

# WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No. 21 - SEPTEMBER 2002

*As usual, this first Newsletter of the winter season 2002/03 will be sent to all those persons who have their address on our files.*

*Subsequent issues during the year will only be sent to paid-up members.*

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

As I write this, the Group has just completed a very successful programme during Wells Carnival Week. In addition to the now regular evening walks, during which I was ably assisted by Terry Whiddett, Brian Scott and Tom Sands, we mounted an extensive display in the Maltings containing historical detail, maps and pictures of the town. Over five days approximately 500 people visited the display. It was extremely gratifying to see that many people spent hours poring over exhibits. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all members who volunteered to man the display, and special thanks to Terry who worked tirelessly in putting the displays together. Only a proportion of the material available was on display, and one realises that with a

proper home and facilities, Wells could have its own attractive history museum in addition to the very successful Maritime Museum.

The August Bank Holiday Fair on the Buttlands concludes our summer programme, which in turn sees the end of a very successful year for the WLHG. Membership has risen to over 150 and high attendance at meetings shows that speakers are both informative and entertaining.

I have had to cancel the Hermitage visit on November 20th, and I am sorry that some of the other hoped for trips have not come to fruition. If there is someone out there who is prepared to take over the organisation of trips I would be pleased to hear from them.

We look forward to another successful season in 2002/3. I hope that all existing members will return and that they will encourage others to join.

**Mike Welland**

## Winter Programme 2002-2003

***Meeting dates and speakers for the winter season 2002-2003 to be held in the Malting Community Centre, Staithe Street at 7:30 p.m.***

2nd October 2002 .....	The Natural History of Wells .....	Paul Banham
6th November 2002 .....	Secrets from the Holkham Archives .....	Christine Hiskey
4th December 2002 .....	Norfolk Record Office .....	Emma Mottram
1st January 2003 .....	Bank Holiday therefore no meeting	
5th February 2003 .....	History of Wells Congregational Chapel . . .	Mike Welland
5th March 2003 .....	Old Turnpike Roads .....	Janet Smith
2nd April 2003 .....	More Coastal Discoveries .....	John Lorrimer
7th May 2003 .....	Norfolk Historic Buildings .....	To be announced
14th May 2003 .....	Annual General Meeting	

### *OUR BUTTLANDS*

The title deeds of the Buttlands go back to the year 1691. By incidence of the lease and release of the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> March 1758, made between John Goodridge & Elizabeth, his wife of the one part and the Rt. Hon. Thomas, Earl of Leicester of the other part. The Buttlands, on express terms were conveyed to Thomas, Earl of Leicester and remained in, and were dealt with by that family ever after until the title deeds were presented to the people of Wells in the year 1937.

For centuries, the Buttlands has been an open space on which children could play, and people could enjoy their leisure moments. A cock fair could be held annually. A bonfire could be lit on Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> and fireworks permitted in accordance with ancient custom and within legal limits.

This state of affairs, which had existed over the centuries, was rudely interrupted by the events of Nov 5<sup>th</sup> 1906 after the Wells U.D.C. had forbidden the annual bonfire on the Buttlands.

On that particular evening the 'Town Fathers' were in solemn debate, in the council chamber. They had previously banned the bonfire in question, in accordance with the Wells Improvement Act.

A group of citizens rebelled against the order and fearing their rights were to be taken from them, dragged large bundles of faggots etc. and lit a large bonfire. They paraded with blazing tar barrels and the bandstand, which had

recently been erected to commemorate the Coronation of Edward VII, was charged with these contraptions. Police were called and, in their efforts to save the bandstand from damage, were manhandled and became covered with mud from head to foot. Later twenty people were summoned to appear at Walsingham Police Court This incident received full press coverage and came to the notice of the Earl of Leicester; the holder of the title deeds.

The rights of the people, dating back for centuries, had been threatened and the Earl decided there and then to lay claim to the Freehold of the Buttlands in order to preserve the rights of the people of Wells. He claimed henceforth that the tolls of the Fair and the rents of the seats and bandstand be paid to him.

These demands fell like a bombshell at the March (1907) Council meeting. The Council wisely decided to seek counsel's opinion, on the assumption that if the claim could be proved, the sooner the calamity was over the better. A deputation from Wells U.D.C. complied with a request and met representatives at Holkham to discuss the serious matter.

After this discussion, a letter was received by the Wells U.D.C. from Messrs. Mills & Reeve, acting for the owners, which practically confirmed what was mentioned to the deputation.

At the meeting, Mr. Reeve wished it to be understood that the inhabitants of Wells should have full use of the

Buttlands, for all reasonable purposes for recreation. No question had arisen until the previous November, when it was apparent that there had been an attempt to interfere with the rights of the inhabitants of Wells. Consequently it became necessary to assert the owner's rights, in order that the privileges of the people might not in any way be destroyed.

A solution was sought whereby the rights of the owners could be represented and at the same time the inhabitants of Wells and their children were to have the use and enjoyment of the Buttlands to the fullest possible extent.

It was therefore proposed that a lease should be granted to the Wells U.D.C. and its successors in perpetuity, at a purely nominal rent reserving all the rights to mines and minerals and containing the following conditions:-

*The Buttlands not to be enclosed.*

*The bonfire and fireworks to be permitted in accordance with the ancient custom and within legal limits.*

*The fair to be held as heretofore, subject to such regulations as the Council think is desirable to make for the protection of the soil etc.*

*The tolls, rents of seats and bandstand to be collected and*

*applied to the upkeep of the Buttlands.*

At the Council meeting which followed, the Chairman suggested that the matter resolved itself into three questions and upon the answers depended the fate of "Our Buttlands".

*1. Were they to agree to the solution, proposed by Messrs. Mills & Reeve on Lord Leicester's behalf.*

*2. Did they adhere to the belief of their fathers that the Buttlands belonged to the people of Wells and did they mean to protect it.*

*3. Did they propose awaiting the final report of counsel before answering the letter.*

The meeting was adjourned for a week to enable counsel to complete his opinion on the subject

After a great deal of debating, agreement was finally reached and accordingly the Wells people were to have their rights restored.

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***From the Archives of  
the Late Mrs. Dorothy Terrington***

## What You Need to Know

An Executive Committee Meeting was held on 8th May and the following officer posts were filled:-

**Chairman**.....*Mike Welland*

**Vice Chairman** .....*Terry Whiddett*

**Secretary**.....*Maureen Whiddett*

**Treasurer** .....*Bob Huntington*

**Newsletter Editor**....*David Perryman*

**Archivist**.....*Cynthia Jackson*

Other committee members are:

John Christmas

Michael Dunsford

## Summer 2002

**Recollections of Wells** by the Local History Group was a most enjoyable evening.

Myrtle's excerpts from the council minutes made one realise that not a lot had really changed. Terry gave an interesting talk on more recent history which was very informative (I didn't know where the Miller's Arch came from!) and Freda's amusing anecdotes finished off a very good evening.

**Pauline Catton**

**The Norfolk Buildings Group** was formed nearly two years ago "to bring together all those who appreciate old buildings and who want to learn more about them, from the casual admirer to the dedicated researcher." Among their several activities are included visits to places of special interest. Recently, members of our Group hosted a visit to Wells, which involved a general walk around the southern part of the town and, separately, a look at some of the principal houses of which we have historical detail. We were blessed with a fine day (it was almost too hot!) and 34 visitors who between them bought 35 copies of our walk guides.

**Brian Scott**

## Family History



As I said in a previous issue people all over the world are becoming more interested in their ancestors. Each week Bob Brownjohn and I take requests in all shapes and sizes for information about Wells families. Even though outline details of records held by the History Group are on the Internet, many people want to view the actual entry on microfiche. Some visitors ask to be taken to see the home of greatgrandpapa. Sadly it can be quite distressing for those whose family lived in the yards off Freeman Street, where now the car park hides all trace of family life.

One enquiring lady was not so disillusioned. Whilst in Wells she spoke to Mike Welland (I was on holiday) about the Rust family who lived in the town from 1802 and whose family I have been researching for many years. She was able to see records, gravestones and homes. In return she passed on to me many dates names, and, most exciting of all a photograph of a portrait in her possession of Martha Rust, her great great grandmother.

## EDITOR'S SOAP BOX

The policy of contacting everyone that has been on our mailing list needs to be reviewed and I will ask for this to be discussed at a future committee meeting.

Copy for the December Newsletter must be in my hands by 31st October 2002 and be submitted on a disc or as an e-mail attachment with a print out for editing purposes.

**D. A. Perryman**