can manage to use it and I am a complete idiot with things mechanical). We have discovered that the simplest arrangement for conducting an interview is to do it in pairs. One asks the questions and the other manages the recording.

Progress at the moment is rather slow but we could progress more quickly if we had more active group members. Those of us who have done some recording have been fascinated by what we have heard and have thoroughly

enjoyed doing it.

Eventually the tapes will be edited to give us a master set. We should then have a permanent record of Old Wells and Old Wells characters, for the future.

If any one would like to help with recording, or can suggest people to whom we might talk or even offer to talk themselves, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Alison Christmas

Tel. 710924

The Millennium Project

Phil Champion is nearing completion of his slides and descriptions for the presentation on 5th January. Our "book" for posterity will then be collated after that meeting incorporating any amendments found necessary. Will all members please note that if they feel amendment is required Phil must be informed so that future generations have a true picture of Life in Wells in 1999.

D.A.P.

EDITOR'S SOAP BOX

The Group continues to be the success we all wished for and the monthly meetings provide excellent speakers.

Contributions are always welcome for publication in the Newsletter. Why not write something during the Christmas holiday?

I wish you all a happy Christmas and a successful final year of this millennium.

D. A. Perryman



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