

WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No. 11 - MAY 1999

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

This will be the last Newsletter of the current session, since we are nearly at the end of the winter programme. We have had a very successful series of well-attended talks. Next year's programme is in preparation; we plan to meet as now in the evening of the -first Wednesday of each month from October to May; see later, you may wish to make a note now of the actual dates. However, we will be seeing each other we hope several times before October, at the series of outings which Mike Welland has arranged for us [also see later].

The notice of and Agenda for this year's A.G.M. [on 12 May] are with this Newsletter, along with a copy for you to keep of the Rules of the Group as adopted at last year's A.G.M. they include provision for the appointment of a new Executive Committee each year. This time two of our current Committee members have decided not to offer themselves for reappointment. The Group as a whole is extremely grateful to both of them for the considerable service they have given in the early years of our organisation. Madge Smith has for two years been our very actively interested and professional Secretary but understandably she now wishes to devote more time to her many other activities. Hew Purchas has been a very loyal Committee member

from the inception of the Group, even through the difficulties at the end of the first year, and we have enjoyed his support in Committee and at monthly meetings. He will we hope continue with his interest in illustrating the Walk-round Guides.

So, see you at the A.G.M! We plan to follow the formal business with a small exhibition by the Genealogy Group, and a discussion on our progress so far with the Walk-round Guides, illustrated by slides.

HELP.. THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT

All the texts that go with the colour slides presentation have been completed, ready for the first Group meeting in the year 2000. They are drafts only and need to be re-typed in a more professional format.

This is an urgent plea for any member of our Local History Group, who has a word processor available, to let me know ASAP if they could copy these typed drafts by the end of September 1999.

The extent of the task is to copy texts from 14 A4 sheets.

Any costs involved will be met from Group funds. Please contact me on 711664 or call and see me at 'The Old Bakery', to the rear of 36 Freeman Street, Wells.

Help in this matter from any member would be very much appreciated.

**Phil Champion,
Leader Special Interest Group**

THE MARITIME MUSEUM

Recent discussions between members of the Group's Executive Committee and the Maritime Museum have identified common concerns and a realisation that the two separate bodies are very compatible in a town with such diverse communities as in Wells. [No mergers, no takeovers and no windfalls for members - just nice to know we have understanding friends. Ed.]

A.G.M. Wednesday 12 MAY 1999

Should any member wish to join the Executive Committee [in accordance with the provisions of the Rules] please send your nominations to the Secretary.

TIMES PAST

Bernard Phillips has passed on the following item which appeared over his name in the Eastern Daily Press several years ago. The introductory paragraphs have been amended for today's reading.

A LETTER, written in September, 1867 and found behind a Wells mantelpiece, provides a fascinating glimpse of Norfolk life 130 years ago. It was sent from Longham, near Dereham, to a young Wells man who had just completed his first voyage to India.

"What a severe passage you must have had!" the letter begins. "Papa says he is surprised to hear such a bad account of the 1st mate, as he thought judging from his face that he must be one of the best-tempered fellows going; it is a good thing that the 3rd mate and the captain are more agreeable

shipmates. You don't say anything about the apprentices. I suppose you get on with them all right."

The young Wells sailor is identified only as Arthur, but his correspondent was the son of the Rector of Longham, the Rev. John Rushworth Pilling, who had recently been curate at Wells.

Like so many country clergymen, Mr. Pilling supplemented his income by taking pupils; he must have had serious academic ambitions, because he had just applied for the headmastership of Gresham's.

"The Holt school was vacant about a month back. Papa had a go in for it, but was unsuccessful, although he had a little consolation in being second. It is worth about £800 a year. You may fancy the state of excitement we were in till the result was known, there being scores of competitors."

This disappointment meant that young Pilling had to abandon a trip to London to see the "French exhibition" while his father decided to take a vacant rectory in the next village and advertise for more pupils. "Mr. Menheath has left Wendling," Pilling says, to explain the vacant living, "and gone to see how he likes Wales. He is a very nice fellow indeed. I believe he left because he was so dreadfully fleeced by the people there." In their old parish, too, there were changes planned: "Mr. Downing is going to leave Wells to the charge of two curates. I should think he must have become tired of the place by now.

The letter was in answer to a long, news-filled one from Arthur, who had promised to bring back cigars and a monkey for the children. His copies of the latest Dickens novels were much in demand, he said, and there was news of friends he had been asked to look up.

"I am glad you like Mosley," young Pilling replied wistfully. "He must live I should think rather a jolly life in Calcutta. I suppose Mr. Garwood's friends have been dead long ago, but he will be anxious to know whether you have found out anything about them." Mr. Garwood was another teacher and secretary of the Wells reading room.

Arthur was not much interested in politics, but he was given the news all the same: "You don't care I presume to know that the Reform Bill was at length passed. ... You will have seen in the papers the account of Maximilian's death. I should like to have had the wringing of those blackguardly Mexicans' necks, particularly Juarez!"

Turning to preoccupations more appropriate for a Victorian parson's son, Pilling continues: "The Wendling Cricket Club is still flourishing, although we had the impudence to challenge Necton and got a good drubbing for our pains."

At Dereham, "Otty and I went to see the Marylebone play. Norfolk, wonderful to say, has got rather a good side just now, particularly a good bowler of the name of Fellowes, who is awfully fast."

Some subjects remain hardy perennials: "The harvest this year is a very good one, a good deal over the average, which has put the farmers in a very good humour."

Nor was the clergyman's son above a little malicious gossip. A neighbour had been to Switzerland for his holidays. "Of course, he had some tremendous yarns to spin when he came back, his stories being very improbable, as usual." And then, as now, domestic scandal was seized with relish: "Mrs. Partridge, I fancy, has run off with some fellow. At least, she has left her husband. The young Partridges are staying with Mrs. White."

Soon afterwards, the Pilling family moved again, this time to Dereham, where Papa was in charge of the Guildhall School. Eventually he returned to Wells as rector, just before the parish church was struck by lightning and burned to a shell in August, 1879. Only the chancel was insured and over £6,000 had to be raised before the restored building could be reconsecrated, four years later.

So often, these old letters and diaries filled with apparently trivial information breathe life into the dry bones of local history and so often they are thrown heedlessly away. For the historian, 1867 may have been the year when Maximilian was murdered, but for us, thanks to the care taken of an 'old-letter by a Wells workman, it becomes the year when Mrs. Partridge ran off with some fellow and Norfolk had a bowler who was awfully fast.

Bernard Phillips

GROUP MEETINGS—next session

1999	6th OCTOBER
	3rd NOVEMBER
	1st DECEMBER
2000	5th JANUARY
	2nd FEBRUARY
	1st MARCH
	5th APRIL
	3rd MAY
A.G.M.	10th MAY

TIMES PAST

This is my final Newsletter of another successful year. There will be changes in the Executive Committee and it is up to members to make the decisions but change is needed from time to time to keep a group such as ours vibrant.

The existing Committee seems to have got things right and the Newsletter appears to be well received.

Members should not just sit back and be entertained - they should, if possible, suggest what they need from the Group and devise ways of working towards that desire. Likewise, the Newsletter can only be informative on the past of Wells if members, and others, will contribute.

Moans and groans about any aspect of the Group should be put in writing to the Secretary and the Executive Committee will consider the problem. It should be noted that the Executive Committee

meetings are very businesslike and adhere strictly to a pre-arranged agenda. Items for that agenda must, therefore, be in writing so as to be included.

Lastly, I would like to thank Madge Smith for producing the Newsletter on her computer and for deciphering my scribbles [and those of others] so efficiently and speedily.

ARTICLES AND/OR COMMENTS WELCOMED.

Write to:

*The Editor:
David Perryman
Ingleborough
Grove Road, Wells.*

Tel: 01328 711254

TRIPS / VISITS

MAY 20th	GRESSENHALL RURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
MAY 19th and 26th	WELLS MARITIME MUSEUM
JUNE 12th	BLETCHLEY PARK, CODE BREAKING MUSEUM
AUGUST 18th	HOLKHAM FORT

Any further details, ring Mike Welland: 710080

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