

# WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No. 9 - SEPTEMBER 1998

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

This Newsletter is not only addressed to Group members of last year, but also to those people who joined in our first year but did not renew their membership, and to anyone else who might be interested. Further issues later in this season will, however, go only to this year's members.

One might reasonably ask why we need a membership scheme at all when up to now we have welcomed non-members to all our meetings [at a double fee]. We need to know who has a long term interest in the Group, but, above all, we need a regular income to give us confidence to plan our comprehensive programme - to book the hall and have sufficient funds to pay the fees and expenses of visiting speakers, and also to cover printing, Newsletter production and other Secretarial costs. So, do please join [or re-join] this year, preferably soon and ideally at our first meeting, on 7 October. We have decided that the subscription shall be the same as last year: £5 per person, but £8 for two at the same address.

Those attending the AGM on 13 May will know that the same Executive Committee as last year was re-appointed en bloc, except that Keith Reay has moved away and is no longer able to be involved. No additional offers or nominations had been received. The Group Rules

adopted at the AGM provide that the Committee will itself appoint its officers. On the principle that what is working well is best left undisturbed, at our first committee meeting of the new season we decided to continue as:

**Vice Chairman** ..... Phil Champion  
**Secretary** ..... Madge Smith  
**Newsletter Editor** ..... David Perryman  
**Publicity Officer** ..... Mike Welland  
**Artistic Adviser, & assistant to Treasurer at meetings**.....Hew Purchas

Madge Smith says that she will not be accepting re-appointment to the Committee next year, so we are already looking for a new Secretary. We will be glad to hear from anyone interested in succeeding her.

The Group owes its existence to the interest and enthusiasm of the Wells Branch of the WEA, and in particular to its then Chairman, John Christmas. However, John preferred not to become Chairman of our History Group in its first year. Our first Chairman chose not to remain on the Committee, and we persuaded John to lead us through our second year. He now prefers to stand down again, and I have agreed to take on that role. He is now Treasurer.

*This year's programme is set out briefly in this Newsletter and we hope to see you all at our first meeting, on 7 October. Bill Green is a truly local speaker; maybe he is coming to make amends for what a previous resident of Warham, Sir Charles Turner, did to Wells with his floodbank of 1719!*

**Brian Scott**

***We are very pleased to acknowledge the very generous gift of £100 from the Wells Carnival Committee. This was made specifically to buy a large filing cabinet for the storage of the historical records, maps, etc. which are beginning to accumulate. Details as to where it will be kept and arrangements for public access will be announced later.***

## **TIMES PAST**

### ***Wells-next-the-Sea, 1854***

The following information about Wells in the mid 1850's has been taken from White's survey of the county of Norfolk. This volume covered many aspects of history and life in Norwich, and in the towns and villages of the county. The preface to this volume states "Every parish, village and hamlet with all the principle residences and farm houses in the county have been visited to authenticate the necessary information."

In 1854 the population of Wells was 3,675 and there were 936 houses in the town. It covered an area of just over 2,339 acres, and it was described in White's as a small, irregularly built sea port 32 miles N.W. of Norwich, lying in the manors of Wells-later-the-Dukes, Normans, and Walsingham Priory. Its commerce was described as being for many years in a declining state, but added that efforts were being made to revive the fortunes of the town by various means.

Schemes to improve the state of the town included improvements to the harbour and a plan to form a railway from the town to join the Eastern Counties and Norfolk Railway at Fakenham. Some of the streets had been macadamized and lit with gas lamps. The Gas Works in Mill Lane had been built in 1844 at a cost of

£4,000 after the *Act for Lighting and Improving the Town* had been approved, and a new road had been made, then called Commercial Road, giving improved access to the harbour and to other parts of the town.

The market, previously held on a Saturday had been discontinued by the 1850's, as had the yearly race meetings. Transport to Fakenham was available by omnibus from the Crown Inn at 8.30 a.m. on Monday and Wednesday, at 12.30 on Thursday, and on Saturday at 6.45 a.m. In addition, Mr. William Richardson operated a daily van from his home in Burnt Street. If one wished to travel further afield, - vessels sailed from the Quay to London and Hull once a fortnight.

In the years prior to 1854, many improvements had been made to the Quay area. The channel had been deepened to allow vessels of up to 200 tons at high tide and a new Quay had been built. Many vessels were built in Wells and the number registered in the port was 200, with a tonnage of 9487. In 1852 the number of inbound coastal loaded vessels numbered 672, with 484 outbound movements. Imports consisted mainly of coal, timber, salt, rape and linseed cake. Exports were mainly corn, oysters, etc.. Numerous fishing boats fished what were then prolific beds of oysters and mussels.

Wells' port limits stretched five miles east of the town and thirteen miles to the west. In addition to the Customs Officers, Harbour Master and their respective staff, there were six pilots and four coastguard stations within the limits.

## EDITOR'S SOAPBOX

Petty Sessions were held at the Crown on the third Monday of each month. In addition to St. Nicholas Church, the following denominations all had their own chapels: the Independents Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists, and Friends. White's states that there was a British school supported by the Earl of Leicester, but it appears that there was only one teacher. However, there were two other schools supported by charity consisting of a farm house, two cottages and 88 acres of land.

The Post Office was at Mr. John Southgate's Staithe Street shop, letters arriving at the shop at 9 a.m. and being despatched at 5 p.m. White's volume also lists the location in the town of residences of important people and of tradesmen, insurance offices, etc. etc In 1854 there were 27 Inns and Tavern in the town, also four Beerhouses There were 10 Fire and Life Insurance offices, thirteen Boot and Shoemakers, thirteen Bakers, six Tailors and Drapers and four Milliners. There were seven Blacksmiths, seven Butchers, eleven Coal Merchants, eight Grocers and Drapers and eight Joiners an Cabinetmakers, plus many other professional tradesmen. M.W.

In the May Newsletter I mentioned that I was short of material for future editions. This is still the situation and the content can only be as good as we members make it. I had a wonderful idea for an article early in the summer but research has taken longer than anticipated, and much of the information I wanted does not appear to have been recorded and/or retained.

### *Norfolk History Fair 1998*

*This 5th Fair is being held at the newly restored Assembly House in Norwich on Saturday 26th September [11 a.m. - 5 p.m.] and Sunday 27th [12 noon - 5 p.m.] and offers family interest. However, please note the entrance fee is £4 per person [children under 16 are free].*

### ARTICLES AND/OR COMMENTS WELCOMED. Write to

*The Editor:*

*David Perryman*

*r Ingleborough*

*Grove Road, Wells. Tel: 01328 711254*

### Programme of Meetings 1998-1999

[held in the Maltings Community Centre, Staithe Street at 7.30 p.m.]

7 OCT	Bill Green	Warham: the story of a Norfolk Village
4 NOV	Katrina Siliprandi	Christmas Past
2 DEC	Joy Lodey	Smuggling in Norfolk
6 JAN	Keith Leesmith	Boudica
3 FEB	David Gurney	Roman Norfolk
3 MAR	Kenneth Penn	The Early Church in East Anglia
7 APR	Victor Morgan	Blickling: how to "read" a house
5 MAY	Janet Hammond	Studies at Sedgeford 1996-98

PRICE TWO-PENCE

**WELLS HORTICULTURAL, ATHLETIC SPORTS  
GALA, FLOWER and TRADE SHOW**

SPONSORED BY

**The Wells Branch of  
The British Legion**

**The Wells and District  
Allotment & Gardens Association**

Chairman: Mr. R. H. Benstead

Chairman: Mr. W. Barnes

President of both Associations: **THE RT. HON. THE EARL OF LEICESTER**

*Schedule and Programme of*  
**The SHOW & SPORTS**

to be held at the

**Beach Road Playing Fields, Wells**

by kind permission of the Wells Urban District Council

**SATURDAY, 30th JULY, 1949**

**Show opens at 2 p.m.**

**Admission to Ground 1/-; Children, accompanied by Adult, Free**

**CUPS and PRIZES to the value of £150**

**Side Shows. Trade Shows. Refreshments. Teas. Ices**

Horticultural Entries to—

S. C. BELLINGER,  
37 Northfield Way, Wells

Sports Entries to—

L. E. FARROW,  
Hammonds Square, Wells

**The Wells & District Allotment & Gardens Association**  
will hold a **DANCE**  
in Church Hall, at 8-30 p.m. Music by "Sweet Jivers"

W. P. Seeley, Printer, Wells, Norfolk