

WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No. 23 - APRIL 2003

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

It seems hardly possible, but by the time you read this it will be almost time for another Annual General Meeting. The A.G.M. is the opportunity for all members to put forward any suggestions on how the Group should proceed. Are there changes you would like to see for next season? Do you have ideas for future subjects for talks, or suggestions for speakers? If you would like to submit items for the agenda please contact Maureen Whiddett. If you would like to submit your name for committee membership also do this through Maureen. Any organisation is only as good as its membership, the Wells Local History Group is no exception.

It is still very gratifying for me, and the other members of the committee, to see so many members at our monthly meetings. However, I spoke recently to someone who had not been to meetings this year, and their comment was that they had heard it all before. I hope this is not the attitude of many members. A great deal of thought and effort goes into the arranging of speakers, but as I pointed out in a newsletter last year, there is a limit to the number of local speakers, and to the subjects they can cover. I know from my February talk, about the Congregational Church, that there were literally months of work in research and preparation, probably yet another year before my research is complete. Some speakers are found by members to be more interesting than others depending on their subject, but I think that most of the membership realise, and appreciate, the effort that all of them make to entertain and enlighten us.

We have taken delivery of the new projection screen which the Community Association agreed to have placed as a permanent fixture in The Maltings hall. It is hoped that the screen will be in place for our April meeting. This screen will be available for other organisations to use if they so wish.

Once again please make a date in your diary for our AGM, and come with questions, ideas, and also criticisms if you have them.

Mike Welland

AGM

The A.G.M. will be held on Wednesday, May 14th. Nominations for the Executive Committee should be submitted in writing to the secretary (Maureen Whiddett) at least 21 days before that date. Guests will be welcome, but only paid up members may vote.

D. A. Perryman

Social Life

The Holkham Partridge Week 1905

The following has been extracted from an article in the "Badminton Magazine" written by a Major Arthur Acland-Hood in January 1906.

At Holkham 1905 was proving to be the best for partridges since the bumper years of 1885 and 1887. The estate had been celebrated for the excellence of its shooting since the middle of the eighteenth century, and Lord Leicester had perhaps done more than any of his predecessors to add to its fame. Lord Leicester superintended the operations of 1905 from his pony-cart.

Holkham was an ideal estate as the extent is great, the soil not too light, i.e. good barley land; highly farmed, fences good and fairly high, vermin well kept under and rabbits not tolerated, a good breeding stock of partridges left on each beat and practically no foxes.

Holkham differed from many other partridge estates in that no artificial aid was given in the way of hand-rearing, Hungarian eggs or birds turned down, or even artificial shelters for the guns to stand behind. The partridges were never driven until November or even later so that they were full-grown, well-feathered and strong on the wing - a genuine wild shoot.

The ground carried a lot of hares and wild pheasants which would be a nuisance when driving partridge, so, in October, Lord Coke accompanied by a large party of tenants went over the ground to kill the hares and pheasants that had bred outside the park wall.

The hare-shooting indicated what sort of stock of partridges there was on each beat and also the natural flight of the coveys when disturbed.

On the Warham beat in 1905 314 hares were killed in one day.

Independently of the "driving" ground proper there were several outside beats and throughout the latter end of September and October 1500 brace were accounted for in 1905.

There were four driving beats (1) Warham, (2) Quarles and Egmore, (3) Wighton and, (4) Branthill and Crabbe. Each beat was about 2000 acres of highly farmed land.

Joyce, the head keeper, had a pheasant beat in the park, and was responsible for Branthill and Crabbe, under him was a vermin killer.

Symons, a partridge keeper pure and simple looked after Warham and Wighton - some 4000 acres. Apparently he was a bit of a pessimist by nature and would seldom allow that he had many birds on his beat. There was no evidence of rats, vermin or rabbits on these beats.

Baker looked after Quarles and Egmore and also Waterloo and Crabbe.

There were four keepers with three under-men in the park and two keepers entirely for partridges outside the park.

The Holkham Keepers seldom changed and they enjoyed their work and always had plenty to do.

Driving did not take place until November and the countryside was therefore bare with hardly any roots and the birds were very strong. The fields were large, averaging over thirty acres, and the plan generally adopted was to begin with one or two down-wind drives towards a general centre, and then to work the whole

beat towards that centre throughout the day. The drivers were all employees of the estate and knew what to do, were good walkers and made no noise.

Being too dark to shoot after 4.30 p.m. in November an early start was made with the first shot being fired shortly after 9.00 a.m. (this was 9.30 a.m. Holkham time as the clocks were kept half an hour fast!)

The ground was never shot over a second time and this meant a good stock was certain to be left so year after year good bags are obtained.

The big day at Warham (November 7th) was a beautiful day with a light south wind and the keeper, Symons, reported that he had some birds. The party consisted of Prince Frederick Dhuleep Singh, Lord Coke, Colonel Coke, Colonel Constance, Major C. Willoughby, Mr. W. Forbes, Mr. W. Barry and Major Arthur Acland-Hood.

The shooting party had a three mile run in a motor to the Warham meeting place. Bread, cheese, beer, whisky and soda etc. was sent out but every one made up their own lunch and put it into a little bag. Lunch was taken at 12.45 p.m.

The drivers at Warham on that day produced 10 pheasant, 1671 partridge, 26 hares, 2 rabbits and 4 various making a total bag of 1713. Over the four days shooting at Warham, Quarles and Egmore, Wighton and Branthill and Crabbe resulted in a total bag of 4961.

At Warham Lord Leicester arrived in his pony and trap and took a keen interest in the proceedings with Lady Leicester telling him the results of the party's efforts.

The week produced the best partridge driving every known in this country. No effort was made to obtain a record but it happened. The outcome delighted Lord Leicester at the successful planning and also reflected the greatest credit on his keepers, drivers and flankers.

The technicalities of the drives have been omitted from the above description.

D. A. Perryman

Times Past

Extracts from Wells Herald, May 1892

The Great Eastern Railway Company has, at last, ordered the enlargement of the Wells station. The platforms are to be lengthened considerably. The difficulty experienced in entraining the crowds of visitors and regatta days, and often during the excursion season will at last be removed. The ordinary passenger will no longer be required to possess the agility of a gymnast which was formerly necessary in jumping from the hindermost carriages, with hands encumbered with bag, stick, and overcoat, to the imminent danger of the limbs of the unwary stranger not accustomed to these little peculiarities of eastern travel.

Phonograph Entertainment

The new hall was crowded on Monday April 25th by an appreciative audience assembled to hear Mr W. Lynd's lecture on this wonderful instrument. After a brief description in untechnical language of the construction and working of the phonograph, Mr Lynd proceeded to make it talk for itself. This it did most unhesitatingly, and maintained the profound attention of the audience during the remainder of the time - a feat to be envied by many a human speaker. The "bottled up cry" of an infant three months old, when reproduced, brought down the house. The entertainment concluded with a brief sketch of the characteristic features of the renowned inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

Extract from Wells Herald April 1892

New Hall Entertainments

Mr F.Beckett's Company engaged the New Hall for the week commencing March 7th. The usual stock pieces were performed before the usual audiences on such occasions. There was a slight rally, however, on the Friday night when Dion Boucicault's "Colleen Bawn" was given, the Hall being on that night fairly well filled, as the patronage of several local gentlemen had been secured.

Mr W.S.Woodin, on Monday March 21st had a fairly good house to witness his impersonations. He does not approach in excellence the inimitable "Carpet Bag" Woodin, who we understand was the father of the subject of this notice. Still, those who risked the money necessary to procure them admission were thoroughly satisfied with the

entertainment provided for them.

Extract from The Wells Herald Oct 1890

Accident

A little boy named Wordingham, stepson of Mr W. Harman, had a narrow escape early in September.

It appears he was playing with some comrades at number 6 Malthouse, they were hoisting each other when from some cause or other the basket became unhooked and the little fellow was precipitated to the concrete floor below, a distance of some 18 feet. For several days it was feared his injuries would prove fatal, we are glad to hear, however, he has weathered this storm also. He seems to have had more than his share of trouble, for his arm has been twice broken, and he was fished out by Richard Smith from under a ship's bottom, all but drowned.

Mike Welland

Archives

COMMA UPDATE

The Wells Community Archive being assembled by the History Group now has a collection of more than one hundred and fifty photos and documents on record. We have photos of both the recent floods, the 'rowing' lifeboat from about 1900, local dignitaries, shops and their proprietors, trades people, the Regatta in the 1920's, the dance band, and photos of Wells in general. Not all the photos are very old, but even those of 30 years ago are fascinating to look at now. Some of our donors have recorded their reminiscences about the pictures which makes them even more appealing. It is fast becoming a very interesting record of Wells life over the last century. We still have unidentified people in the photos and are glad of help in naming these. We would also welcome other offers of material to record. We realise people are reluctant to part with precious photos, but you can watch your pictures being scanned into the computer, tell us about them and then take them home again. Volunteers from the History Group are in the library the first Friday morning of each month. Come and look at the archive, bring us your photos to record, help us with identities or just tell us your reminiscences. We would love to see you.

John and Alison Christmas

Tel 710924

Meetings Comment

Congregational Chapel Talk

Despite the slightly chilled air and the hardness of the wooden pews, the change of venue for the February meeting to the Congregational Chapel was a great success. The weather was bitterly cold but members, as usual, came in droves and the Chapel was full.

Mike Welland's talk on the history of the Chapel was enthralling and was made more so because we were sitting in the very building that was being discussed.

For those of us who knew nothing of its history, it was a revelation to hear the story of the early days of the Chapel unfold. Completed in 1817 and long beset by financial difficulties, the Chapel thrived. There was an extremely successful Sunday School over many years. The Chapel was enlarged to include extra rooms and a gallery. We learnt also that Scarborough House had been built, originally, to house the Minister and the Sunday School.

The history of mere buildings is limited, however, without the 'voices' of the people who once lived in and around them. But we heard those voices too, speaking to us from the Chapel records to which Mike had been allowed generous access by Neil Woodruff, the Minister, and Gordon Barrett and Cynthia Neale, members of the congregation. Mike had asked several of our members to read out excerpts from these records and this really brought history to life. We heard of a young woman banned from membership for giving birth only a few months into her marriage. Did she ever attend Chapel again, I wonder, and what of her husband's 'sentence'? How times have changed; for the better one hopes. There were two offences recorded of misappropriation of the poor Minister's stipend, which came from Chapel offerings. These too, were punished by suspended membership. Youth, as now, was a problem, making mischief in the gallery and outside the Chapel doors. The generosity of benefactors was recorded too. One, Mrs. Martha Rust, who owned several public houses around Wells, is buried in the chapel yard.

After the talk, some of our members told of their own memories of the Chapel, bringing its

history closer to our time. We then looked around the building with keen interest.

The Chapel is a prominent feature of the town and, as we heard, its past is very much part of the history of Wells. Sadly, now, the congregation has declined and the building itself is under threat of decay. The guttering, for instance, is in urgent need of renewal. Concern was expressed at the meeting and if some enthusiastic person were willing to take up the challenge of leading a campaign for funds, I'm sure that many would be glad to contribute.

Madge Smith

National Records Office

Included in documents located at N. R.O. Relating to Wells history, I found the following, attributed to Miss Edith Garwood, a school teacher, resident in the town at the time of the church fire in 1879.

"As you know the Church was struck by lightning and destroyed by fire on August 1st 1879. The fire engine had been locked up for so long they could not find the key, and when they did the engine was so rusty it was no good. The Church was not insured except the Parsons part at the East End, and had long wanted to be done up. So when it was burning Bessie Garwood, then the organist, said 'What man would not do - God has.' So like her was not it? Her friends and many other called her The Church is one foundation' she loved it all so much, and her choir especially and they her."

Mike Welland

EDITOR'S SOAP BOX

We are nearing the end of another very successful season and, hopefully 2003/4 will prove to command a "not to be missed" event on Wells and district calendars.

Finally, I must thank Jean Terrington for her continued support by producing the Newsletter on her computer.

D. A. Perryman