

WELLS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER No. 16 - DECEMBER 2000



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



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

We are now well into the current season of winter meetings. By early November 110 people had joined or re-joined, which was very encouraging and enables us to finance the visits of good speakers as well as our other activities.

We have had two excellent meetings so far. Mike Welland's talk on "Researching History in Wells" created a great deal of interest and has, we hope, inspired others to follow his lead. The microfilm/fiche reader has not yet been placed in the library because it has been in continuous use elsewhere for particular projects. Maureen Whiddett has prepared a note for this newsletter about her researches for a family who claim local connections. Bob Brownjohn has been carrying out the arduous task of preparing a computerised index to the Parish Registers for 1719 - 1900, which we now have on microfilm, so that it will be possible to look up baptisms, marriages and burials in the Anglican church for a given surname without having to search through the entire series for each new name as enquiries arise. This will be of great help for local researches and in answering the queries of the many peoples who are writing to 'us from away. We plan to print out the index so that it will be accessible to those without computers! Similarly, 'the information from the 1891 Census for Wells has been indexed.

David Gurney, in his talk on 1st November, as usual made a potentially dry subject (the Saxon Shore Forts) very interesting and entertaining. He has kindly agreed to conduct a visit for us to the one at Brancaster

(Branodunum) sometime next summer. Anyone confident enough to predict a fine evening please let me know the date!

By the time this Newsletter appears the December meeting will be past. At the one on 3rd January we are to hear again from Mike Welland, this time the results of his research into the development of Freeman Street. See you there!

Brian Scott

HOW THEY LIVED

Some years ago I thought it would be an interesting project to investigate the water supply and sewage disposal systems in Wells in the late 1800's and early 1900's. At the time, I was employed by Anglian Water and could find no, useful information in the company's records, but little information has come to light. I had- heard that Wells had some "smugglers' tunnels,, but I felt sure these are nothing more than large drains- From memory I remember counting about 170 well water pumps on the 1875 Ordnance Survey sheets of Wells.

The geology of Wells is interesting and deserves an article on its own. This could include details of the elephant tusk and mammoth teeth found in the 1800's (-contributions welcome. Ed.).

However, back to early water supply. The records of the Institute of Geological Sciences, as published, do not reveal much information. There was a well at New Farm, Warham Road, sunk before 1921, a well at the station, a well at Wells Lodge, a well at Cuckoo Lodge, one-at Mill Road (sunk in 1923?), a well at Mill Farm of unknown date and wells at Manor Farm (sunk

in the 1950's).

The early Ordnance Survey sheets do not indicate many wells but some are shown e.g. "Josabode" on the coast road, one on the site of the "Coronation Garage", others at Golden Gates, Cuckoo Lodge, "Highlands" Northfield Lane and "Ashburton House,,. I have not found any reference to a well sinker in Wells listed in any of the Directories.

Recently I was shown a 'turn of the last Century' domestic water supply system in Wells still almost intact. The house is a six bedroom semi and the kitchen/scullery is virtually unchanged although the bell system to summon the house maid is sadly lacking its bells and disappointingly the kitchen range, unused for some time, lacks an oven door. Obviously a dwelling of some note.

Both semis are served by one well for domestic supply by individual systems. The unmodernised house has its own pump within the well and, what is intriguing, is that it could be operated by hand via an arrangement of rods, cranked bar and cog wheels to a handle in the kitchen some distance from the well. Possibly a modification had taken place to allow a motor of some sort to operate the arrangement but identification of the actual method has disappeared. However, the pump lifted water to a tank to provide a constant supply of water to the taps. The early owner of the property **was** well aware of the need to use well water sparingly as roof water was also discharged to tanks for other uses.

My tour was concluded with being shown another momento of the past - a still usable bucket closet! Are there any other early 1900's amenities still in being such as gas lighting !

What surprises me is that Wells is reputed to owe its name to the numerous springs yet there is no record of a "holy" water source in the area.

D. A. Perryman

Using the new Microfiche/film reader

During the summer, whilst sitting on my front step, I was approached by visitors to the town who asked if I knew anything about the Jolly

Sailor Public House. As the History Group plaque, ("this is the site of the JS Public House") was just above my head I was able to answer in the affirmative. The ensuing discussion and correspondence led me to learn how to use the reader and to provide interesting information to relatives of a former landlord of the establishment, John **LUBBOCK**. If this name means anything to readers of this newsletter, I, and his relatives in Sussex would be pleased to hear from you.

Having got started on research I was eager to find out about the family of Richard PARKER, who lived at East House, East Quay, and his daughter **Martha**, (married to Thomas Bonnett **RUST** a brewer), who owned the Jolly Sailor Public House next door. We have much information about this family from our deeds, but the parish registers and details from the 1841 to 1891 census have given up a considerable wealth of facts about Martha. Though owning the pub, she lived on the Quay from 1841 to 1881, probably on the corner of Standard Road. She then moved to Bolts Close. Living as a wealthy widow, with her son Alfred, she employed servants and would have owned a substantial house. I would be delighted to hear of any member who knows of the name of **RUST**, either from deeds or from evidence passed down.

Maureen Whiddett

More Millennium Project News

The continuing millennium photographic project is producing a fascinating record of the town. The section relating to the businesses and retail outlets is well under way and it is worth commenting on the fact that not a single proprietor, employee, assistant or indeed anyone asked, had the slightest objection to being included in the pictures. Having seen some of the photographs many of the "stars" felt that a book of the completed project would be a sure fire winner if available in the town.

The importance of this undertaking is underlined by the fact that at the least two locations recorded this year have ceased to operate but, encouragingly, several operations have started up.

John Checketts

In these days of global warming and Health and Safety Acts it is easy to dismiss the hardships endured not so many decades ago. The following was an item in 'The Building Trades Journal', a "serious" publication, in the 1980's which unfortunately has now ceased publication.

D.A. Perryman

Certain overheads are both desirable and essential. First consider the conditions which prevailed in 1852 when the following 'Office Staff Practices' were promulgated in a Midlands office :

1 *Godliness, cleanliness and punctuality are the necessities of a good business.*

2 *This firm has reduced the hours of work and the clerical staff will now have to be present between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6p.m. on week-days.*

3 *Daily prayers will be held each morning in the main office. The clerical staff will be present.*

4 *Clothing must be of a sober nature. The clerical staff will not disport themselves in raiment of bright colours, nor will they wear hose unless in good repair*

5 *Overshoes and top-coats may not be worn in the office, but neck scarves and headgear may be worn in inclement weather*

6 *A stove is provided for the benefit of the clerical staff and coal and wood must be kept in the locker It is recommended that each member of the clerical staff bring four pounds of coal each day during cold weather*

7 *No member of the clerical staff may leave the room without permission from Mr Rogers. The calls of nature are permitted and clerical staff may use the garden below the second gate. This area must be kept in good order.*

8 *No talking is allowed during business hours.*

9 *The craving of tobacco, wines or spirits is a human weakness and as such, is forbidden to all members of the clerical staff.*

10 *Now that the hours of business have been drastically reduced the partaking of food is allowed between 11.30 and noon, but work will not, on any account, cease.*

11 *Members of the clerical staff will provide their own pens. A new sharpener is available on application to Mr Rogers.*

12 *Mr. Rogers will nominate a senior clerk to be responsible for the cleanliness of the main office and the private office, and all boys and juniors will report to him 40 minutes before prayers, and will remain after closing hours for similar work. Brushes, brooms, scrubbers and soap are provided by the owners.*

14 *The new increased wages are as detailed:*

Junior Boys (To 11 years) 1/4d

Boys (To 14 years) 2/1d

Junior Clerks 8/7d

Clerks 10/9d

Senior Clerks (after 15 years with the owners) 21/-

The owners recognise the generosity of the new Labour Laws, but will expect a great rise in output of work to compensate for these near-Utopian conditions.

HOME WORDS

Our thanks are due to Mrs. Audrey Temple, of New Farm, who has very kindly given to the Group for safe keeping the 1891 and 1892 volumes of the Wells edition of 'Home Words'. Many people will know that this was the national monthly magazine of the Anglican Church, presumably available to all parishes, and issued at one (old) penny per copy in a four page cover particular to the individual parish. The pink outside front cover is illustrated with pictures of English cathedrals and the back with advertisements for Birds Custard, Cadbury's Cocoa, Bengers Food, Reckitts Blue and other less familiar products. The inside cover pages of these Wells versions are much more interesting historically in that they usually, but not always, deal with Wells affairs.

'Home Words' itself was full of moral tales and poems and what we now regard as over sentimental (and improving) illustrations, and is of no particular local interest. It was possible to have the year's twelve monthly issues bound together, at a cost of one shilling and threepence. Neither of the two volumes we have is quite complete - some issues and more importantly several of the cover pages are missing. However, what is there is of interest as a reflection of parish life of the time.

The numbers of burials (but not baptisms or marriages) are tabulated, ranging from 22 in 1889 to 58 or more in 1891. Occasionally there is mention of forthcoming special services, but presumably it was not thought necessary to list the regular ones.

Lists of subscriptions to various charitable causes are tabulated in great detail, with exact amounts given by each named person. There is mention of the distribution of coal and blankets, and soup and bread, which tells us something about the social conditions in the town at that time.

In both years there is mention of the Church Institute Library (where?) by then containing over 400 volumes. In August 1891 is reproduced the summary of the Inspector's Report on the Board School. It would seem that a poor standard of arithmetic is not peculiar to our own time! In both years there is a very detailed report of the (presumably Sunday) School treat, giving precise numbers of the loaves and pounds of beef for the sandwiches, and of the plum puddings and penny buns which had been consumed. Thanks at Harvest Festival time included a

mention of Lord Leicester's generosity in allowing the collection of moss in the Park.

In May 1892 there is a list of "Donations for warming the Parish Church of Wells" (by gas) collected by Mrs. Hamond. These totaled £32.4s.6d.; £28.10d.8d. had already been spent, mainly with Messrs. Cornish (presumably of the foundry in Theatre Road) leaving £3.13s.10d. which "... will nearly pay for one of the large stoves we hope to get in the autumn". How monetary values have changed, but our needs have not.

There are occasional articles, probably reprinted from elsewhere, on religious topics and on church politics, one on work in the garden for the month, and a truly terrifying one on the symptoms and dangers of diphtheria.

Of more local interest, in December 1892 there is mention of the Wells change ringers and their enthusiasm. In the same month, there are reproduced reports and letters relating to the loss of presumably a local man, apprentice J.F. Wyatt, by drowning off Cape Horn on 18 June.

Altogether, these two volumes are very interesting in casting light on the conditions in Wells in late Victorian times. They will be available for consultation from our cabinet in the Branch Library.

Again, thank you to Mrs. Temple - maybe other members may have equally interesting contributions to make to what we hope will be a growing collection.

Brian Scott

EDITOR'S SOAP BOX

At the time this Newsletter was put together many members of the Executive Committee were away or busy elsewhere. This brought home to me that we need all members of the Group to put forward articles or items for the Newsletter, however brief. It is the members' Newsletter and it will be the members that ensure that it will continue to be interesting.

From myself and Jean Terrington (the Newsletter team) best wishes to you all, for a Happy Christmas and a healthy and successful 2001.

D. A. Perryman