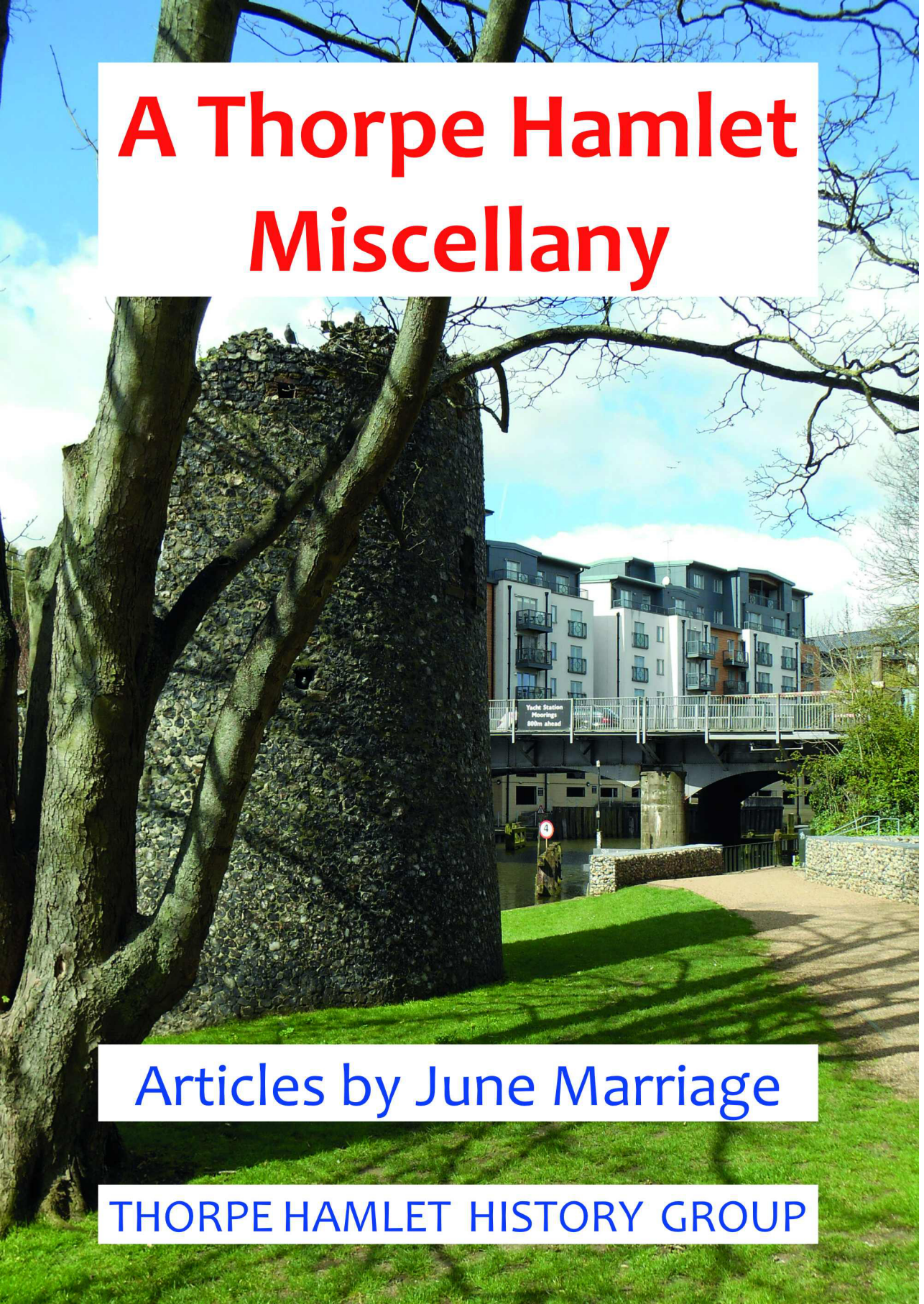
A Thorpe Hamlet Miscellany



Articles by June Marriage

THORPE HAMLET HISTORY GROUP

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A collection of articles by June Marriage of the Thorpe Hamlet History Group, published in the Parish Magazine of St. Matthew's Church between February 2005 and April 2015

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Front cover photograph : the Boom Tower on the Thorpe Hamlet side of the river Wensum, formerly part of the city walls (see article no. 81), and also Carrow Bridge (article no. 5), with modern housing reflecting changes in the river Wensum (article no. 102). *Photo John Trevelyan*

Please note that references contained in the articles to availability of publications etc may no longer be valid.

Information about the Thorpe Hamlet History Group is at www.thorpehamlet.org.uk

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Contents

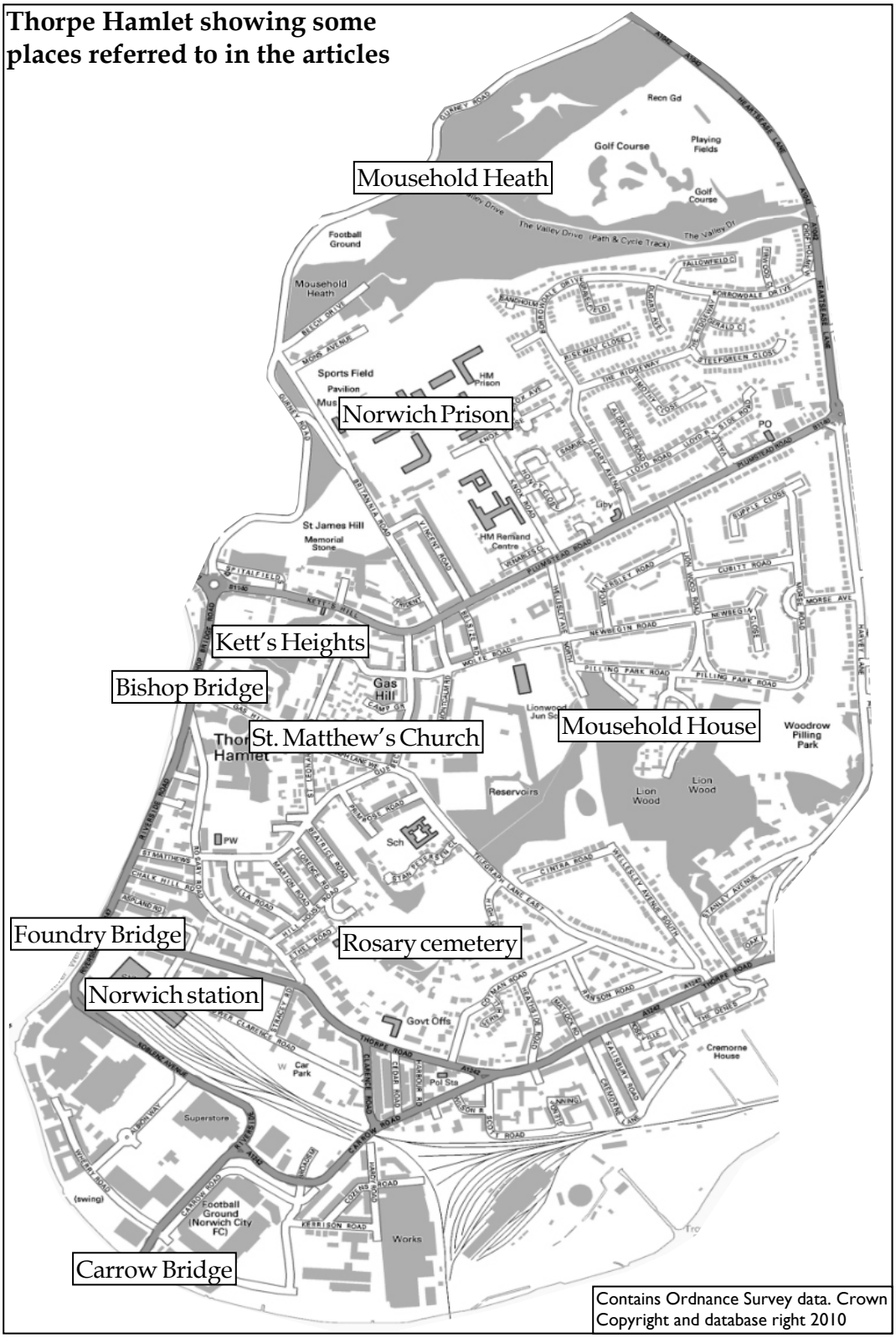
The date of the event in the article is in brackets after the title.

Map of Thorpe Hamlet showing some places referred to in the articles
Foreword by Derek James 1
1. The Yacht Station [1934] 3
2. Aero Club - visit of Amy Johnson [1931] 4
3. First train to Great Yarmouth [1844] 5
4. Funeral of Edith Cavell [1919] 6
5. The Prince of Wales and Carrow Bridge [1923] 7
6. Smugglers on Mousehold [1791] 8
7. Visit of Elizabeth I [1578] 9
8. Plumstead Road Library [1939] 10
9. The crash of the R101 [1930] 11
10. The Rosary Cemetery - funeral of Anne Drummond [1821] 12
11. The Norwich Electric Tramways Company [1935] 13
12. The death of the Earl of Surrey [1547] 14
13. The Water Tower in Thorpe Hamlet [1931] 15
14. St. William of Norwich [1144] 16
15. Steam packet explosion at Foundry Bridge [1817] 17
16. Norwich City Football Club - The Nest [1935] 18
17. Woodrow Pilling Park [1929] 19
18. Hangings at Norwich Prison [1841- 1951] 20
19. Kett's Rebellion [1549] 21
20. Lollards' Pit [1428] 22
21. The visit of King Edward VI [1909] 23
22. The bus depot in Cremorne Rd [1931] 24
23. Death of Isaac Bugg Coaks [1909] 25
24. Strong language in Riverside [1909] 26
25. The Big Freeze in 1926 27
26. Bishop Bridge [1923] 28
27. The Stuart School [1934] 29
28. Mousehold Heath [1886] 30
29. Sea Cadet Corps [1912] 31
30. The Norwich to Great Yarmouth stagecoach service [1817] 32
31. Duelling on Mousehold Heath [1802] 33
32. Charles Green, Balloonist [1804] 34
33. Introduction of the postcode [1957] 35
34. Cotman's ride [1841] 36
35. Louis Marchesi [1954] 37
36. The North Wind will blow and we shall have snow... [1861/62] 38
37. The dedication of St. Matthew's Church, Thorpe Hamlet in 1845 39

38. Hamlet Centre Trust [1973] 40
39. Air raids in Thorpe Hamlet [1942] 41
40. Rubbish disposal [1920s] 42
41. Cremorne Gardens [1886] 43
42. The death of John Berney Ladbrooke [1879] 44
43. The opening of the new prison [1887] 45
44. The Port of Norwich [1833] 46
45. Pugilistic fights in Thorpe Hamlet [1820] 47
46. Crossing the Wensum [1845] 48
47. Pure and Brilliant Gas [1831] 49
48. New Year's Resolution [2009] 50
49. Chalk workings [1963] 51
50. Thorpe Hamlet - a place of leisure [1886] 52
51. The Jonathan Scott Hall [1901] 53
52. The 1921 Miners' Strike 54
53. Barrack Street and Barrack Road [1821/27] 55
54. There's the wind on the heath [1803/55] 56
55. Victorian recycling at Ketts Hill [1898] 57
56. Thorpe Station mystery [1846] 58
57. Street names and St. Leonard's Priory [1101] 59
58. War memorials [1914, 1945] 60
59. The first telephone in Thorpe Hamlet [1880] 61
60. Last orders? [1974] 62
61. Gas explosion at Ketts Hill [1972] 63
62. What's in a name? [1852] 64
63. The new Thorpe Railway Station 1886 65
64. The Peasants' Revolt [1381] 66
65. The changing face of Thorpe Hamlet in the 19th Century 67
66. Heritage Open Days [2010] 68
67. Gas Hill and the car [1901] 69
68. We'll Eat Again [1939-45] 70
69. Christmas past - Christmas present [2010] 71
70. Looking forward to the New Year [2011] 72
71. Reading the Riot Act [1826] 73
72. What's in your garden? [various dates] 74
73. Windmills [1795] 75
74. Archery in Thorpe Hamlet [1886] 76
75. The visit of the Chief Scout Sir Robert Baden-Powell [1926] 77
76. Murder in Rosary Road [1916] 78
77. The floods of 1912 79
78. The Thorpe railway crash of 1874 80
79. Petch's Corner [19/20th century] 81
80. A soldier's life [1890] 82

81. Walls [various dates] 83
82. New Year's Resolution (2012) 84
83. Norwich Prison [1887 and after] 85
84. Gateway to the world [1934 and after] 86
85. Upstairs, Downstairs in Thorpe Hamlet [1821] 87
86. The Penny Black and Twopenny Blue [1840] 88
87. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee [2012] 89
88. Barnum and Bailey [1899] 90
89. The Marion Day Centre [1985] 91
90. Thorpe Hamlet's part in the Napoleonic Wars [1808] 92
91. Thorpe Hamlet power station [1926] 93
92. "We will remember them" [2012] 94
93. Christmas Crackers [1847] 95
94. The UNESCO literary award and Thorpe Hamlet [2012] 96
95. New Year's resolution (2013) 97
96. The Vikings [1004] 98
97. General Sir Robert Harvey [1785-1860] 99
98. Horses [various] 100
99. Proposed lock near the Cow Tower [1837] 101
100. A green history book of Norwich [19th/20th centuries] 102
101. Natural history [20th century] 103
102. Changes in the river Wensum [1813] 104
103. Mousehold Heath and the military [1886] 105
104. Past residents of Thorpe Hamlet [19th/20th centuries] 106
105. Commemorating World War I [1914-18] 107
106. Postal services in World War I and now [1914-18] 108
107. Why does Thorpe Hamlet finish at Harvey Lane? [1403] 109
108. World War II civilian casualties [1939-45] 110

Thorpe Hamlet showing some places referred to in the articles



Foreword

by Derek James

A wife, a mother, a nurse, a health visitor, a city guide, historian, a writer and now an author. June Marriage has achieved so much in her lifetime. This wonderful book telling the story of a village within a city is a testament to her many talents. From air raids and archery to riots and rebellions, this is all a proud parish like no other.

Welcome to Thorpe Hamlet and what a story it has to tell. The fascinating book is made up from a collection of brilliant and thought-provoking articles written by June in recent years for the parish magazine. Now we all get the chance to read them, and they will interest people who have never stepped foot in Thorpe Hamlet or are ever likely to. She has proved she has a rare talent with words, a love of history, and has written a fabulous collection of stories about events and happenings over the centuries.

So who is June Marriage? Born in London in 1933. Her father was a soldier and as a result they were a family on the move. At the age of 14 she went to Chiswick Polytechnic and then became a nursery nurse at Twickenham where she lived in a small house with a large and extended family. Mostly male. At the age of 18 she returned to Hammersmith Hospital where she was born - this time as a student nurse and after qualifying she fell in love with Jim, a regular soldier, and they moved to Germany after getting married in the 1950s. June and Jim had a daughter Anne and son Michael. After leaving the Army he worked as a quantity surveyor at Cheltenham and June was a part-time nurse.

The family moved to Norwich in 1967 when Jim took up a post teaching surveying and building subjects at City College and moved to their home in Cintra Road where they still live. June continued nursing before becoming a health visitor for many years working in and around Norwich. She always had a thirst for knowledge, and she attended English and history courses at City College before graduating with honours with a BA in History at the UEA after being inspired by a talk from Baroness Hollis.

June and Jim also became Norwich Blue Badge Tourist Guides, telling the story of the Fine City to people from across this country and the world. Thorpe Hamlet has always had a special place in their hearts and they jumped at the chance of becoming members of the local history group with June volunteering to write monthly articles for the parish magazine.

The book is a collection of more than 100 intriguing and well written articles about parish life over the years. The chances are that even the most avid local historian

will discover something they didn't know - thanks to June. The idea to put them together and publish them as a book was a brainwave. This is one of the best local history books to appear in recent times and I hope it inspires other people to pick up a pen, or should I say click on a computer.

As for Thorpe Hamlet. Well, did you know....?

Sorry, you will have to buy this book you are reading. You won't regret it.

1. The Yacht Station

THIS MONTH IN 1934

In February 1934 a small part of Thorpe Norwich became the Norwich Yacht Station. This was the exotic name given by the City Council to the narrow strip of land between the river and Riverside Road, close to Foundry Bridge. Those expecting anything like Cowes on the Isle of Wight, Monte Carlo or Cannes would be disappointed, but the holiday makers in those early leisure craft that made their way from the river Yare up to the river Wensum, past the factories, industries and the sea going ships found themselves with beautiful views of Norwich Cathedral, over the sports ground and Pull's Ferry. Once off their boat they were in Thorpe Hamlet where they could catch a No. 21 Tram to Mousehold Heath or into the centre of Norwich. Now the Yacht Station is being redeveloped and we will still be able to mark the seasonal changes by counting the boats moored up - rather like seeing the first swallows and house martins.



Norwich Yacht Station in 1986 before redevelopment Photo : Philip Marriage

THIS MONTH IN 1953

Another February event that occurred, in 1953, was of national interest and which will be remembered by all of us of a certain age was the end of sweet rationing. Corner shop owners could stop cutting out with scissors small pieces from the Ration Book marked D and E. However did they count them up at the end of the week?

Published February 2005

2. Aero Club - visit of Amy Johnson

On Tuesday 17th March 1931, the eyes of many in Thorpe Hamlet were looking to the sky. By now the activities of the planes of the Norfolk and Norwich Aero Club at Heartsease had become almost a normal part of the sights and sounds of the area. But on this day there was to be a special visitor - the aviator, Amy Johnson and her De Haviland Gypsy Moth, 'Jason II'. The club had issued an invitation to the general public to witness the arrival. It shows how new this kind of event was when it was particularly requested that "all those who enter the Aerodrome will take great care not to get in the way of the in-coming planes".

Amy Johnson, at 27, was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia, taking 19 days. Four months after her visit to Norwich, she, with Jack Humphries, set the record for the England to Japan, and a year later she produced the record solo flight from England to Capetown. Like Ellen MacArthur today, Amy Johnson was feted for the pioneer that she was. The song 'Wonderful Amy' was written in honour of her.

That night, at the Annual Dinner of the Norfolk and Norwich Aero Club, Amy Johnson spoke in support of the Aerodrome. She also called for better guiding of aircraft around the country. She said "For people using cars on the road, you put up plenty of signs. The poor people up in the air have no help at all except to come down and ask their way. Then trouble arises, especially if in coming down we trample a field of corn".

This comment proved prophetic when, 10 years later on 5th January 1941, Amy Johnson, as a member of the Air Transport Auxiliary, was lost over the Thames estuary while ferrying an aircraft.

On 12th March 1933, a 30 m.p.h. speed limit was introduced for built up areas. On the next day, 13th March, a voluntary driving test was introduced. I wonder how many drivers decided to take it?

Published March 2005

3. First train to Great Yarmouth

The first through train between Norwich and Yarmouth ran on 12th April 1844 from Thorpe Station. On board was Major-General Pasley, the Board of Trade Inspector, the Bishop of Norwich and several directors. The Gala Opening was held later on 30th April with some 200 guests taking the train to Yarmouth, accompanied by the Howlett's brass band in the open seatless 3rd Class carriage next to the engine. How did the wind instrument players manage with all that smoke? The journey took fifty and a half minutes to Yarmouth and forty-four minutes back to Norwich.

Most large cities and towns in England wanted a rail link with London, as did many people in Norwich, but the Norwich to Yarmouth link was the vision of others who wanted an improved harbour at Yarmouth with a rail link crossing the country to Liverpool. Robert Stephenson, son of George Stephenson who had built the first railway between Stockton and Darlington, was the Engineer-in-Chief. The railway follows the river Yare, but at Thorpe St. Andrew it was necessary to dig a new channel for the river, which left the river at Thorpe Green as a back water.

At one time it was planned to have Norwich Station in Rose Lane, but the cost of an extra bridge over the Wensum made this too expensive, so it was located in Thorpe Hamlet instead, where there was also land available for further expansion.

23rd April 1968

Decimal coinage was introduced.

Published April 2005

4. Funeral of Edith Cavell

This month Thorpe Station is again the subject of this column, but this time for a very solemn occasion. On 15th May 1919, according to the Norfolk Chronicle, "a special train arrived bearing the mortal remains of one of the noblest English women ever, who gave her all for the benefit of others". Edith Cavell's body was returning to her native Norfolk to be reburied in the shadows of Norwich Cathedral.

Edith was born in Swardeston in 1865, where her father was rector. Educated in Peterborough and Norwich, she later became a governess in Brussels. Then, when almost 30 years old, she began training as a nurse at the London Hospital. After several nursing posts, she was invited to Brussels in 1906 to oversee nursing in the establishment of Monsieur Depage. By 1914 Edith was 'Directrice' of 3 hospitals. When the First World War broke out she was on holiday in Norwich, but immediately returned to Brussels. On 20th August 1914, Brussels, including Edith's hospitals, fell to the Germans. The German advance had been rapid and the expected flood of wounded did not happen. After the Battle of Mons, there was an increase in work, but the hospital and Edith became involved in a network of safe houses for soldiers trying to pass through the German Lines into neutral Holland. It was only a matter of time before the network, and Edith's part in it, was discovered. She was charged with "conducting soldiers to the enemy", an accusation she never denied. The court passed the sentence of "death by firing squad", which caused an international outcry, but to no avail. The execution took place on 12th October 1915, and she was buried at St. Gilles in Brussels. The news of the execution went around the world and Edith Cavell became an international figure.

In 1919, it was decided to bring her body home. Westminster Abbey was suggested as a burial place, but her family wanted her to return home to Norfolk. A full military funeral was arranged, with her body being brought across the channel to Dover, and then by train to London. A military cortege escorted the coffin on a gun carriage to Westminster Abbey for the first part of the burial service. Then the cortege reassembled for the journey to Liverpool Street Station, and then on by train to Norwich. At Thorpe Station the procession was escorted by 100 men from the Norfolk Regiment, the bands of the 2nd Norfolk Regiment and the Royal Scots. The coffin on the gun carriage was flanked by nurses. The procession passed 1000's of people who lined the route to the Erpingham Gate, where it was met by the Civil and Cathedral dignitaries. One of the pall bearers, Tunmore of Witton, Nr North Walsham, had met Edith Cavell in Brussels, and was one of the escapees.

Published May 2005

5. The Prince of Wales and Carrow Bridge

On 27th June 1923 David, the Prince of Wales, (later Edward, Duke of Windsor) made his first visit to Norwich since he was a child. He was greeted by the Lord Mayor, local dignitaries and a large crowd when he arrived at Thorpe Station. The Norfolk Regiment Territorials provided a Guard of Honour, and the British Legion Band the music. The local newspaper reporting on the visit described the Prince's attire which included one of his trademark grey check suits, a dark tie on this occasion and a bowler hat. He had come to Norwich as President of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Society who had a show in Eaton Park, but before attending this, he opened the new Carrow Bridge.

Here, he was presented with a golden key, and enjoyed a display of arches of water produced by the Carrow Works Fire Brigade. The sea scouts rowed under the bridge, shipping their oars in salute, which the prince acknowledged.

The bridge was the first Carrow Bridge on this site. The previous two bridges had been 175 yards further downstream than the present one, but the need for a new bridge to make the Port of Norwich more accessible to large ships gave Colmans the opportunity to move the road within their factory.



Carrow Bridge in 1934
Photo : George Plunkett

The work started in 1920. It was one of the many schemes of the City to use the unemployed. These also included laying out many of our city parks.

Carrow Bridge is a single-leaf bascule bridge which is seldom raised these days, but when it was first built it enabled sea-going ships into the river up to Foundry Bridge, bringing in timber, grain and coal. It normally took three minutes to raise, but it could in very extreme temperature take longer, and at times even get stuck. Any journey that passed over Carrow Bridge could become delayed by the shipping movements, with the bridge taking three minutes to go up, followed by the seemingly slow passage of the ships, and then a further three minutes to lower the bridge. The boats' progress may have looked romantic, but it would not have felt that way if you were late.

Published June 2005

6. Smugglers on Mousehold

In Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The Smuggler's Song', there is the warning:

If you wake at midnight, and hear horses feet
Don't go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street.
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie
Watch the wall, my darling, while the 'Gentlemen' go by.

The 'Gentlemen' were to be found not only smuggling on the coast or in far away Cornwall. They were here on Mousehold Heath or were coming up by the rivers Yare and Wensum into Norwich. In July 1791, 312 gallons of spirits, 78 lbs of tea and 1100 lbs of tobacco were seized by Norwich Excise men on Mousehold Heath. The heath's uneven ground with hollows and pathways made a convenient temporary hiding place for goods, before they were taken into Norwich for sale or to be sent further afield. The amount of space needed to conceal so much material gives some idea of how wild the heath was in the 1700s. Smuggling was no game and the smugglers no gentlemen; they were prepared to fight for their contraband goods. Shots were often fired and men were killed. The Excise Officers relied on the support of Dragoons to assist them in their duties, some of whom may well have come from the Cavalry Barracks in Barrack Street. The Excise Officers preferred using Dragoons rather than the local militia, because they thought the militia might have local sympathies. After all, the poem goes:

Brandy for the Parson,
Baccy for the Clerk,
Laces for a Lady
Letters for a Spy

The Cavalry Regiments of the Dragoons generally only stayed in Norwich for two years at a time and were thought not to have such local loyalties. In 1784 Prime Minister Pitt lowered the rate of tax on tea, which made smuggling tea less lucrative. This might account for the small amount found in comparison to tobacco on Mousehold in July 1791. Even today alcohol and tobacco are still being smuggled, as I personally found out when my husband and I took my 14 year-old grandson with my husband on a coach day trip to Calais from Norwich. Picking passengers up as we went, the coach went to Calais via the Channel Tunnel. Our three-some went off to the town for a meal and then a stroll by the sea. On the return journey, the coach was pulled over by the British customs officers. The coach was thoroughly searched and the passengers questioned. After being questioned, some were so nervous they smoked so many cigarettes they set off the fire alarm in the Customs House. Cigarettes seemed to be the biggest haul of the day, with most people carrying far more than could be explained by 'for my own personal consumption'. No longer 'gentlemen' on Mousehold Heath, but respectable looking old age pensioner smugglers. They were no longer in danger of being shot - the only dangers were to those who smoked the cigarettes. *Published July 2005*

7. Visit of Elizabeth I

Each Summer Queen Elizabeth I liked to leave London, visit parts of her Realm and show herself to her subjects. These visits were called 'Progresses'. It was said she could "draw the hearts of the people after her wheresoever she travel". With her went lords and ladies, chaplains, ministers, cooks, pages, maids, grooms and every other kind of servant, all accompanied by an immense baggage train of 200 to 300 wagons and many horses.

So it must have been with some trepidation that in 1578 Norwich heard that the summer's Progress was coming to their city. Court officials visited places on route to plan accommodation and to organise entertainment. Before the visit Norwich undertook major works to clean up the City, especially around the City Gates and the river Wensum. Citizens were ordered to clean and plaster their houses (by the end of July), though only "towards the street side". Butchers had to clean up after slaughtering their beasts, cows were only to be milked outside the city walls, and privies were not to be emptied in the river

Extra food was ordered to cater for the anticipated large number of people. New clothes were bought, streets were decorated, and speeches written, all to be ready for the Queen's entrance to the city on Saturday 16th August 1578. There was hunting in New Costessey, and music by the Norwich Waites.

It was on Wednesday 22nd August that the entertainment brought the Queen to Thorpe Hamlet. She came with the French envoys and the Earl of Surrey for a dinner at Surrey House, which was located on top of what is now known as Gas Hill.

The house had been built by the son of the 3rd Duke of Norfolk, and had been used by Kett in 1549 as part of his camp. It must have been a pleasant meal because she did not return over the river until it was dark. Those waiting to provide a show had formed up between "my Lord Surrey's backdore" and the river. With everything ready they had "hovered on the water for three long hours". Eventually they gave up and went home, with I should think, much disappointment.

Two days later the Queen left Norwich. It was an event that must have been talked about for many years. It was also blamed for an outbreak of the plague that killed about 5,000 people during the course of 1579.

Published August 2005

8. Plumstead Road Library

On 16th September 1938 a distinguished company made its way to the corner of Hilary Road and Plumstead Road for the opening of a new library. With the Lord Mayor Charles Watling and the Lady Mayoress were Mr R. H. Mottram, the Misses Ethel and Helen Colman, and librarians from King's Lynn, Colchester, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. The opening ceremony was performed by Mr Berwick Sayers, President of the Library Association, who in his address said "Every new library established is a new centre of light and information for its people", but he also said "Penny Dreadfuls need not be harmful".



Plumstead Road library
Photo : John Trevelyan

The Lord Mayor, Charles Watling, addressed the audience with words which are as true today as they were then; "Certain sections of the press deal out standardised opinions for the millions, and so people fill with lumber what should be the richest chamber in the body. We hope that borrowers will read the best literature; not that they will absorb their opinions but that they will create for themselves new original thoughts". Norwich was the first place to have a public library after Parliament passed the Public Library Act. The popularity of the new library in Thorpe Hamlet is shown by the fact that in the first eleven days 3,519 books were loaned out with a daily average of 320 books. This was almost half of the library stock. The most popular books taken out were fiction, 1,529 books, children's books, then called 'Juvenile', 1,176 books, 78 books on useful arts, probably gardening and DIY, 63 books on Fine Arts and then 10 on Philosophy.

The library is still there, "a centre of light and information", but in ways that those who met on that last peaceful September before the war could not have imagined. Now there are eight computers, so up-to-date information can be gathered world-wide, and the ability to request books that are not on the library shelves from other collections is still there. The innovations of large print books and audio tapes have made the library more accessible to a wider audience. The recent renovation of the library has added what would have been seen in its early days as luxury, for example, armchairs alongside the chairs and tables used for study. On one of the tables are 4 volumes of copies of photos of old Thorpe Hamlet produced by the group who produced the book 'Memories of Thorpe Hamlet'. All this was almost lost 17 years ago when there were plans for closure, and then again 3 years ago. Safe for now, with fresh paint and a smart children's section, long may it continue.

Published September 2005

9. The crash of the R101

On the morning of Sunday 5th October 1930, the airship R101 crashed into a hillside near Bauvais in Northern France. Out of the 54 passengers and crew 48 died. This inaugural flight of what was hoped to be the start of regular flights to India via Egypt lasted less than 8 hours. The news which flashed around the world had special resonance in Norwich for the workers of Boulton and Paul's at the Riverside Works in Thorpe Hamlet, for it was here that the stainless steel main airframe of the R101 was designed and made. Boulton and Paul had done pioneering work in this form of construction and had won the contract for this large prestigious work. The frame consisted of over six miles of tubing, and triangular longitudinal girders of thin gauge stainless steel up to 45 feet in length.

On that autumnal morning in 1930, the huge structure lay twisted, distorted and crumpled, and it was described in one newspaper as being like "the skeleton of a prehistoric monster".

The French gave full honours to the bodies recovered from the crash site. They were 'laid in state' in the chapel of the town hall of Beauvois and guarded by a regiment of Spahis in their vivid uniforms. A British destroyer was sent to bring the bodies home. They included Lord Thomson, the Air Minister, Air Vice Marshall Sir Sefton Brancker and one Norwich man, Mr E. G. Rudd.

On 10th October memorial services were held simultaneously at St. Paul's Cathedral and Norwich Cathedral. Two hundred employees of Boulton and Paul, representing all departments, joined the Lord Mayor and civic dignitaries at Norwich. The service from St. Paul's was broadcast to the nation. The burials took place at Cardington in Bedfordshire, the home base of the airship.

Three days after the crash, Sir Robert Hadfield said he was "Glad to report that so far no fault of any kind had been found in British material. From the examination I made I should say the materials are not to blame". This must have gone some way to relieve the gloom that had descended on the Riverside Works.

This tragedy, together with the later Hindenburg explosion in the U.S.A. in 1937 ended the airship era.

The site of Boulton and Paul's Riverside Works is now covered with car parks, shops and places of leisure and entertainment.

Published October 2005

10. The Rosary Cemetery - funeral of Anne Drummond

The first burial in the Rosary Cemetery took place on 16th November 1821. It was the second funeral of Ann Drummond, the wife of the Rev. Thomas Drummond, the founder of the Rosary Cemetery. Ann had died in 1819, and was first buried in the grounds of the Octagon Chapel in Colegate, where they both worshipped. It was after Ann's death that the Rev. Thomas Drummond bought 5 acres of ground, which is thought to have been used as a market garden where roses were grown, hence the name. The cemetery became the first non-denominational cemetery in the country. It was to fulfil a need felt by the non-conformist sects to have a burial place where their own religious rites could be observed at funerals.



Tomb in the Rosary
Photo : John Trevelyan

Despite the overcrowded condition of the city churchyards and the risk of grave robbers, the cemetery was not greatly used at first. The site was terraced and laid out with avenues of trees, and a chapel was built but it was not until 1850 that 100 burials a year became the norm. Amongst those buried were the good and great of Norwich, such as Jeremiah James Colman of Colman's Mustard fame, George White, shoe manufacturer, many other industrialists, soldiers, and non-conformist ministers.

Some of these personalities and the history of the cemetery can now be read about in a booklet produced by the Friends of the Rosary. Locally it is on sale at Tracey's Newsagent's, formerly "Paul's", in Rosary Road. The Friends are also erecting signposts in the cemetery to help people find some of the graves of those mentioned in the booklet. Drummond's vision of a "place of decent interment" has left Thorpe Hamlet a legacy of Norwich history written in stone. It is also an area of interest to naturalists with its varied plant, bird and animal life. The Friends of the Rosary are a group of people whose affection for the cemetery takes many forms, there are those who do actual physical work in maintaining grave sites, some who take an interest in the historical side, and some who give guided tours around the cemetery. Others show their support by their membership. The city cares for footpaths. trees and general maintenance in what we call the 'old part', but their main work is concentrated on the 'new' and still used part of the cemetery.

Published November 2005

11. The Norwich Electric Tramways Company

On the night of 10th December 1935, the last tram in Norwich trundled its way back to the Silver Road depot. The Norwich Electric Tramways Company was set up in 1897 and the trams were the first in the eastern counties to be powered by electricity. It took only 3 years to widen roads, set up electrical sub-stations, lay tram lines, and overhead cables and posts. Staff were trained and trams purchased and the services started on 30th July 1900. By 5th August the first tram came to Thorpe Hamlet going to Mousehold via Riverside. Another line went as far as the 'Redan' public house which is now a Canton Chinese restaurant on Thorpe Road.

These two routes not only served Thorpe station, but enabled the people from the city centre to come into the leafy suburbs of Thorpe Hamlet and the open spaces of Mousehold. The Redan stop was very near the 'Cremorne Gardens' pub and pleasure ground, reached after passing Victorian villas along Thorpe Road. In the summer the trams went on to Mousehold Heath as far as a thatched drinking fountain. Mousehold was far more of an open space at the beginning of the 20th century and had a bandstand and a pavilion.



Tram coming up Thorpe Road

The journey down from Mousehold via Gurney Road to Riverside on the open top of the tram must have been very exciting, as also would have been coming down the open stairs, especially in a long skirt.

The Rule Book for conductors gives us a flavour of the age.

Rule 32: "When a passenger is getting on or off the car, the Conductor must not give the signal to start until he or she is safely on or off, and if a lady, he must see her dress is perfectly clear before giving the signal to start."

Rule 34: "Conductors must be ready at all times to give a hand to persons needing their assistance in getting on or off the car."

As Norwich expanded after World War I, the new estates were serviced by new more flexible omnibuses. It was only a matter of time before the demise of the tram, but they had many champions. The Tramways Company was taken over by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company in 1933 and the trams were taken out of service on 10th December 1935.

Published December 2005

12. The death of the Earl of Surrey

In January 1547, those in the house called Mount Surrey, near the top of what is now Gas Hill, heard the news that the Earl of Surrey had been beheaded. It had not been unexpected, but the court politics of Henry VIII could be uncertain, and there was always a slim chance that the execution order could be revoked. So what had this property in Thorpe Hamlet to do with the eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk? The Dukes of Norfolk owned many places in Norwich, with property in Surrey Street, Duke Street and King Street. In 1538, at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the King granted the Duke the site of St. Leonard's Priory.

When Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, decided to build there, outside the city wall and the crowded streets within, he built a house with beautiful views which, at the time was reported to be "revealing a daring aesthetic dimension". In fact it was parts of the features of this house which led to the fall of the Earl. Known as a poet and a man of "febril impatience", he aspired to high office which he felt was his birth-right.

The plans for Mount Surrey were modern for its time with military crenellations intended to 'overawe' the city. Other notable features were a bell tower and a fortress-like gateway. He also altered the Howard heraldic shield to make him appear to have stronger royal ties than he was entitled to. The glass in the Mount Surrey windows and the embroideries in the house were decorated with this 'incorrect' shield and added to the evidence against him.

An ailing Henry VIII had the Duke of Norfolk and his son the Earl of Surrey arrested and sent for trial. Found guilty, both men were sentenced to death. The Earl was executed on 19th January, aged thirty. Henry VIII died on 28th January and the Duke of Norfolk was reprieved but remained in the Tower of London. After the Earl's execution the house and its contents were taken by the Earl of Hertford and others.

The house was used by Robert Kett during his Rebellion in 1549, and was also visited by Elizabeth I, but now nothing is known to be remaining on the site.

Published January 2006

13. The Water Tower in Thorpe Hamlet

One of the most prominent land marks in Thorpe Hamlet is the water tower in Telegraph Lane, so visible from the city, but almost hidden within the parish. It was at a meeting of the Norwich City Council on 6th February 1931 that the need for a water tower was discussed.

Clean water supply is taken for granted now, but in the history of Norwich, it is a comparatively recent event. The water for Norwich was taken from the Cockey (a small stream), wells and the River Wensum. The river was also used by industry and for drainage of all kinds, making it a very polluted source of water. The public pumps were also often contaminated. The water from the pump still in position at the bottom of the St. John Maddermarket burial ground was once said to be pure essence of graveyard. Supplying water to Thorpe Hamlet was difficult, especially to areas such as Mousehold Heath and the top of the hill. There were some ponds on the Heath, but wells were the main source of water supply. Not only humans needed water, but also livestock and horses, the main form of transport.

In the 1800s progress was made in providing both a clean water supply and a hygienic sewage system, and reservoirs were being built. With the expansion of housing into Thorpe Hamlet and the beginning of Norwich Prison in 1888, a first reservoir to hold 500,000 gallons was built in the parish in 1889, and two further reservoirs were added in 1898 and 1902.

It was the proposal to build the Pilling Park Estate that made it necessary to construct a water tower which could maintain the required water pressure to such 'modern' houses with their greater demand on the water supply. In the 1930s many yards inside the city still had shared pumps and shared toilet blocks. The weekly bath night entailed pulling the metal bath down from its hook on the wall and filling it and emptying it with buckets. For many women, having a tap in the kitchen meant the end of the need to go to the communal pump. Gossip and feuding around the pump may have made life colourful, but it was hard work. An internal flushing toilet was an amenity appreciated by the whole family.

In 1932 therefore the construction of the reinforced concrete water tower began. It is 80 feet high and built to hold 284,400 gallons of water. It was designed by Mr J.C. Hughes and constructed by J. Youngs and Son. It looks old-fashioned now compared with the newer wine-glass shaped water towers, but it is still an elegant feature of the Norwich skyline. It is now shining white, but what was it like during World War II? Was it camouflaged? I've heard reports that a gun was mounted on it or was it used for 'fire-watching'?

Published February 2006

14. St. William of Norwich

On 24th March 1144, which was a Good Friday, a young boy was found murdered on Mousehold Heath. He was William, a 14 year-old tanner's apprentice. Murders in those days were investigated by the church, the civic authorities of the city and the King, unlike today's murders which are investigated by a police force. The news of the crime would probably have died down and William would have been treated as a tragic victim of a murder, but superstition, rumour and prejudice roused the population, and the story was manipulated by various factions.

Soon stories of heavenly signs, and his uncorrupted body added to the fervour. Very early on suspicion fell on the Jewish community in the city. The connection with the Jewish Festival and Good Friday started stories in England of ritual killings that became known as the Blood Libel.

Here was a heady mixture of conspiracy and religious enthusiasm for a martyr and possibly a saint. William's body was taken to Norwich Cathedral and buried near the high altar. A monk at the cathedral, Thomas of Monmouth, wrote the history of St. William sometime after William's death. The burial place of a saint would bring pilgrims to worship at the shrine.

Soon pilgrims began to arrive, and in fact it was reported that so many pilgrims came that they disturbed the monks at their religious duties. William's body was once again reburied, this time in a side chapel in the cathedral. A number of miracles were reported, helping to reinforce William's saintly status, but the cult of St. William was not to last.

His burial place is now unknown, but he is still commemorated by St. William's Way, the road which leads out of Thorpe Hamlet, and paintings of him are also to be seen on rood screens in the churches at Loddon, Eye, and Worstead. On Mousehold Heath, near the football ground next to Mousehold Lane, are foundations of the chapel built by Bishop Turbe in 1168 to mark the place where William's body was found.

When the Playhouse Theatre in George Street in Norwich was opened, a play was commissioned from Arnold Wesker to celebrate the first night. He called it 'Blood Libel', a play which tells the story of William of Norwich.

If you wish to read more about William, a book called 'A Saint at Stake' by M. D. Anderson is available at Plumstead Road Library.

Published March 2006

15. Steam packet explosion at Foundry Bridge

The age of steam came to Norfolk in many forms, among which were the boats first called steam barges, but later known as steam packets. These appeared on the river Yare around 1813. Steam was used to drive various forms of propulsion, including shovel type paddles on an axle - the forerunner of the paddle steamer. A vessel that could go from Great Yarmouth to Norwich at about five miles an hour and not be at the whim of the wind was welcomed by some, if not by the wherrymen. The boats, belching smoke from tall funnels and making curious noises must have made a strange sight in the quiet countryside along the Yare.

Later it became a popular passenger service, but on Good Friday, 4th April 1817, a terrible explosion occurred on Wright's Norwich and Yarmouth steam packet. The boat had just started from Foundry Bridge, when the boiler exploded killing 9 of the 22 people on board; 5 men including the captain, 3 women and 1 child. Six women were injured and conveyed to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, where 1 woman later died; 7 other passengers escaped unscathed. The newspaper report "that every possible assistance was given to the survivors, and amongst the most active of the helpers was Mr Aggs, opposite whose premises this shocking and deplorable event happened".

Newspapers of the day did not dwell on graphic description but wrote "that we will not harrow up the feelings of our readers further by giving details". Maybe the imagination of those living in 1817 didn't need 24 hour, up-to-the-minute coverage, but a public subscription raised £350 "for the relief of the sufferers". The readers of those days did not suffer from compassion fatigue either.



Foundry Bridge
Photo : John Trevelyan

At the inquest, engineers from London joined the local engineer, Mr Donkin. The control of the safety valve seemed to be the cause of the problem. With new legislation confidence returned to the service and a daily service was soon resumed. One suggestion that was not followed up was that a separate boat towed behind should carry the passengers, leaving on board the steam packet "only those passengers necessarily exposed to the violence of the steam" - in other words the crew. This is after all what happens on a train, and it was the Norwich to Great Yarmouth train service, which started in 1844, that was to become the main competitor to the steam packet passenger boats.

Published April 2006

16. Norwich City Football Club - The Nest

On 6th May 1935, the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary, Norwich City Football Club played their last game at The Nest in Rosary Road. The club had played there since 1st September 1908, but the site, on old chalk workings, had always been a tight squeeze. A retaining wall of concrete, 50 foot high, had been built behind the goal at one end to make the area safe. This virtual cliff face was topped by a row of terraced houses. The pitch was said to intimidate visiting teams, and be worth an extra goal to the home side. It was possibly this wall that inspired the line in the club's song "On the ball, City, never mind the danger". But there was a danger. In April 1922, a barrier on the top terrace gave way and 60 fans fell to the ground. Luckily there were no serious injuries. On another occasion, a corner of the pitch collapsed when an old chalk working gave way, and the club had to warn both sets of players to take particular care when venturing over the temporarily shored-up pitch, especially when taking a corner. In April 1935 there was a record attendance of 27,363. Fans came by foot, tram, train and over Pull's Ferry in the 1930s, and the roads around The Nest thronged with supporters. There were entrances to the terraces via Guelph and Malvern Roads.



Football match at The Nest
Picture published in the Eastern Daily Press and reproduced here courtesy of Archant

There were plans for an improved ground at The Nest, but space was always going to be limited. The Football Association were worried about the suitability of the ground for football in a higher division, and on 18th May 1935, the Club's Chairman Billy Hurrell said "there is a grave possibility of The Nest being declared unsuitable". A new ground had to be found. The Boulton and Paul Sport Headquarters on Carrow Road owned by Colmans was settled on. Some of the hardcore for the new stand was from The Nest and within 82 days the first game was played at Carrow Road on 31st August 1935, with an attendance of 29,779. It is almost impossible to believe that the necessary decisions, planning and construction could have taken place in such a short time. So unlike the new Wembley Stadium today.

A green plaque on the side of a house in Rosary Road commemorates the position of one of the entrances to The Nest football ground. The last match result at The Nest on 6th May 1935, in the 'Hospital Cup' was Norwich 0, Arsenal 1.

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17. Woodrow Pilling Park

In 1926 a Mrs Joseph Pilling wrote to Norwich Corporation intimating that she would like to make a gift to the city, in memory of her father Jeremiah Woodrow. She wished the gift to take the form of a "recreation and playing ground for young of both sexes, without any limit as to age", and with if possible a small piece for younger children. Over the next three years letters passed between the council officers and Mrs Pilling setting out the purchase of land and the design of the park, which was to be known as the Woodrow Pilling Park. A spinney and arable land covering 7.883 acres was purchased from Sir Charles Harvey of Rainsthorpe Hall for £2,000. The Council took this opportunity to widen Harvey Lane and offered £83 back to Mrs Pilling for the land lost to the Park. She declined this saying it could be spent on the work on the park. In fact she gave a further £3,000 for the layout of tennis courts, cricket ground and sports pavilion. The entrance to the park on Harvey Lane had brick pillars supporting an ironwork arch which proclaimed 'The Woodrow Pilling Park'. Captain Sandys-Winch designed the layout and men from the Council's scheme of work for the unemployed were used to do the work. I hope the men who worked on this programme during the Depression can look back with pride on the legacy they gave us, not only with Woodrow Pilling Park but also Eaton, Heigham, Wensum and Waterloo Parks.

So why did Mrs Joseph Pilling, who lived in Manchester, make this generous gift? Her father Jeremiah Woodrow was a native of Norwich and in 1826 had become a Freeman of the city as a hatter. In 1829 he left the city for Lancashire and eventually set up his company J. Woodrow and Sons, hat manufacturers, in Stockport. His daughter records that her father retained a great interest in Norwich and still had relatives here.



Woodrow Pilling Park
Photo : John Trevelyan

On 29th June 1929, Princess Mary, the sister of George V, came to officially open the park. Mrs Pilling, who was described as a 'lady of advanced age', joined the Mayor and the Civic Party and was presented to the Princess Mary. So, a hundred years after Jeremiah Woodrow, the hatter, left Norwich, a park was dedicated to his name, and both he and his daughter also gave their names to streets nearby.

Published June 2006

18. Hangings at Norwich Prison

A new prison opened on Plumstead Road in 1887. It was built by the government to replace the prisons in the Castle and the old City Gaol. The site of the old City Gaol was where the Catholic Cathedral now stands in Earlham Road.

The new prison built on Mousehold Heath stood in grim isolation, a feeling which has since been lost because of the houses which shelter it from the road. The heath has also changed its character with more trees and undergrowth than hitherto. When new, with its high walls, it was a place of imprisonment and execution, which must have given those who passed by a very uneasy feeling. It was here that George Watt came in 1898. Found guilty of the murder of his wife, and on 12th July, he was to be the first man hanged at the prison, This execution took place inside the prison, but only 31 years earlier in 1867, the last public hanging took place at the gates of Norwich Castle, and hundreds of people were there to witness it. For George Watt, there was only a small group outside the walls to hear the 9 o'clock prison bell to signal the sentence had been carried out.



Norwich Prison in 2003
Photo : Sheila Keith

Over the next 53 years, eleven more men were hanged at the prison. The last time, the hangman Mr Albert Pierrepoint visited Norwich Prison was on 19th July 1951. The day was more unusual because two men were to be executed - Alfred Reynolds and Dennis Moore. Both men had been condemned for the murders of their girl friends. So on that summer morning, the sound of the prison bell rang to send the message to those outside the walls for the last time. It may have been the last hanging in Norwich, but it was not the last in Great Britain. Even in the mid 1800s there had been calls for its abolition. In 1948, a 5-year trial period, when no hanging would be carried out, had been voted for by the House of Commons, but this was defeated by the House of Lords. The same thing happened to the 1956 Abolition Bill. In 1957 the Homicide Bill introduced degrees of murder. The last execution in Great Britain took place in 1964 and the death penalty was finally abolished in 1965. It was just under a hundred years from the time public executions had been carried out outside Norwich Castle, with people coming great distances to witness the spectacle, until the abolition of capital punishment.

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19. Kett's Rebellion

In August 1549 the final phase of Kett's Rebellion took place in Thorpe.

What had started on 6th July in Wymondham as a grievance about land enclosure had gathered momentum and had become serious enough to be called a rebellion. It was natural for any grievances which had been brought to Norwich to be sent to the King. As the numbers grew, a camp was set up on Thorpe Ridge overlooking the city. The base for the leader Robert Kett was Surrey House at the top of what is now known as Gas Hill. The camp must have covered a wide area to accommodate the reputedly 15,000 followers.

The camp has always been considered to have been orderly and well organised. Disputes within in the camp were settled and decisions made by representatives of the different groups which had come from all over Norfolk. The camp 'Court' sat under a tree called the Reformation Oak. While waiting for the King's answer, the camp had visitors from the City, including Mayor Thomas Codd and Matthew Parker, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, who preached in the camp.

Kett's '29 requests' arrived at Court, but there were other rebellions in the Kingdom and the only answer was that there would be a pardon for those who went home. Kett, convinced they were not guilty of any crime and needed no pardon, refused. This was the turning point. Relationships with the City changed and a Royal Army under the Earl of Northamptonshire entered the City on 31st July. Serious fighting occurred over the next few days and Northampton's troops suffered defeat. The City and rebels had a short period of relative calm before another Royal Army arrived. This time it was stronger and under the leadership of the Earl of Warwick, a seasoned soldier, with 12,000 battle-hardened troops. Between 24th and 26th August battles raged in Norwich. On the 26th Warwick received further reinforcements of 1,400 German mercenaries.

Was it these extra troops, the loss of men by Kett, or the wish to be home to loved ones, which, on the evening of 26th August, led to the rebels leaving the safety of the camp for their last battle at Dussingdale? 3,000 rebels died, Kett and his brother were captured and later hanged, Robert Kett at Norwich Castle and his brother at Wymondham.

Dussingdale is the name of a new estate in Thorpe, but the actual battle site is unknown, as is the actual burial place of those who died.

For 7 weeks Thorpe Hamlet was a vast camp for Kett's men; every part of the parish would have been used, but now only place names remain.

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20. Lollards' Pit

Just off Riverside is a short cul-de-sac called Lollards Road, which ends with a high wall. Why a road in Norwich should be named after the Lollards, a religious movement that began in the late 14th century and was suppressed in the early 15th century, is to be found in the history of the surrounding area. Lollardy was a dissenting movement before Luther or the Reformation. It questioned the state of the church of the time and criticised many of its practices such as fasting in Lent, use of images, bell ringing and the special roll of priests in confession and marriages. Followers also used the Bible translated into English by John Wyclif.

Punishments for those preaching or practising heretical ideas included imprisonment, flogging and public humiliation, but the severest sentence was for those who repented but lapsed again. The sentence for these heretics was death by fire. The charges were made and carried out by the church authorities.



List of martyrs on the memorial stone near Bishop Bridge
Photo: John Trevelyan

So it was on 13th September 1428 that three men, William White, a 70 year-old priest, John Waddon and Hugh Pye, were brought before the Bishop. They were charged, found guilty and sentenced to death by burning. The sentence was to be carried out outside the city walls on an area over Bishop's Bridge, which became known as Lollards' Pit, and possibly where Godfrey's car park now is. Although the trial had been carried out by the church in the Chapel of the Bishop's Palace, the city accounts show that it was also involved in the punishments. Payments were made "for two cart loads of wood bought in the market for burning William White heretic 4/8"; "To John Jekkes for carriage of the wood from the city to Bishop's Gate for burning William Waddon and Hugh Pye, heretics by agreement made with the said John 16d"; "To John Excetre for half a hundred faggots bought from him for punishing the said Lollards 18d"; "To Edmund Snetysham for 2 logs to which the said heretics were bound 6d". These three men were the first to walk down Bishopgate and over the bridge to suffer public execution by burning. Others followed and the last burning took place in 1558. The number of executions was not great, but few could be so steadfast in their faith to hold firm when there was such a penalty to pay. The Council and Supporters of the Protestant Alliance have placed a memorial stone to commemorate most of those that died in Lollards' Pit, on the grassy bank on the Thorpe Hamlet side of the river near Bishop Bridge.

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21. The visit of King Edward VII

The weather on Monday 25th October 1909 started cloudy, windy and cold, but the sun came out in time for King Edward VII to review the troops on Mousehold Heath. This, reputedly the first visit to Norwich by a reigning monarch since Charles II came in 1671, caused great excitement. The day opened with the massing of the Norfolk Territorial Force which numbered almost 3,000 men and a contingent of the Norfolk Veterans' Association. Many of the troops came into Norwich by train to Thorpe Station, as did the thousands of visitors from the county, and the station had never been busier. Rail staff from other areas were brought in to supplement the efforts of the local staff.

The heath was decorated with a pavilion, grandstands, a Triumphal Arch of greenery and Venetian masts carrying connecting lines of streamers. All this added to the colourful display of military bands and troops in their best uniforms. Even the Cyclist Corps, whose uniforms were rather dull, had bicycles with chrome plated parts to make them look smarter, and the Royal Field Artillery guns were pulled by horses. The King's path was lined with members of the Norfolk Veterans' Association, most of whom would have been men who had served in the Boer War, but some had even seen service in the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny.

The King reviewed the troops from an open Landau wearing full uniform and a plumed hat. He presented colours to various battalions. This was followed by a march past of all the troops and veterans, accompanied by the band playing 'The Boys of the Old Brigade'. After the King had left the heath he went to tea at the Colmans' home at Crown Point, where there were many other invited guests who needed a ticket to gain admittance. The thousands who flocked to the heath mixed with the troops after the celebration, and the end of the parade became rather disorganised. This might have been caused partly by the fact that some troops had been given an allowance to arrange their own meals.

Next day 'cinematograph photos' of the Royal Progression and the Presentation of Colours were shown at the Thatched Assembly Rooms. The King, in his short reign, had always showed an interest in Army Reform and the Army Medical Service. He died the following year, in 1910, and did not live to know that many of the men on parade that day were to die in the Great War that started five years later.

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22. The bus depot in Cremorne Road

In November 1931 Thorpe Hamlet became the bus centre of East Anglia. From their new offices in 79 Thorpe Road, a huge network of Eastern Counties Omnibus services covered the whole of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and parts of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire.

Formed by the amalgamation of old firms such as Tilling and British Automobile Traction Ltd, Ortona Motor Company of Cambridge, Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd of Ipswich, it inherited vehicles of various types which it tried to rationalise by adapting chassis and bodies. It also used a corporate livery of orange and cream. In 1933 it also took over the trams of Norwich Electric Traction.



Photo: John Trevelyan

In the 1930s the bus was for many villagers, as now, the only cheap way of travelling. The three railway stations in Norwich fed many parts of the countryside, but it was the bus that went where the trains could not, and the buses, unlike trams, did not need complicated wires and tramlines. With car ownership a fraction of what it is today, the bicycle, the train and the bus were the main means of transport for most people. During World War II, even those with cars were restricted by fuel rationing. Later Dr. Beeching decimated the railways and the bus was king. In 1947 the Transport Act established the British Transport Commission. Outwardly the Company showed no change except for the standardisation of vehicles and livery. In January 1969 the National Bus Company was formed. This was still the age when a bus had both a driver and a conductor - the age when the factories of Laurence Scott and Electromotors, and Boulton and Paul, disgorged masses of men on bicycles at the end of the working day. In 1985 major changes occurred, when the coaching division became Ambassador Travel and the Cambridge operations were separated from Norfolk. What remained was sold in 1987, resold to GRT Bus Group in 1994 and then to First Bus plc in 1995.

Thorpe had bit-by-bit lost its importance in the bus network. The Thorpe Headquarters, together with its depots in Cremorne Road, was also sold. Where once stood thriving workshops now stands housing and small business units. With the loss of local shops and the growth of supermarkets, many things have changed but buses still criss-cross the parish. With the advent of concessionary bus permits bus transport is now free throughout the county for those in the right age bracket.

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23. Death of Isaac Bugg Coaks

Isaac Coaks died on 30th December 1909 at his home 'Fernhill'. One of the grand houses of Thorpe Hamlet, 'Fernhill' was built by Coaks in 1860 in the Jacobean style. It stood in 3 acres of land with an Italianate sunken garden, and with glass houses for peaches and vines. Isaac Coaks was born Isaac Bugg in Brundall, the son of a carpenter/wheelwright, but changed his name to Coaks when his wife inherited from her uncle, whose surname was Coaks. Isaac did not follow his father's trade but became a partner in a firm of solicitors in Norwich. He later started his own firm. Amongst his clients was Sir Robert Harvey. When there was a run on the Hudson and Harvey Bank Sir Robert Harvey committed suicide, and Isaac Coaks was involved with winding up the estate. The firm of Coaks Solicitors continued in practice after this with varying degrees of success.

In Thorpe Hamlet, it is the sale of the 14 acres of the Hill House estate for which the family is remembered. Some land was sold to the School Board of Norwich for a new school on the site where the Marion Day Centre, the Hamlet Centre, and Ellacombe now stand. Other land was sold for housing and the roads were named after Coaks' six daughters: Ella, Beatrice, Marion, Florence, Ethel, and Primrose.



Photos: John Trevelyan

After Isaac died 'Fernhill' house remained empty until World War I when the military took possession and used it as a hospital. Many casualties from the war came to Norwich by train to St Andrew's Hospital and other small units around Norwich. You can only hope that the peace and beauty of the gardens and the house aided their recovery. After the war the house once more changed use, this time into a private hotel called 'Norfolk House'. The specification of the hotel gives some indication of its size; 17 bedrooms, 12 bathrooms, a dining hall, lounge and billiards room. It remained as an hotel until 1933. Some houses had been built on the site in the 1930s, and then in World War II the house was used for storing the possessions of those bombed out, and also as a warehouse for Harmer's stock because their factory had been destroyed. Once again the property was left and neglected; the house was finally demolished in 1961 and further development took place. Do parts of the gardens of the new houses now on the site still show signs of their Italianate past?

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24. Strong language in Riverside

By the time you read this magazine, some New Years' Resolutions will have been broken, some may last a little longer and there may be some which last a lifetime. One I wish could be made would be for people to stop swearing in public, or using what the television warnings call 'strong language'. Things were a little different in 1903, when Private Stephen Hastings was charged with using obscene language. It appears that on 25th January 1903, Private Hastings, along with other soldiers, was causing a disturbance by shouting in Riverside Road. When warned that Police Sergeant Rayner was nearby, Private Hastings 'used a disgusting expression'. An officer from his unit stationed at the Cavalry Barracks defended him saying he was just a recruit, but this did not impress the court. The chairman said that a man wearing his uniform ought to know better. Hastings was fined ten shillings with four shillings and sixpence costs, a large amount for a private soldier.



Riverside Road
Photo: John Trevelyan

I found this report in one of Neil Storey's books and wondered if this was an isolated incident. The 'crime' was likely to have been a common one considering the number of soldiers in the area. The Cavalry Barracks (later Nelson Barracks) in Barrack Street was a base for the Hussars, Lancers and Dragoons who used Mousehold Heath for cavalry training before the Royal Artillery took over. With the Headquarters of the Royal Norfolk Regiment at Britannia Barracks, the area was full of military personnel. With the natural pride that soldiers took in their own regiments, there was bound to be a certain amount of rivalry, and the number of public houses in Barrack Street, Riverside and the bottom of Ketts Hill would have been natural magnets for those off duty. Some of the public house names, now sadly lost, reflect the military nature of the area, such as the 'Light Horseman', the 'Horse Barracks', the 'Marquis of Granby' and the 'Lord Raglan'. Lord Raglan fought at Waterloo, where he was injured and lost an arm; later he served in the Crimean War.

In the 1930s Barrack Street was widened to make an Inner Link Road, and many public houses were swept away, including the 'Evening Gun', the 'Seven Stars', the 'Bird in Hand', the 'Duke of York' and the 'Robin Hood'. The Barracks were closed in 1963 after 171 years of use, leaving the Royal Norfolk Regiment to roam at will for a few more years before that too disappeared into the history books.

Published January 2007

25. The Big Freeze in 1926

In February 1926, our present day concerns over global warning would have never seemed possible. An icy wind from the continent swept into Eastern England and remained for two weeks, bringing the sharpest frosts since 1860 with temperatures of less than 8 degrees Fahrenheit (-12 degrees Centigrade). In Europe the cold weather had 100 trawlers ice-bound in the Baltic Sea and firefighters in the Netherlands were unable to put out a fire because the water froze in the hoses.

In Thorpe Hamlet the most startling effect of this severe weather was the freezing of the river Wensum. Other parts of the rivers and the Broads were also affected. On 26th February there was ice yacht racing on Hickling Broad. Football was played on the ice at Oulton Broad. The river Yare was also ice-bound. The Colman's steam tug 'The Mustard Pot', which is commemorated in the public house name and sign on the Thorpe Road, acted as an ice-breaker.

The Port of Norwich was an active and essential part of Norwich trade in the 1920s and the loss of the river to shipping was serious. Supplies for companies such as Colman's, Boulton and Paul, Read's Flour Mill, and the timber yards were all disrupted. Probably a more worrying problem with the cold weather was the supply of coal to power the Gas Works and for domestic purposes. Coal was delivered to wharves along the river banks such as Moy's Wharf and Raymond Coller's coal yards, and then delivered in sacks by horse and cart around the streets of Norwich. They must have been a welcome sight in that bitterly cold February. There was no long-term weather forecast in the 1920s so they just had to wait for signs of a thaw and warmer weather. Coal would have been the only source of heating in most homes and, in some where there was a kitchen range, for cooking as well. The Gas Works supplied most of the city's other needs with fuel for heating and cooking and in some cases lighting. Wherries were blocked in Norwich until the thaw, which could not come soon enough for the crews and owners. Wages and bonuses were often only paid for work done.

Eventually the thaw came and the river trade returned to normal. Another severe winter in 1962/63 caused disruption with heavy snow as well as frozen rivers. Global warming not only means warming but also climate change, so we may well see frozen rivers again.

Published February 2007

26. Bishop Bridge

On 2nd March 1923 Basil Cozens-Hardy, an antiquarian and solicitor, successfully moved the Archaeological Society's Council to join with others to watch over "the threatened destruction of ancient buildings in Norwich". This led to the formation of the Norwich Society, which still monitors and fights to preserve the historic fabric of the city.



Bishop Bridge
Photo: John Trevelyan

Plans to widen Bishop Bridge was one of the concerns which sparked these debates. The bridge once had a gate-house which had been removed in 1791. Until the first Carrow Bridge was built in 1810, Bishop Bridge and the bridge at Trowse were the last chances to cross the river between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. All other crossings had to be made by ferry. The need to widen the bridge for road traffic was not great as there was already a wooden bridge at Foundry Bridge and a new bridge had been built at Carrow in 1923. Wherrymen would have been pleased to see a change because although the wherry trade was in decline, Bishop Bridge had always been a difficult bridge to get under. Loaded wherries, providing the tide was favourable, could get under the bridge, but on the return journey, unloaded, they rode higher in the water, and often had to take people on board to weigh the boat down to get back under.

Bishop Bridge, one of the nicest ways of walking into the city from Thorpe Hamlet, has been involved in so much of our history. As you walk over the bridge think of all those who have passed this way before. It might be on the line of the Roman road which went through Thorpe Hamlet on its way to Brundall. Certainly Kett's rebels fought on the bridge, and martyrs crossed it on their way to Lollards' Pit, carrying the faggots for the fires in which they would be burned at the stake. And did the Earl of Surrey bring his father, the Duke of Norfolk, over the bridge to see his house being built on top of the hill, now called Gas Hill? Queen Elizabeth I, rode over the bridge as did some of the Mayors' Processions, before the Reformation, to visit St. William's Chapel on Mousehold.

Published March 2007

27. The Stuart School

In April 1934, the Lord Mayor Mr F. C. Jex opened the new Girls' Senior School in Telegraph Lane. He was welcomed to the school by the Head Girl, Stella Kay; the pupils performed the dramatic poem 'Green Cap'; a group of young violinists played and a minuet was danced. After the speeches and entertainment the school choir ended the ceremony with 'O son of man'.

Norwich was one, if not the first, to implement the recommendations of the second Hadow Report of 1933. One recommendation was that the school should provide an "open air environment" affording "scope for experiment". The school was certainly that, situated near the top of Norwich's highest spot, with light and airy classrooms. So unlike the Victorian schools with high ceilings and windows, and asphalt playgrounds. The Stuart School, as it was to be called, had all the modern facilities for the education of girls, with classrooms for 'domestic science' which included cookery, laundry, sewing and 'elementary hygiene'. There was also a medical room for the use of visiting doctors and nurses. The nurse was more often referred to as 'Nitty Nora', because of the periodic hair inspections. Also attached to the school was the Infant Welfare Clinic and one and a half acres of ground to be used as a playing field. Little did those on that April day think that less than six years later some of the ground would be used as air-raid shelters.



The former Stuart School
Photo : John Trevelyan

The new school was called the 'Stuart School' after James Stuart who had died in 1913. Born in Scotland in 1843 he attended Trinity College Cambridge and later became a Professor at Cambridge. In 1884 he became a Member of Parliament, and remained so until 1898, when he was appointed as a Director of J and J Colman Ltd. As well as working for the firm, he became a member of the family when he married Laura Colman in 1890. In his obituary in the Carrow Magazine, there was much praise and affection for him, and particularly for his work for women's rights. I am sure he would have been pleased that a Girls' School was named after him. The school name has now gone, but we still have dedicated to his memory the small 'Stuart Gardens' in Recorder Road, just over the river from Thorpe Station. The 'Crome School' for boys which was next to the 'Stuart School' has now gone, but the Stuart School building remains with the word 'Girls' still built into the fabric. At the moment it is called the 'Thorpe Hamlet First School' but soon there will be another name change, this time to 'Lion Wood Infants'.

Published April 2007

28. Mousehold Heath

Thorpe Hamlet is fortunate in being such a green parish. The river is our boundary on the west and south, Lion Wood and Pilling Park are in the centre, and there are green areas not used for recreation such as the Rosary Cemetery and the area around the Water Tower. This makes the parish not only good for us, but also the wild life, from the swans and ducks on the river and the 40 species of birds seen in the Rosary Cemetery. The trees and plants make homes for the birds and also provide food for the butterflies, ladybirds etc.



Mousehold Heath
Photo : John Trevelyan

On 12th May 1886, 184 acres of Mousehold Heath were passed to the City. The Mayor of Norwich, Mr John Gurney, officially declared the Heath open as a recreation ground for the City in perpetuity. The declaration was made beside the road that runs through the Heath and is now called Gurney Road. The occasion was the final act in the history of defining the area of Mousehold Heath, which over the centuries had been much larger and often encroached upon and enclosed. As late as 1801, one thousand acres were enclosed by Act of Parliament for Sprowston and Thorpe. Further encroachment was made by Norwich Prison and Britannia Barracks before the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral entered into negotiation with the Corporation in 1886 for the transfer of their rights and interests in Mousehold to the City. It was a slow process, but eventually it was settled and Mousehold's future as an open space was ensured. It now has two football pitches, a pitch and putt course, a bandstand and a Pavilion designed in a Swiss style. The Heath was always a place of activities - smuggling, bare knuckle prize fighting, duels, as sheep runs and also for excavating brick clay and gravel. George Burrow wrote about it and the Gypsies who camped there. The Norwich School of Painters painted it and the Cavalry from the Barracks in Barrack Street used to practise their skills and train their horses there.

In May 1947 the War Office proposed to take over 150 acres as a battle training ground. Luckily there were sufficient protests for the heath to be protected. Today the Heath is still a wild uncultivated place, but it needs preserving and here is the rub. Postcards of the Heath show it as a vast open space with very few trees, but it has been wooded in the past. The space and borders are secure, but is it an open heath or a wood? Maybe global warming will decide for us.

Published May 2007

29. Sea Cadet Corps

On 24th June 1912 the 78-foot Lowestoft trawler 'Elsie' was renamed 'Lord Nelson' and commissioned for the Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Navy League. The civic ceremony was attended by Admiral of the Fleet Sir Gerald Noel and the Countess of Leicester. A special berth had been prepared between Pull's Ferry and Bishop Bridge next to the Norwich School playing fields. Crowds watched from both banks as the 21 young boys became the first crew. For the next 25 years the two-masted boat, together with a 26ft cutter, gave training opportunities in seamanship for boys with the Navy League, which had strong connections with the Royal Navy. A walk down to Foundry Bridge would give the cadets a taste of the mercantile side of sea faring in the Port of Norwich. In 1937 the 'Lord Nelson' was full of rot and another headquarters was needed. For a time it looked as if the boys would be land-based, but a former paddle steamer which had plied between Southampton and the Isle of Wight became 'Lord Nelson II'. Having no masts for drills aloft, the mast from the first 'Lord Nelson' was erected on the playing field and remained there as a landmark until 1967. In 1942 the Navy League Sea Cadet Corps organisation changed its name to the Sea Cadet Corps. In 1946 there was again a need for another boat, and the Royal Navy gave the Corps, on loan, Motor Torpedo Boat 740, 'Lord Nelson III'. Being too big to pass under Foundry Bridge, a new berth was found next to the bank where the Hotel Nelson now stands.

'Lord Nelson III' lasted 14 years before dry rot and leaks meant that another replacement was needed. The Royal Navy once again gave their support. This time the ML 196, a boat with an eventful wartime career, which included a supporting role during D-Day, became the 'Lord Nelson IV'. In 1963, the hotel site was re-developed and a new berth had to be found. Eventually, in 1965, a berth was found on the railway side of the river. In 1977 the Cork Sands Lightship was towed into Norwich to become 'Lord Nelson V'. This time the Sea Cadets and their supporters themselves had to raise the funds for its purchase.

The lightship lasted until the late 1990s when once again a replacement was needed. A former Swedish patrol boat called the 'Vale' reached Norwich on 1st September 2004, to become 'Lord Nelson VI'.

For 95 years our stretch of the river has been home to the 3rd oldest Sea Cadet Corps in the Country. Long may they continue.

Published June 2007



TS 'Lord Nelson VI'
Photo : John Trevelyan

30. The Norwich to Great Yarmouth stagecoach service

On 12th July 1818 T.S. Coldwall's new light post coach called the 'Day' began a service between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. It carried four passengers inside and ten outside, the journey taking three hours. This was slightly faster than the river steam packet service, the reputation of which had been damaged by an explosion causing the death of ten people.

Parson Woodforde gives some idea of what an 'inside passenger' could expect. In his diary of a journey in a similar coach with his niece he says, "The coach carries only four inside passengers. We had a very fat woman with a dog, and many banded boxes which much incommoded us, and a poor sickly good kind of man that went with us".

Those inside had at least some shelter from the vagaries of the weather. The 'outside passengers' had no more protection from the elements than the clothes they wore and covers for their legs and laps. Cold, rain, sleet and snow were not the only problems. In the summer, heat and dust from the unpaved roads could also be very unpleasant. Winter journeys, with their shorter daylight hours, together with ice and snow made travelling more hazardous.

The coach 'Day' started at the Angel Hotel in Norwich Market in the morning, and passed through Thorpe Hamlet on its way to Great Yarmouth. Until Carrow and Foundry Bridges were built, the route would have been over Bishop Bridge and along Chalk Hill to the Thorpe Road. Rosary Road was then called Chalk Hill and only changed its name after 1819, when the Rosary Cemetery was established. Chalk Hill was a gentle slope compared to Ketts Hill and Gas Hill.

After travelling over ten miles of rough roads, the horses were changed at Acle. This also gave the passengers a break. The route then continued by Caister on Sea, because there was no road over the Halvergate Marshes. Now we have the Acle Straight. The journey ended at the Quay at Great Yarmouth, where it was easy for those wanting to take boats to London, Hull and mainland Europe, to embark.

In the afternoon the 'Day' returned to Norwich with new passengers. Great Yarmouth also had a coach to Norwich which started in the morning and returned in the afternoon.

It must have been quite a sight to see the coach and horses coming through Thorpe Hamlet, especially if there was a full complement of ten outside passengers.

Published July 2007

31. Duelling on Mousehold Heath

In the news these days there are often reports of so-called 'Honour Killings' and stabbings, because someone feels slighted. Such things are not new and on 17th May 1802 two men came to Mousehold Heath to fight a duel. A perceived slight was felt by a Mr Grigsby. In a court case at the Suffolk Assizes, Mr Alderson, a well known barrister, was acting for the plaintiff against Mr Grigsby. Mr Grigsby felt he had been harshly treated under cross-examination. He challenged Mr Alderson to a duel even after Mr Alderson tried to explain the judicial system to him. Why these two men chose Mousehold for their duel when the events started in Suffolk is unknown. Was Mousehold a known venue for such events? Duels by tradition were held in a secluded spot in the early morning, but this event was reported in the next edition of the Norwich Mercury newspaper, so was not secret. Unusually the paper reports "On Tuesday evening at 8 o'clock, a late start, were present two seconds, Mr Mackintosh for Mr Alderson, and Mr Turner for Mr Grigsby". The report continues "Two shots were exchanged with no other effect than that Mr Grigsby's first ball passed through the skirt of Mr Alderson's coat. A cordial reconciliation was afterwards effected, and it is justice to add that nothing could exceed the coolness and firmness shewed by both gentlemen during the whole affair".

A keyword in this newspaper report is 'gentlemen'. You did not duel with your social inferior. A duel was by this time a ritualised event and the pistol had on the whole replaced the sword and rapier in England. Matching pairs of pistols were often made and would have been the ideal weapons of choice. There had to be an equal chance for each participant, with a measured distance between them and a given signal for firing. There could be no certainty of being able to match the firing skills of each duellist. The fact that Mr Alderton had the skirt of his jacket torn shows that Mr Grigsby got very close.

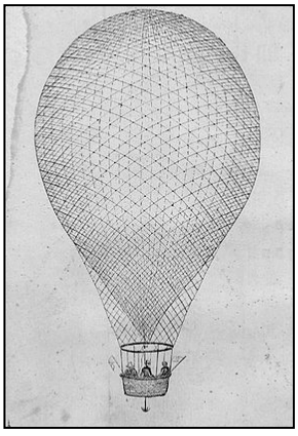
Duelling is now illegal in all but a few countries around the world. Paraguay is one country in which duelling is still legal, so long as both duellists are registered blood donors. In the United States of America, in the State of Kentucky, all official candidates for posts in the judiciary etc., have to take an oath not to take part in duels in any way whatsoever.

It is so much better to use the doctrines of 'turn the other cheek' and 'forgiveness'.

Published August 2007

32. Charles Green, Balloonist

On 24th September 1840 a crowd gathered at the bottom of Ketts Hill and Bishop Bridge to watch the record-breaking balloonist Mr Charles Green ascend in his balloon 'Nassau'. On the trip were also six local passengers. The passengers and pilot were suspended from the balloon by ropes in a bowl-shaped compartment. Green had been a professional balloonist for several years. He made his first ascent in 1821, and by 1835 he had made 200 flights. In 1836 he had set a new record by making an overnight flight from Vauxhall Gardens in London to Nassau on the east bank of the Rhine in Germany, a distance of 480 miles - a record which was not broken until 1907. He travelled around the country with the balloon he had used on his record-making trip. Ballooning was a popular event and Charles Green was not the only one to do balloon trips. Mr Hampton also made a flight from the same place at the bottom of Gas Hill on 25th September. With him was a monkey, who was provided with a parachute. The monkey was 'detached' from the balloon as it was passing over Mousehold Heath. (I have not discovered the fate of the monkey.) Colonel Money of Crown Point, Trowse, had an adventurous trip when his balloon was blown out to sea at Lowestoft and he had to be rescued by a Customs and Exercise Officer in a cutter.



The balloons in Mr Green's time were not hot-air balloons. Those that we see over Norwich today ascend only when the air in the balloon is heated by a burner. In the 1820s and 1830s the balloon was inflated with coal gas, the same gas that was used for cooking and lighting. Coal gas had around 60% hydrogen, which is lighter than air. So the balloon was filled with coal gas and sealed to prevent it escaping. This was the reason the balloonists often started their flight from the bottom of Ketts Hill or Pockthorpe. In 1830 a gas works was developed in the area at the bottom of what is now known as Gas Hill. Here the balloonists could fill their balloons.

Charles Green, on one of his trips to Norwich, had a Richard Crawshay as a passenger, probably a member of the Crawshay, Young and Crawshay Brewery family. Mr Crawshay presented Charles Green with a silver salver with the balloon 'Nassau' engraved on it. This salver is still used as an award by the British Balloon and Airship Club.

Published September 2007

33. Introduction of the postcode



Thorpe Road sorting office
Photo : John Trevelyan

In October 1959, Norwich became the first place in Britain to be allocated postcodes. Sir Ernest Marples, the then Postmaster General, chose Norwich, partially because of the new sorting office in Thorpe Road, which had been opened in 1956, and had eight automatic mail sorting machines. These machines would present an envelope to the operator, who would press buttons to send the letter to the right bin. Postcodes were suggested to increase the speed and accuracy of this process. In January 1959 discussion had begun about the use of postcodes, and by July Norwich had been chosen to begin trials, so in October each house in Norwich was given a code starting with NOR. The letters of the code represented a geographical area. It may have been easy to get the City of Norwich to use the new codes but a further fifteeen years passed before the system covered the whole country in 1974. By now the use of letters as the part of the geographic description had produced more towns with names like ours so Norwich's postcode changed from NOR to NR.

The code is divided into two parts, the first part is the outward code (e.g. NR1) and sends the letter to the sorting office of the end destination of the letter. The second part of the code (e.g. 4AE) is for the post to reach the smaller areas within a district. These areas cover between 14 to 80 properties, although large businesses may have their own unique code. It is this part of the code which is used by some companies to assess the standing of their would-be clients. It has led to the term 'postcode lottery' and explains why, when you are on the telephone, the operator only needs your postcode and house number to know who you are.

Maybe next time this happens I will give SAN TA1 which is the postcode for Father Christmas. I think his credit rating should be good. London had a system of divisions slightly different, being based on a letter system started in 1856 with numbers being added in 1917. My daughter, when she married over 25 years ago, was pleased when their small terrace house had a highly prestigious London coded address. Now the family lives in Norwich and is happy with a normal NR code.

Here a few postcodes you might find useful:-

SW1A 1AA	Buckingham Palace
SW1A 2AA	10 Downing Street
SW1A 0AA	House of Commons

Published October 2007

34. Cotman's ride

In November 1841 John Sell Cotman, while on his last visit to Norwich, rode over Mousehold Heath. He described the journey thus, "I galloped over Mousehold Heath on that day, to dine with my Father - but was obliged to stop and sketch a magnificent scene on the top of the hill leading to Colonel Harvey's house, of trees and gravel pit. But Norfolk is full of such scenes. Oh! Rare and beautiful Norfolk".

He returned to his home in Bloomsbury, London, only to die 8 months later. The Norwich School of Painters often drew and painted the heath and river around Thorpe Hamlet. Before photography, the artists with their paintings, drawings and etchings gave us the best representations of our area at that time. John Sell Cotman's water colour of Mousehold Heath, completed around 1810, now in the Castle Museum, shows that the Heath was a larger area and without trees. It also shows the contours of the land with dips and pits giving it an almost industrial feel; a land used for producing clay bricks, gravel and chalk. This landscape is now no longer visible as it is covered with trees and housing. The site of the Nest, the earlier home of the 'Canaries', is probably the biggest and most obvious example of where the whole ridge has been dug into from Spitalfield across Ketts Hill road to below Godfrey's 'Do-it-Yourself' store. Rosary Road was once called Chalk Hill and there are extensive tunnels dug to excavate chalk which was then burnt to make lime.



Photo: John Trevelyan

Lime mortar has been used since before Roman times, and possibly some of the lime from our parish was used in the building of Norwich Cathedral. My own home in Cintra Road is also in one of these workings and could be the gravel pit that John Sell Cotman wrote of. Cintra Road has been built in a strange shaped indentation. If Cotman had come down Telegraph Lane East and looked down what is now Cintra Road, he could have seen Mousehold House which was owned by Robert Harvey. It seems appropriate that the next road around the corner from this view point, formerly Grove Road, is now called Cotman Road. This dedication could be to John Sell Cotman and his two sons Miles Edmund and John Joseph, both artists and drawing masters.

St. Matthew's parish today may not have as many artists as the Norwich School of Painters, but it does have its own Art Group which meets at the church on Thursday afternoons.

Published November 2007

35. Louis Marchesi

On 10th December 1968 Louis Marchesi died at his home in Wellesley Avenue South. This son of an Irish mother and a Swiss immigrant father, who had begun a catering business in Norwich, was to become the founder of one of the most successful world wide organisations.

Louis joined the army in the First World War, aged 16. He served throughout the war, was torpedoed off the Cape of Good Hope, but survived after spending 10 hours in the sea. On his return to Norwich he resumed his career in his father's catering business. He eventually ran Langford's restaurant in London Street, and he also catered for events at Sandringham and elsewhere in Norfolk. He was very much a part of his local community and was a member of the Norwich Rotary Club. Members were expected to give a maiden speech on a subject of their choice in which they had some expertise. Marchesi spoke about what it was like to be 27 years old. He was a man who had survived the war, had a successful business and felt that the young should be able to have more control over their lives. It is said that in his maiden speech he developed the idea of a club for young men. Marchesi was tapping into a ground swell of feeling alive in the country at the time. Edward, the Prince of Wales, at the British Industries Fair in Birmingham, had said "The young business and professional men of this country must get together round the table, adopt methods that have proved so sound in the past, adapt them to the changing needs of the time, and wherever possible improve them". Marchesi must have known about this speech. He called for a meeting at Suckling Hall on 14th March 1927 to which 90 young men responded. He told them, "What we want is a club where young men can get together and exchange their own ideas, without being fed by older men". It was here that Marchesi's idea resulted in the 'Round Table' being founded with the motto 'Adopt, Adapt, Improve'. The following year a second Table opened in Portsmouth.



Now there are over 1000 'Round Tables' in Great Britain and further 'Tables' in countries world wide. It is still for men between 18 and 45 years old. Despite its close origins with the 'Rotary', 'Round Table' is a totally independent organisation.

Louis Marchesi is commemorated in Norwich with a seat near his restaurant in London Street, and with a 'Round Table' and a small portrait plaque in the garden of Suckling Hall in front of Cinema City. Maybe one day we will find a way to commemorate Louis Marchesi, one of our famous residents, in Thorpe Hamlet.

Published December 2007

36. The North Wind will blow and we shall have snow…

As you took down the Christmas decorations you would have noticed that many of the Christmas cards had snowmen, children playing in the snow, or winter wonderlands made beautiful by the snow, ice or frost. Those of us old enough will remember such Christmases and winters, but with the climate changes forecast will our children and grandchildren have the chance? If not, they will miss not only the fun, but also some of the beauties of nature.

Between 1854 and 1895 January was in the grip of severe weather on at least eight occasions. Every five years life was severely disrupted and real hardship suffered. In January 1854 a heavy snowstorm, accompanied by a severe gale from the north, passed over East Anglia. The snow was deeper than had been experienced for many years; all roads were blocked, and even that new mode of transport the railways were disrupted. Trains from Yarmouth and London could not get through and river trade was also affected. In January 1861, the river was frozen from Norwich to Yarmouth, and there was a great shortage of supplies such as coal. The Mayor of Norwich inaugurated a fund to relieve the distressed poor and within days £4,139-12-11 had been raised. This was a vast sum for the time and gives some idea of how serious the effects of the weather had become. In January 1866 snow brought down telegraph lines and communications were suspended; each new invention succumbing to the effects of nature. In January 1867 there were seven foot snowdrifts, which even today would cause problems. Prices of food and fuel had gone up and many people were unable to work, although snow clearance had provided some jobs. Again a collection was made and this time £2,227 was subscribed. January 9th 1895 was the coldest night since 1881, and the temperature was below freezing for twenty-eight successive nights; the lowest measurement being recorded as 4 degrees Fahrenheit which is about minus 13 degrees Celsius. Ice houses would have been filled early with ice cut from the rivers and broads. These ice houses lined with ice were the deep freezers of the day. Ice was also used by shop keepers for keeping fish fresh and also for making ice-cream. That year there was more ice than could ever have been used. Any pleasure derived from seeing the patterns of Jack Frost on the windows, snow ball fights and skating on the rivers, broads and ponds would have been no compensation for the cold houses with no central heating, outside toilets and water drawn from pumps in the yards. The horse drawn carts with their narrow metal-rimmed wheels were not the best form of transport for these condition. Ketts Hill, Mousehold Heath and even Rosary Road would have all proved impassable.

Christmas cards may well be beautiful but reality is much different.

Published January 2008

37. The dedication of St. Matthew's Church, Thorpe Hamlet in 1845

On 19th February 1845 a meeting was held to consider building a church in Thorpe Hamlet. It was to be one of several new churches being built because the population of Norwich was beginning to expand beyond the city walls. Thorpe Hamlet, although retaining the name Hamlet, had by 1845 already become a built-up area. The existing large villas of the wealthy had been added to with terrace houses being built for the artisans, such as those working on the railways or at the gas works.

A great deal of thought must have been given to the Dedication of the new churches. After all, there were already within the city three St. John's - Maddermarket, de Sepulchre, and Timberhill; three St. Michael's - Coslany, At Plea, and At Thorn; and three St. Peter's - Hungate, Mancroft and Parmentergate. Two new churches were built in Heigham - The Holy Trinity and St. Philip's; one in New Lakenham - St. Mark's, and in Sprowston - St. Cuthbert's. Christchurch was chosen twice - one in Eaton and one in New Catton.

The dedication of St. Matthew for the church in Thorpe Hamlet was probably fairly easy to choose, because the Episcopal Visitation of 1368 states that St. Matthew's in Bishopgate was ruined and that the parishioners had joined the church of St. Martin at Palace "from the time of the Great Pestilence". The Black Death had killed approx. one third of the population of Norwich, and St. Matthew's was one of the church casualties. The site became incorporated into the cathedral grounds and is now behind the wall on the bend of the road near the Adam and Eve.



Old St. Matthew's
Photo courtesy St. Matthew's Church

It is a dedication that moved once again when the new church was built in 1982 in Telegraph Lane West, leaving behind the old church buildings and a road name St. Matthew's Road. This makes me wonder how often strangers looking for our new St. Matthew's get lost. Now St. Matthew's is the name of a thriving church on what is probably the highest location for a church in Norwich.

Ken Lock of the Thorpe Hamlet History Group negotiated with Mr Christopher Codling to allow tours of the old St. Matthew's church during the last two Heritage Weekends. These usually take place in the first weekend in September. Numbers on the tours have to be limited and free tickets can be booked through the Tourist Information Centre in the Forum. We hope these tours can be repeated again this year.

Published February 2008

38. Hamlet Centre Trust

In March 1973 two remarkable people opened a Toy Library in the Vauxhall Centre in Norwich. Jack and Margaret Wymer were both born physically disabled and were never able to walk. They wrote a book "Another Door Opens", about their lives which was published in 1980. They may have been disabled but were two very strong people in every other way. Although the book is Jack and Margaret's personal saga of their battles to lead the sort of life that most people expect to live and the choices they have, it also shows how society has progressed in its views on how those with disabilities can live.

Jack and Margaret knew from personal experience that young disabled people have aspirations and hopes exactly in the same way as able-bodied. Jack and Margaret got married, had their own flat, were both awarded M.B.E's, and Margaret gained a degree at UEA. They were an inspirational couple who gave so much.



The Hamlet Centre, Ella Road
Photo: John Trevelyan

The Toy Library that first opened in the Vauxhall Centre in Norwich was the beginning of a much wider service that is now called the Hamlet Centre Trust, based in Ella Road. There is still a Toy Library there where toys can be borrowed for 30 pence per item per week. It is difficult for families with babies and children with disabilities to know what toys will appeal to or be suitable for their children. The Library has a wide range of toys which can be tried at home to see if they are suitable. Children learn through play and having fun should be part of childhood. Also based at Ella Road is a Mobile Toy Library, because this very active site reaches out to the whole of Norwich and beyond.

In the warren of rooms at the Centre are places for under 5 groups, Summer Respite Play-schemes, Youth Clubs for 8 - 13 and 13 - 19 year olds, a Sensory and Soft Play Room and Day Services for those 18 or over.

Marion Day Centre in Marion Road, Ellacombe Residential Home in Ella Road and a children's playground. It was also the site of the Thorpe Hamlet School that was bombed in 1943. So much going on in such a small area of Thorpe Hamlet. I hope that Isaac Bugg Coaks would be happy with the use of the land that he sold to the School Board in 1886.

Published March 2008

39. Air raids in Thorpe Hamlet

A piece in the Evening News on 20th February reported that a WWII mortar bomb had been found in the grounds of Norwich Prison. My husband, who served with a Mortar Company in the Royal Artillery for a time, said that if it was a mortar bomb it must have been one of 'ours'. Thorpe Hamlet had more than enough enemy bombs with some of the worst air raids on the nights of 27th/28th and 29th/30th April 1942.

By 1942 air raid shelters had been built, and the chalk workings on Rosary Road were also being used for the same purpose. Gas masks had been issued and Air Raid Precaution Wardens had posts in Clarence Road, Rosary Road, Lionwood Road, Heathside Road, Britannia Road and in the playground in Wolfe Road. The Water Tower in Telegraph Lane was the site of the Air Raid Warning sirens and there were three Barrage Balloons sited on Mousehold Heath, the bank of the river Wensum and also on land off Thorpe Road. Thorpe Hamlet School was used as the base for an Ambulance Depot, but all this planning and the precautions taken could not provide complete protection. Ten people were killed in Thorpe Hamlet on these two April night raids. The eldest was Caroline Barkway, aged 89 years, and the youngest Zena Raven, aged 15, who was killed with her 17 year-old sister Gladys and their father Cyril. There was destruction and damage to houses, Thorpe Hamlet School and the public houses the 'Evening Gun', 'Ketts Castle', the 'King's Arms', the 'Lord Raglan' and 'Morrison Lodge'. Those who lived through those nights woke to find devastation not only in Thorpe Hamlet, but in many other parts of Norwich as well. News of family and friends was hard to get and schools, shops and transport were disrupted.

Of the people that spent nights sleeping in the air-raid shelters, many had extra responsibilities as ARP wardens, Fire Watchers or were members of the Home Guard. Many men and women had joined the Armed Forces. Women filled many of their jobs and also provided the extra production needed for the War Effort. All this had to be done together with making the food rations go round and making doing and mending - a real Home Front.

Those that died are not commemorated on the Thorpe Hamlet War Memorial, but there is a Garden of Remembrance on the east side of Earlham Cemetery. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is responsible for British Military Cemeteries world wide,was given the task of compiling a list of civilian deaths. The complete roll of 66,400 names throughout the country is bound in seven volumes and is kept in St. George's chapel in Westminster Abbey. A different page is displayed each day. Those that died in Thorpe Hamlet are among those recorded.

Published April 2008

40. Rubbish disposal

When you look at history, it is clear that important changes don't just start in one day. This was brought home to me by two pieces of post I received recently; one from Norwich City Council about brown wheelie bins for garden waste and the other a journal from the Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society. The journal had an article by Chris Fisher about waste disposal in Norwich in the early twentieth century.

The domestic refuse was collected by horse and cart from the houses and courtyards around Norwich and taken to the River Wensum near Foundry Bridge. It was then transferred to mastless wherries, then taken down river by steam tugs to Kirby Bedon and Whitlingham and placed on the marshes. This method of waste disposal continued until the 1920s. This disposal of rubbish as landfill is still used today, although spreading it on marshland would not be considered acceptable. The old sites were popular for bottle collectors in the 1970s. They found the sites contained little more than soil, coal-ash, and of course, bottles.

The collection of household rubbish and the supply of clean water led to an improvement in the health of the city. The amount of rubbish from each household was much less than that produced today. What has changed is what we now get rid of. Changes in our shopping habits happened slowly. You could get money back for jam jars and drink bottles which were returned to the shops.

Home delivery, which is now offered by some supermarkets, was done by individual traders who were met by housewives at their own front doors with their shopping baskets. The traders often delivered by horse-drawn vans. These produced no carbon footprint. In fact, if there was any pollution, gardeners were keen to collect it to spread around their roses. Food was bought in smaller amounts, fresher and often loose such as biscuits and sweets in paper bags.

There was no junk mail, newspapers were smaller and after they were read could be used for other things, such as helping to light the open fire in the house, or given to the fish and chip shops for wrapping. Some paper might be cut up into squares and strung up for the smallest room. The open fires and the bonfires were useful to burn things that now go into the dustbins, and where have our 'rag, bottle and bone men' gone, and also the small gentleman who 30 years ago used to call at our door asking for scrap metal? Things are changing, but then they always have.

Published May 2008

41. Cremorne Gardens

In the 1880s Thorpe Hamlet provided one of the green lungs for the crowded population living within the city walls. By crossing the river by bridge or ferry people could walk on to Mousehold Heath, or on Sundays visit the Cavalry Barracks in Barrack Street to admire the soldiers and their horses. Other pleasures within the parish included 'Cremorne Gardens'. From the catalogue of a sale held at the Royal Hotel on 28th June 1886 the 'Cremorne Gardens' is described as "a Public House doing a thriving business with a Full Wine and Spirit Licence, 10 minutes walk from the Railway Station". But 'Cremorne Gardens' was more than a public house, for as well as a clubroom it included "a well frequented Pleasure Grounds planted with shrubs, and pleasantly shaded by ash, willow and other trees". It also had vegetable and fruit gardens overlooking open fields, which until 1844 gave a clear view of the river. In 1844 the Norwich to Great Yarmouth railway line cut across the land between, but the passing of a steam train might well have added to the attraction of the place.

One of the proprietors of 'Cremorne Gardens' boasted it had "the largest gymnasium outside London", which conjures up visions of gentlemen boxers and men in strange garb with waxed moustaches waving Indian Clubs and performing deeds of strength. Surely another reason to visit the gardens. The Fitness Centres of today with their running machines, weight training and personal trainers do not seem to have the same appeal.

Those that did not want to walk to the Gardens could catch a bus to the terminus at the 'Hero of the Redan' Pub, later known as the 'Redan' and now a Chinese restaurant. They could then walk down Frogs Hall Lane, the newly developed Salisbury Road, or along a right of way which was later named Cremorne Lane. Some people maybe never got beyond the 'Hero of the Redan', the hero being Major General Sir Charles Ashe Windham, and the Redan was a battle in the Crimean War in 1855.

If they took the path down Frogs Hall Lane, they walked down the boundary between the City of Norwich and the County of Norfolk. This boundary was one of the selling points because the buildings of the 'Cremorne Gardens' pub were just over the border into the County and less rates had to be paid than on the land which was in the City; some things don't change. A further point in its favour was "the neighbourhood is being steadily developed for building purposes and the large extent of land now offered can be readily converted into Valuable Building Sites". How true that has proved to be. The pub closed in 1910 and is now a private residence and new houses are still being built nearby.

Published June 2008

42. The death of John Berney Ladbrooke

John Berney Ladbrooke died on 11th July 1879 at his Thorpe Hamlet home which he called Kett's Castle Villa. He was one of the second generation artists of the Norwich School of Painters. Born in 1803, his father was Robert Ladbrooke, a founder member of the Norwich Society of Artists. His mother was Mary Ladbrooke (nee Berney), whose sister Phoebe married John Crome. So John Berney Ladbrooke was born not only into a family but also an artistic community. An elder brother Henry and a younger step brother Frederick also became artists and drawing masters but both worked away from Norwich. John Berney Ladbrooke first exhibited a sketch in Norwich at the age of thirteen. He received his early training from his father and also from John Crome, and he continued to exhibit in Norwich and London. Painting and lithography were professions in their own right, but most painters took pupils to augment their income.

At the age of nineteen John Berney Ladbrooke was advertising his willingness to give lessons in lithography at the cost of two guineas for four lessons. By 1836 he had become an established and popular drawing master, and his advertisement in the 'Mercury' shows that he was prepared to travel some distance to give lessons to "Private Families or Schools". He did journey abroad to France and Holland, but seems to have done little work there. His visits to Scotland, Wales and the Lake District were however more productive. His main subjects were landscapes, but he also painted a number of still life pictures, mainly of flowers and occasionally fruit. He is best known for his rustic scenes some of which are exhibited in the Castle Museum. Some of his pictures would be difficult to place now, but not 'Selected Views of Norwich and Environs'. The 'View of the City from the back of the Barracks' is very clearly of the view of the cavalry barracks in Barrack Street, circa 1823.

It may well have been that while working on this large picture he saw the site for the house that he built in St. Leonard's Road in 1859. As well as it being his home it was also a studio and a place to teach people. Much of his work in oils was painted there. A photograph of him and his young pupils was taken in the artist's conservatory studio.

When John Berney Ladbrooke died he was buried in the Rosary Cemetery next to his wife Hannah, and their grave is marked by a stone gothic obelisk.

Artists are still at work in Thorpe Hamlet as could be seen at St. Matthew's recent Arts, Crafts and Hobbies Fair. And we even have at least one 'Drawing and Painting Master', Paul Tuck who now runs Art Classes at St Matthew's Church on a Thursday afternoon.

Published July 2008

43. The opening of the new prison

On 2nd August 1887 the first prisoners entered the New Prison on Mousehold Heath. It was called the New Prison to differentiate it from the prison in the Castle, and the City Prison, which was built on what is now the site of the present Catholic Cathedral. The first inmates consisted of 90 males and 5 female prisoners, all from Norfolk and Norwich. In 1928 it also catered for prisoners from Suffolk. Today approx. 40% of the prisoners come from London.

The New Prison had all the requirements of a modern prison - a treadmill, a crankhouse, an artisans' workshop, a condemned cell and an execution shed. A new innovation was a place to take photographs of the prisoners, which had now become acceptable as evidence in the Law Courts. They probably proved to be very useful when Robert Large and Robert Annison became the first escapees from the prison in February 1888.

Traditionally, once gaolers had been appointed, they were left to manage the gaol as they wished and make a profit. Prisoners could be charged for food and bedding.

One of the Christian duties was to care about prisoners. In Norwich, Elizabeth Fry is probably the best known exponent of this. John Howard, the founder of the Howard League for Penal Reform, visited Great Yarmouth prison in 1776 and reported the practice of sending a begging basket round the town three times a week to pay for the prisoners' needs.

In the New Prison a silent system was in operation. There was only one person to a cell and no communication was allowed between prisoners. Wardens could be spoken to only after permission had been given. Punishments included whipping with the cat of nine tails or the birch. Loss of privileges included being given less food, removal of your mattress or losing remission. Hard work could be imposed by the use of the Crank. This was a box with a handle which was turned to move a paddle through wet sand or gravel (this operation served no useful purpose). A rev counter counted the turns and prisoners were given targets to reach before they got their meals. The warder could make the mechanism harder to turn by adjusting a screw. This is why Prison warders are often called 'Screws'. Even the name Warder is incorrect because since the Prison Act of 1921 a Warder should be referred to as a 'Prison Officer'. Over the last 121 years, the New Prison has grown and has taken in the former Britannia Barracks. This makes Norwich Prison one of England's largest, and with over 500 staff, it is the largest employer in Thorpe Hamlet - 500 people who do a very difficult job.

Published August 2008

44. The Port of Norwich

On 30th September 1833 the river side from the Old Carrow Bridge into the City of Norwich was crowded by thousands of people; bands played and the bells of St. Peter Mancroft were rung, for this day was the culmination of years of planning to allow Norwich access to the sea via Lowestoft. In the eyes of many this was the day when Norwich became a port. The river had always been a gateway to the sea and the wider world. It had been used by the Romans and the Vikings, and the Caen stone from Normandy for building the cathedral and the castle came by water. Merchants sent goods for overseas trade to the Low Countries and beyond via Great Yarmouth. In the words 'Great Yarmouth' lies the rub. Great Yarmouth was the access to the sea for the rivers Yare, Wensum, the Northern Broadland rivers of the Ant, Thurne and Bure and the southern river of the Waveney. The harbour often became inadequate with a sand bar building up across the harbour mouth, and in certain conditions all but the smallest coastal vessels were prevented from reaching the river. This led to increased delays and costs much to the frustration of the merchants and manufacturers of Norwich. Many plans and ideas were put forward to improve matters, but anything that detracted from Great Yarmouth's control was resisted by that town.



The former Clarence Harbour pub in 2003
Photo : Philip Marriage

After much planning, surveying of land and raising of funds, the Norwich and Lowestoft Navigation Bill was placed before Parliament in 1826. It passed its first and second readings, but on the third reading it failed with a petition against being put forward by Great Yarmouth. The result gave rise to great rejoicing in Great Yarmouth, and a civic dinner was held to celebrate the defeat of the Bill.

A new Bill was prepared and passed in 1827 and the work began. This time it was Lowestoft, Beccles and Norwich that rejoiced. It took six years to build a harbour at Lowestoft, provide a lock to allow boats to enter Oulton Broad, and to dredge the river. A canal still called the 'New Cut' two and a half miles long was excavated between the river Waveney near St. Olaves to Reedham on the Yare, thus avoiding a longer river journey via Breydon Water. All this was funded by private money from shareholders.

So, on 30th September 1833, two boats the 'City of Norwich' and the 'Squire' from London were towed by a steam tug into the City and our riverside was never the same again.

Published September 2008

45. Pugilistic fights in Thorpe Hamlet

On 7th October 1820, reports on fights on Mousehold Heath included this condemnation: "It is with mingled feelings of shame and disgust that we state no less than four pugilistic battles were fought on Sunday morning last on Mousehold Heath, near Norwich, and that many hundreds of persons were present to witness this unchristian scene". This appears to have been a well-publicised organised event to have drawn such a large crowd. These fights would have been bare-knuckled with little in the way of rules. There had been efforts to make contests more even with 'The London Prize Ring Rules of 1743'. Whether these had reached Norwich is not known but with betting and prize money at stake some effort must have been made to give the appearance of fairness at least.

Daniel Mendoza, a champion boxer, wrote the the first textbook for fighters in 1789 which stressed diet and training, and he taught sidestepping and other ways to avoid being hit. Mendoza is now almost forgotten unlike his more famous great great grandson, Peter Sellers. In the film 'The Pink Panther', Inspector Clouseau, played by Peter Sellers, had pictures of Mendoza on his office wall.

Maybe, on that October day a young James ('Jem') Mace of Norwich watched the fights and was inspired to take up the 'sport'. He became the English Heavyweight Champion under the more refined Marquess of Queensberry rules in 1861.

Another report of 28th October 1822 shows the dangers of these Prize Fights: "Two men, one named Grint - a dyer, and another Purdy - a weaver, neither of whom had any pretensions to pugilistic science, fought for an hour, near Bishop Bridge, until Purdy became insensible and three days afterwards died". Grint was committed for trial at Norwich Summer Assizes in 1823, was found guilty and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

Those coming to these free spectacles had plenty of places to have refreshments. The area was well supplied with Public Houses. Apart from those still existing today there was 'The Evening Gun', 'The Horse Barracks', 'The Ostrich', 'The Ship' and 'The Duke of York'. They were all happy for the extra trade. Britannia Barracks had not yet built, but soldiers from the regiments stationed in the Cavalry Barracks in Barrack Street would have been among the spectators and perhaps even took part.

So, what with the drinking, battling, fighting and probably also pick pocketing, the first report on this "unchristian scene" was probably not far off the mark. These days people can win a gold medal at the Olympics in a sport which had such a rough start.

Published October 2008

46. Crossing the Wensum

When the first train ran between Norwich and Great Yarmouth in 1844, some dreamt of a line that would run from Great Yarmouth to the city of Liverpool. Each stage of the development of a railway took time; investors had to be found and encouraged to finance the long drawn out process through Acts of Parliament, surveying and negotiating with land-owners. The site at Thorpe Station was restricted by the river Wensum. Liverpool was to remain a dream but routes to London and the centre of the country were not, so the river Wensum had to be crossed.

From 1833 Norwich was a port with not only wherries and passenger boats but also sea-going boats coming from Lowestoft. And navigation had to be maintained so a fixed bridge was not an option. An engineer, George Bidder, designed a swing bridge that turned on a central pivot. This would allow the bridge to accommodate both the rail and river traffic. Made of a central mechanism which could be operated by one man, the 45 foot long sections on each side of the pivot could be turned sideways to allow the river traffic to pass.

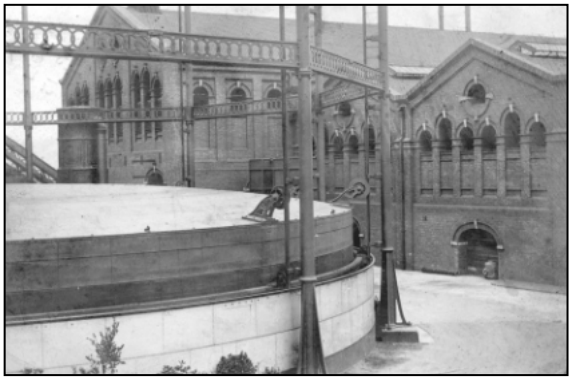
Rail was proving to be a great competitor to the river trade so it was ironic that the metal sections for the swing bridge were brought from Grissel's Regent Ironworks in London to Norwich by sea and river. Completed by November 1845, the first train went over in December. The bridge carried a single track line and was designed to take 30 ton trains. It remained in use until 1906 when it was taking 50 ton trains. The replacement bridge was also a swing bridge and carried two tracks of rails.

The signal box men and the swing bridge operator must have been kept very busy in the beginning and were responsible for the safety of the trains and the river craft. Navigation took priority. Boats had to contend with wind and tides and were irregular in their timing. I do wonder if they enjoyed making the bridge open for them. I know the feeling of power as we have on a couple of occasions asked Reedham railway swing bridge to open for a boat we were on. It was only a small boat and its mast was too high to get under the bridge, but it had a horn which made it sound like the 'Queen Mary'. Today the signal box is less busy than when the swing bridge was first opened. When you travel to London or Cambridge and cross the latest swing bridge from Thorpe Hamlet to Trowse, give a thought for all the men who laboured to keep both forms of transport moving.

Published November 2008

47. Pure and Brilliant Gas

On 11th December 1831 a notice was placed in the Norfolk Chronicle that the Norwich Gas Light Company "beg to announce to the inhabitants of Norwich, they are now ready to supply pure and brilliant gas". For the inhabitants of Thorpe Hamlet, this marked the completion of the new gas works at Bishopbridge Road. It covered a large area of land and had 40 retorts and 2 gas holders. Men were employed and cottages for them were built around the works. Most of these cottages have since disappeared. River traffic increased as the coal necessary to fuel the retorts had to be brought in by boat. The gas supplied was said to be entirely free from sulphur and objectionable matter, but the air around the gasometers was probably not so sweet. Where I grew up, it was traditional to take children with whooping cough, in a pram, for a walk around the gas works to breath in the air - this was supposed to be an effective remedy. The by-products of gas manufacture, such as coke and coal tar, were also sold by the Company.



The former gas works on Gas Hill in 1910
Photo courtesy Basil Gowen

The name 'Gas Light' indicates that the main aim of the Company was to provide street and house lighting. Eighteen miles of mains piping were laid and 420 public street lamps were installed. The new job of 'lamp lighter' was now necessary to light the lamps at night, and turn them off at daylight. The last gas lamp to survive in Thorpe Hamlet was in St. Michael's Terrace. If domestic consumers wanted the lighting system they themselves had to pay for the necessary piping in their own homes. Even with the Gas Company's claim that gas light was cheaper than candles or oil lamps it would take some considerable time before the expense was recouped.

In 1883 the Company began to sell gas cookers and heaters. With this widening in the use of gas, it became cheaper and more popular. Cooking became easier and cleaner. The days of the kitchen range that needed to be fed with fuel, raked out causing dust to spread, and polished with blacklead were numbered. The habit however of taking the Sunday joint to a baker to put in his oven to cook did continue for a time. Gas and electric cookers have become more sophisticated, but when it comes to preparing Christmas dinner for family and friends, it is still the cook's skill that matters, just as it always did. Merry Christmas.

Published December 2008

48. New Year's Resolution (2009)

New Year's Resolutions begin with a good idea, but then they need the resolve to carry them through. The start of the year seems to be a good time when there is a natural break between one year and the next, to make such promises to oneself. This is what the Thorpe Hamlet History Group has done. Last year we had the idea of producing what we are calling 'Occasional Papers', and the idea is to publish the first one in 2009. The projects will not be as big as 'The Memories of Thorpe Hamlet' book, but they will all have an historic theme relating to Thorpe Hamlet. The idea for the first paper originated when we started discussing why our streets, avenues, roads and closes are so named. Our own names give us a personal sense of being. They are given to us by our parents, and are used by our family, friends, colleagues and teachers throughout our lives. Our name is our own, even if we sometimes adapt it or change part of it when we get married. And so it is for the places where we live and have our homes. Our address is on our passports; the postie knows where to deliver our letters, and we use it when filling in forms, but often we have no idea where the names of our streets come from. Our research has led us into the history of Thorpe Hamlet, foreign parts, military heritage and the personal history of the people of Norwich.



Road signs
Photos : John Trevelyan

The age of your house and the name of the road it is in often reflects the mood of the country in the period in which it was built. Who were the heroes and the local good and the great at the time.

We have been led up many blind alleys when producing the publication and in some cases we have been defeated. Why 'Barton Way' for a new development off Carrow Road, and who is Sonya of 'Sonya Terrace', or Timothy of 'Timothy Close'? Once you know the names of the streets in your area, it is like walking around inside a history book.

Any suggestions can be left for us at the Plumstead Road Library or on the Thorpe Hamlet Web-site feedback@thorpehamlet.idps.co.uk

Happy New Year.

Published January 2009

49. Chalk workings

February 1st 1963 was very cold, but for the inhabitants of 6 houses in Thorpe Hamlet it was not the crackle of ice that worried them but the cracks appearing in their houses. Within a day some had to leave their homes.

The geology of Thorpe Hamlet is an interesting one. In times past, building materials, such as flint, gravel clay and chalk were sourced locally. These activities left their mark, some more than others, and it was chalk excavation which made the greatest impression on our landscape.

Anyone walking around Thorpe Hamlet cannot be unaware of the steep rise of the hills, whether it be Ketts Hill, Gas Hill, St. Leonard's Road, Harvey Lane or Telegraph Lane West. It is when you go from the roundabout at the bottom of Ketts Hill to Thorpe Road via Rosary Road that you can see the incursion into the hillside most.

If you start at the bottom of Ketts Hill and Spitalfield which was in the area behind Ketts Castle, then cross the road to the area which was once used as the home base for the travelling fairground folk and near the gas works, you can plainly see how much of the hill has gone. The names of Lollard's Road and Lollards' Pit are a reminder that this encroachment into the hillside is not new. The name 'Lollard' was given to people who followed Wycliffe in the 1400s. Much is made of the fact that the stone for Norwich Cathedral came from Caen in France, brought up the Wensum and then through the Water Gate at Pull's Ferry. Little is said about the lime mortar that holds the stones together, some of which probably comes from Thorpe Hamlet. This shows that an almost industrial use of burning chalk to produce lime was taking place in 1096 when the cathedral was founded.

The chalk was not only cut from the hill face but also from tunnels which had been dug into the hillside. These tunnels were often ten feet high and between eight and ten feet wide and some penetrated nearly fifty yards into the hillside. After the chalk workings were abandoned, future owners of the land such as Thompson and Son, and Coleman's Brewery used these tunnels for storage space. After seeing the tunnels in Dover, the catacombs in Paris, the wine caves in the Loire valley, and even Grimes Graves near Thetford, I often wonder if we have a forgotten asset on our doorstep (or even under our houses). We could have tours of the tunnels which could be festooned with fairy lights and have figures of chalk workers. Think what a very good tourist attraction that would make.

Published February 2009

50. Thorpe Hamlet - a place of leisure

Thorpe Hamlet has always been an area for recreation for Norwich citizens. It was comparatively late in being developed for housing and therefore there was still space for farming, small industrial activity and leisure activity. In 1886 the ownership of Mousehold Heath passed from the Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral to the City of Norwich. Now we have the use of two football pitches, a pitch and putt course, a bandstand and acres of an almost unspoilt natural area for walking. When it snows St. James's Hill rapidly becomes a wonderful site for winter sports. Norwich City Yacht Station is in our parish and the river has always attracted fishermen. Bowling Greens sprang up in various places - some as independent venues such as the one that was once on the site of the road now called High Green, and others which were developed in the grounds of public houses. In the past we have had shooting, archery clubs and a cricket club with its own pitch.

As Thorpe Hamlet developed and houses gradually took up more ground, we were very fortunate to retain open spaces such as Lion Wood and Pilling Park. There were also smaller places such as those at the end of Marion Road, off Rosary Road, near Borrowdale Drive, and the new Butterfly Garden behind Plumstead Road Library. If you include the riverside paths and Petch's corner, none of us are far from a green space. Rosary Cemetery was never meant to be an area for pleasure, but the old part of the cemetery was laid out with trees and terraces which have matured (some might say overgrown), giving us a green oasis for peace and contemplation.



Norwich City football club
Photo : John Trevelyan

Although we had all these facilities, one sport was still not represented until a new swimming pool was opened on 7th March 2003. Some private houses might have had a pool and the middle school in Quebec Road had one, but now a new modern pool with its eye-catching architectural design was built on Wherry Road by the river. The facilities offered were a gymnasium, spa, sauna, a main pool and a smaller teaching pool. Open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. the main pool is programmed to cater for all, with slots set aside for the over-50's, swimmers with disabilities and family fun, according to their needs. So Thorpe Hamlet has another place for pleasure. Nearby at Carrow Road is Norwich City Football club, which for about 25,000 spectators is a place of very mixed emotions, sometimes pleasure, often pain but hardly ever relaxation.

Published March 2009

51. The Jonathan Scott Hall

As Victorian Norwich spread outside the city walls, there was a population explosion into the suburbs. The Church of England began planning building churches to cater for these congregations. St. Matthew's in St. Matthew's Road was one of these new parish churches.

It was the same for many of the non-conformist groups, one of which was the Primitive Methodists. The Primitive Methodists had begun to be an influence in the City except in the east. The Rev. Jonathan Scott, who had completed his full-time ministry in Norwich took on the lease of Blackfriars Hall as a super-numerary minister and used the Hall from 1878 until 1887. The CONNEXION, the leaders of the Primitive Methodists, decided that a church should be built in Thorpe Hamlet. In 1895 land was bought in Ethel Road, and a hall was built which seated 250. Soon a congregation of 200 was attending. When a church was planned to replace the hall the minister at the time, the Rev. John Smith, felt that the Ethel Road site was not prominent enough so a site in Thorpe Road was chosen.



Jonathan Scott Hall
Photo : John Trevelyan

The architect for the church was Augustus Frederick Scott, the son of the Rev. Jonathan Scott. It was Augustus Scott, himself a preacher, who suggested that the church should be dedicated to his father who had died in 1900. The foundation stone was laid on Easter Monday 8th April 1901 by the Rev. Jonathan Scott's daughter, Fanny. In April 1902 the church was finished. It was built with Gothic features, in red brick with stone details. The arcaded entrance, with granite columns, led into a church which could seat 650. The interior has a barrel-vaulted roof with a gallery on three sides. As preaching was an important aspect of their worship there was a triple-decker pulpit. So the congregation could see the preacher, the floor was sloped. Plans to build a tower and a Sunday School never materialised. The property in Ethel Road continued to be used until it was damaged by bombing during World War II. In 1959 a school building was built behind the church. The church closed in 1985. The final service was taken by the Rev. Jack Burton. The words carved over the entrance were changed from Jonathan Scott Church to Jonathan Scott Hall with such skill that it still seems to be the original carving. The architect, Peter Codling, sympathetically converted the interior into offices. The Rev. Jonathan Scott is buried in the Rosary Cemetery.

Published April 2009

52. The 1921 Miners' Strike

In May 1921 the effects of the Miners' Strike were felt in Thorpe Hamlet. The strike was over a cut in wages and the effects were far reaching. Coal was King. Train services were cut and factories were affected. Most domestic heating was by coal or coke; gas was important in cooking, in food production and in brewing. Electricity stations also used coal. There was sympathy for the miners and there had been a May Day Demonstration in Norwich market place.

The dispute spread to Thorpe Hamlet on 21st May when the Gas Company at Bishop Bridge took delivery of French coal. A shipment of French coal came into Lowestoft and was loaded on to a wherry by 'blackleg' labour. When it arrived in Norwich the workers at the gas works refused to unload it. Management and clerical employees started to unload the wherry, but the elevator taking the coal into the works malfunctioned. On 21st May the Company took out a large advertisement in the 'Norwich Evening News', with an appeal for help to "men and women of goodwill to assist the Company's loyal staff and willing friends to carry on the service of supplying gas and coke".

On 23rd May another appeal was made for "Men and women of goodwill to support the Company's efforts to resist the dictates of a tyrannical organisation which undermines the natural bonds of respect and regard between employer and employee". On 25th May a third appeal appeared "The spirit of England which opposed the arrogant assumption of German Imperialism is now equally opposed to the menace of a degraded form of Trade Unionism". There was also an appeal to their own workers with promises of restoration of work for those who expressed "regret at being misled". It also reminded them of higher than normal wages and "the support of their faithful employees in old age".

On the same day the strikers had a closed meeting with pickets on guard. It was reported the Gas Company had trouble with getting drivers because one lorry had been seen to have a woman driver. The speaker said it was "the first time I had seen a woman occupying such a position". As national talks continued the Trade Union lifted its embargo on foreign coal and by 8th June, the newspaper reported the end of the dispute. The paper reported "There is to be no victimisation and the men without exception are to return to their employment. We hope that in spirit as well as in fact the incident will be regarded on both sides, as being closed". I hope it was, but I wonder if all was forgiven.

Published May 2009

53. Barrack Street and Barrack Road

While working on 'The Street Names of Thorpe Hamlet', the Thorpe Hamlet History Group found that there are two roads with the word 'Barrack' - Barrack Road and Barrack Street. Barrack Road is named after Britannia Barracks, and Barrack Street is named after the Cavalry Barracks. Although Barrack Street is outside our parish, the soldiers who were stationed there had an impact on the area. The Cavalry Barracks were built for garrisons of cavalry, such as the Dragoons, Lancers and Hussars, brought in, it is said, to quell any possible uprising because Norwich was seen as a hot spot where a revolution could start in this country after the time of the French Revolution in 1789. Mousehold Heath was also seen to be a suitable place for the cavalry to practise its skills. Mousehold was more of a heath in those days with far fewer trees. There could be a lighter side to the military presence. In June 1801, a quartermaster of the 13th Dragoons won a bet that he could ride a measured distance up Thorpe Road, in a given time, facing towards the horse's tail. Afterwards he did the same thing up the 'sand hill' near Ketts Castle.



The former barracks on Barrack Street
Photo courtesy SB Publications

The Cavalry were also used for law enforcement, and on one occasion for fire fighting. On 25th June 1801 a fire broke out on the roof of Norwich Cathedral. The cavalry were called out to assist. Bishop Manners Sutton personally distributed refreshment to the soldiers. The cost of the damage to the roof was estimated to be £500. The Cavalry also helped revenue officers against smugglers. In June 1827 a serious riot broke out, when weavers who had caused damage to looms in Ashwellthorpe, were being taking to the prison in Norwich Castle. A detachment of the 12th Lancers was acting as escort, and when the convoy came under attack more Lancers were sent from the barracks. The reinforcements charged at full gallop and dispersed the mob in all directions. An attempt by the rioters to rally was frustrated by a second charge. These charges were not at a gentle trot - they were reminiscent of the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819, where a company of Dragoons charged rioters protesting peacefully against the Corn Laws. That particular charge caused 600 casualties and many deaths.

Some of the soldiers never left Thorpe Hamlet. This can be seen by the tombstones in the Rosary Cemetery of Sergeant Bottle, Corporal Banter and Private Hippers of the 16th Lancers, who had all fought in Afghanistan and the Indian Mutiny but died at the Cavalry Barracks.

Published June 2009

54. There's the wind on the heath

George Borrow was born on 5th July 1803 in East Dereham and died on 26th July 1881 at Oulton. Born into an Army family which often moved about, his education was disrupted, but when the family settled in Norwich, he attended what is now the Norwich School from 1816 to 1818. When he left he was articled to a solicitor, but was more interested in languages than studying law. William Taylor, a German scholar, wrote in 1821 "George Borrow has learnt German with extraordinary rapidity, indeed he has the gift of tongues and although not yet 18 understands 12 languages including English, Welsh, Erse, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Danish, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German". After the death of his father in 1824, he abandoned the legal profession and set off to London to make a living from translation and writing. Although some of his work was published including a translation of Faustus from the German, and his own Romantic Ballads, he could not make a living. 1825 to 1832 has been called his 'Veiled' period when he lived a nomadic life, fraternising with the gypsies, and working as a tinker and an ostler. In 1832 he was invited to an interview in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society who were preparing to send a representative to St. Petersburg to superintend the printing of the New Testament into Manchu. He walked the 112 miles to London for the interview and was offered the job, providing he could learn Manchu-Tartar in six months. He succeeded and spent the next two years in St. Petersburg, adding Russian to his list of languages. The next post took him to Spain, Portugal and Morocco where, among other things, he translated St. Luke's Gospel into a Spanish Gypsy tongue and also into Basque. He left the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1840 and returned to England. For the next twenty years he rarely travelled abroad but concentrated on his writing. In 1851 he wrote 'Lavengro', a book that showed that he knew Mousehold and the gypsies and prize-fighters that used the heath.



A fine old city viewed from the east - the view from Kett's Heights
Photo : John Trevelyan

In 'Lavengro' he writes of Norwich "A fine old city, truly, is that, view it from whatever side you will; but it shows best from the east, where the ground, bold and elevated, overlooking the fair and fertile valley in which it stands. Gazing from those heights, the eye beholds a scene which cannot fail to awaken, even in the least sensitive bosom, feelings of pleasure and admiration".

In the same book he wrote "There's the wind on the heath, brother, if I could only feel that, I would gladly live for ever".

Published July 2009

55. Victorian recycling at Ketts Hill

In the early hours of August 1st 1898 a fire broke out in the workshop of Hums, the sail maker in Dove St., the lane leading from the Market Place to St. John Maddermarket. The fire soon spread and the Norwich City Fire Brigade, later helped by Colman's Works Fire Team, could not stop it. The flames spread to the Public Library where sixty thousand books were destroyed, some of the volumes part of a collection, which had been started 144 years earlier. The Edinburgh Public House was burnt out and its facade collapsed five days later. To the south the fire destroyed most of the shop of Chamberlin and Sons. This 'Harrods' of Norwich was a shop known for its elegance and comfort. There were chandeliers; finely panelled ceilings and the rooms were lavishly provided with mirrors. For customers, and especially for those who had come from outside the city, a fine waiting and writing room was provided with richly upholstered settees, writing desks and all the necessary material for writing letters. The shop even had its own post box. It was a building with a rich interior and merchandise to match - ready-made clothes, shoes, haberdashery, mantles, silk, and curtains. There was a staff of 120 women assistants, skilled in alterations, curtain making and millinery. With its floor walkers, chairs to sit on while being served, Chamberlin's was a very different shop from the Tesco's, now on the site, where you serve yourself, queue to pay and pack the goods in a plastic bag. Those things which the fire did not destroy were damaged by fire and water. Chamberlin's valued their losses as £100,000 but they were covered by insurance with Norwich Union. After the fire the frontage was still intact and stands today on Gaol Hill.



Gaol Hill today
Photo: John Trevelyan

Samuel Moore, a farmer, carter, paving contractor and the owner of a gravel pit on Plumstead Road in Thorpe Hamlet, gave permission for all the salvaged material from Chamberlin's to be brought and dumped on his land at the top of Ketts Hill. When all the material had been collected, he allowed housewives from all over the parish to come and help themselves to whatever they could use. The temptation that the salvage held treasures led to an 'invasion' causing considerable damage to fences and walls, and Sam Moore had to stop them coming. I wonder how many families found they were owners of items that they normally could never have afforded.

The founder of Chamberlin's, Henry Chamberlin, is buried in the Rosary cemetery.

Published August 2009

56. Thorpe Station mystery

In September 1846 three local papers, 'The Norwich Mercury', 'The Norfolk Chronicle' and the 'Norfolk News', were carrying, amongst their news of Royal Events, foreign affairs, advertisements for clothes, pills and country estates, many stories about the railways. The first train had run between Norwich and Yarmouth in 1844, and by 1846 a rather convoluted journey could be taken to London via Thetford and Ely. The newspapers were full of reports of meetings, Parliamentary Bills, land rules and rail timetables. It was the era of Railway Mania. Many of the local 'Good and the Great' were involved, many as officers and shareholders in Railway Companies. With all these high profile and positive articles, it is probably not so surprising that a piece of negative news seemed to have been reported only in the 'Norfolk News'.



Thorpe station from the Carrow Road bridge
Photo: John Trevelyan

On 5th September 1846 the news broke that there had been a robbery at Thorpe station. "In the forenoon the clerk in the cashier's office, wishing to leave for a short time deposited some money in the safe, which he locked up, but omitted to take the key with him. On his return, he found that the leather bag containing gold sovereigns, bank notes, and cheques etc., had been abstracted from the safe." The police were called in, but no clues were to be found. On Monday mornings there was always more money in the office than on any other day, as the takings for Saturday and Sunday had not yet been banked, and over £800 had been stolen. Fares to Yarmouth varied from three shillings and sixpence for first class to one shilling and threepence for third class. The cash was judged to have weighed nearly half a hundredweight, which makes you wonder why no one was seen removing it. The coinage must have been very bulky as coins were much larger in those days - remember the size of an old penny.

A rumour circulated that the money had been put into a bag and thrown into the river, but it was never recovered. Although a large reward was offered, no one was ever charged with the crime. Was there just one thief; was it planned; or an opportunist theft that just happened because the money was there when the takings were at their highest?

The ticket collector and two clerks were dismissed for gross negligence, but the crime remains unsolved.

Published September 2009

57. Street names and St. Leonard's Priory

The members of the Thorpe Hamlet History Group have for some time wanted to share the knowledge they have gained from their interest in the area by publishing their findings. Unlike the excellent 'Memories of Thorpe Hamlet', the intention is to take one subject at a time and publish the results in what will be called an 'Occasional Paper'. This will give flexibility in the timing of the publication and also the subject matter chosen. The first Occasional Paper is now ready and the subject is 'Street Names of Thorpe Hamlet'. There can be a variety of reasons why a street gets its name. It could be geographical, historical, a celebration of a battle, description of a local industry or based on national or local personalities. St. Leonard's Road, for example commemorates one of the oldest sites in Thorpe Hamlet.



St. Leonard's Priory in the 1950s
Photo : Mrs L Hewitt

In 1101 Bishop Herbert de Losinga acquired the Manor of Thorpe and Thorpe Wood by charter from Henry I. Here he founded the Priory of St. Leonard's at the top of what we now call Gas Hill. It had its own establishment of monks and also acted as home to other monks while their own monastery, together with the cathedral, was being built. St. Leonard's became a wealthy church and a place of pilgrimage. By 1422 gifts to the church included a bone of St. Laurence and a silk ornamented cap of St. Leonard. A statue of St. Leonard was adorned with a cross made from four rings with a pearl, and red and green stones. On St. Leonard's fingers were ten rings, three on the thumb, two on the index finger and five on the middle finger. The number of rings, which were of the usual size worn in real life, gives some indication of the size of the statue. Another statue at the Priory was that of the 'Blessed Virgin', which was less lavishly adorned. There were amber, jet, silver and gold items, and hanging from the ceiling was a silver ship with an anchor and chain. It is possible that the ship had been presented as a gift in thanks for a safe journey taken or about to be taken.

In the fifteenth century when Margaret Paston's husband was ill in London, she promised to make a pilgrimage to Walsingham and to St. Leonard's Priory. At the Reformation the priory and church lands passed into the hands of the Duke of Norfolk. Those of you who are still young and energetic enough to walk up Gas Hill will be using the same route that the pilgrims used. Modern day pilgrims will only have to go a few yards further to find the church of St. Matthew.

Published October 2009

58. War memorials

Memorial Services this year are being held 70 years after the start of World War II. Those of us who were alive on that day in September 1939 will remember it well. I feel that the mood in my family on that day was reflected by the comedian Rob Wilton when he used to say "The day war broke out, my wife said to me 'What are you going to do about it?'". I was young enough to think that the world had not changed - but it had. When a couple of years ago, my husband and I went back to our junior school where we were pupils during the war the Headmaster took the opportunity to get us to talk to the senior class about the school in war time. He referred to us as "living history". It was then I realised that our generation will be the last living link with that conflict.



The war memorial in the sorting office
Photo : Jim Marriage

Later we joined the War Memorials Trust, an organisation that exists to give advice and offer grants to ensure that war memorials in the future will be safeguarded. The most well-known war memorial in Thorpe Hamlet is the one in the grounds of St. Matthew's Church. There are others. In Hardy Road, on the wall of Laurence, Scott and Electromotors, the war memorial is a large clock, under which is a plaque with the names of the men from the firm who died in the wars. In the entrance of the Post Office Sorting Office in Thorpe Road are two brass plaques, one for each of the World Wars. In Thorpe Station is a memorial, on which have recently been added the two names of Railwaymen who were killed an in an air-raid on Boulton and Paul. Another, which is little seen, is in Norwich Prison commemorating prison officers. The Boulton and Paul factory in Riverside Road had in its office its own memorial. This was moved firstly to the Bridewell Museum but is now in a corridor adjacent to the Octagon Café. In the Rosary Cemetery are 12 Commonwealth War Grave Commission graves which are cared for by the Commission, and also buried there in private graves are 24 other military personnel from World War I and World War II.

When, this year people say those words 'We will remember them', it is these monuments that will be there to remind future generations of the price paid by those we are remembering.

Published November 2009

59. The first telephone in Thorpe Hamlet

On 17th December 1880, the first private telephone in Norwich was installed in Mousehold House in Lion Wood in Thorpe Hamlet. It was linked to Morgan's Brewery in King Street, with a mile and a half of wire suspended between the two sites, it took eight telephone poles to carry it through Lion Wood at a height high enough to allow a rider on horseback to pass under the wire. All this cost and effort to install a phone when no-one else had one. This was the only telephone line, so who else could you call. The reason that the Brewery was the only connection was because the tenant of Mousehold House at the time was Mr William H. Hackblock, Morgan's Brewer, who was probably always on call.



Mousehold House in 2003
Photo : Philip Marriage

In 1878, an earlier telegraphic connection had been made, for trial purposes, between Colman's in Norwich and the firm's offices in Cannon Street, London, a distance of 115 miles. For this demonstration the wires used were those that ran along the line of the Great Eastern Railway. The connection to Mousehold House and those of later subscribers produced more telephone lines, and what a curious sight they would have appeared in those days. Today, as we walk down our streets we hardly notice the telegraph poles with their wires going to almost every house. It does not seem so long ago that most of the population used the iconic red phone boxes or perhaps in an emergency you might knock on the door of one of the few who owned a telephone to ask if you could use theirs. Even the police had their own small blue phone boxes to call back to their control centre, and the Automobile Association provided phone boxes for their members. Now it seems most of the population carry mobile phones in their pockets or handbags. The water tower at the top of Telegraph Lane West has sprouted aerials to accommodate this newest form of communication. With a touch of a few buttons you can be talking to people all over the world, or more often be requested by a computer-like voice to hold or you might be asked to choose from a confusing round of options, by pressing 1,2, or 3 etc. There is also the nuisance of so-called 'cold calls' from organisations trying to squeeze money from you, legal or otherwise, but none of these things can detract from the pleasure of hearing from friends and family, especially at Christmas time.

Published December 2009

60. Last orders?

The beginning of a New Year is a time for New Year's Resolutions and looking forward to the year to come. It also becomes a time, as you grow older, to look back, and the older you are the further back you look. When you do this you think you can see trends developing but this might just be hindsight. The customers of 'The Ship' public house at the top of Gas Hill who left the pub for the last time in January 1974 must have felt sad that their favourite 'drinking hole' had closed. There are records of a pub on this site from at least 1883. They may have been sad but at least a few yards down St. Leonard's Road was the 'Baker's Arms', and in the opposite direction were the 'William IV' and the 'Jubilee'. If they were energetic enough they could go down Gas Hill to the 'Bridge Inn' but then of course they would have to climb up it again to get home.



'The Ship' former pub
Photo : Sheila Keith

In 1883 twenty one public houses were recorded in Thorpe Hamlet, and after 'The Ship' closed in 1974 there were still 17. Now there are only 11. Those last customers at 'The Ship' did not know the closure was part of a trend and that in 2009 the local newspaper would be running articles under the heading "Love your local". For them, as for many in Thorpe Hamlet, their 'local' was, for the men at least, a place of companionship. In some there were bowling greens, skittle alleys, dominos and darts, and many ran Christmas Clubs and arranged outings. A 'local' was local - travelling with the family in a car to pubs with restaurants and children's play areas was unknown. Even the beer was local with the Breweries of Steward and Patterson in Barrack Street, Young Crawshay and Youngs and also Morgans in King Street, and Bullards in Westwick Street. The breweries had their own stables of dray horses to deliver their beers. Sitting in the bar smoking a pipe or later cigarettes has recently gone and outside smoking areas have appeared. Slowly other changes have happened. Opening hours were restricted during World War I and then extended again recently. There has been a gradual introduction of juke boxes and slot machines, and now to tempt customers there is televised sport, karaoke and pub quiz evenings.

The Public Houses in Thorpe Hamlet still cater mainly for the local community. Maybe the newest one, 'The Queen of Iceni' on Riverside will in time, do the same,

The pub was once described by the diarist Samuel Pepys as "The Heart of England while the Church is its soul". Happy New Year.

Published January 2010

61. Gas explosion at Ketts Hill

On 1st February 1972 at about 10.30 in the morning, an explosion was heard in the premises of J. Thurston and Son Ltd at the bottom of Ketts Hill. One man, Mr Lome, was injured by flying glass and taken to hospital. The cause of the explosion was a 4 foot cylinder of Calor Gas. Workers had taken the cylinder into a workshop to connect it to a heater. Remember it was February. Some of the gas was ignited by a spark from an open fire which was already in position in the hut. Three fire engines attended the fire, but by then the staff and the son of J. Thurston had already 'lassooed' the cylinder and pulled it out of the building.

Once everything had settled down it was found that about £400 of damage had been caused to the fairground equipment, and this was at the beginning at the 'Fair' season. The first venue for the fair was at Lynn Market and programmed to take place on St. Valentine's Day, 14th February.

The Thurstons were one of the fairground families who had their bases in Norwich. Theirs was a life lived on the move, going from one place to another. They had skills which were not always seen or understood by those who visited the fairs, such as driving massive rides through country lanes and setting the equipment up on site.

What was seen - the colour, lights and the sound of music which brought a sense of excitement to towns and villages around Norfolk. The Hoopla stalls where prizes seemed so elusive, and rifle ranges where young men could show off their skills to win toys for the girls. There were rides which could cause screams of delight or fear - you could never tell which, even if it was you who was doing the screaming. There was Candy Floss which stuck to your teeth and everything else, and the smell of hot dogs and onions pervading the air.

On the final day of a fair everything was dismantled and trundled off, ready for the next fair. The Christmas Fair in Norwich would end the season.



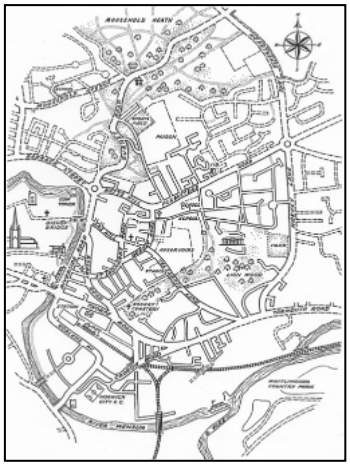
The Barker memorial in the Rosary cemetery Photo : John Trevelyan

Thorpe Hamlet was not only a base for these travelling folk. The Rosary Cemetery became the final resting place of some including Charles Thurston, also John Barker who was killed in 1897 setting up a 'circular railway' ride for a fair on Norwich Cattle Market next to the Castle.

Published February 2010

62. What's in a name?

In March 1852 Thorpe Hamlet was constituted a separate ecclesiastical parish from the old civic parish of Thorpe St. Andrew. This was the 'coming of age' for St. Matthew's, a new church with its own parish. An invisible line had been drawn on the map but it altered the lives of those Victorians living in Thorpe Hamlet. Now they had their own church where they could have their banns read, be married, babies Christened, and all the other services that were part of their lives. No longer did they have to go to Thorpe St. Andrew's church. A Sunday school was formed, and from the parish magazine at the time it can be seen that a social side with a supporting role for the community was developing. This was all before the 1870 Education Act or the introduction of Social Services.



Map : Graham Keith

Many invisible lines have been drawn on the map since then. Soon politicians will be knocking on our doors, and pamphlets and letters from them have already been dropping on our doormats canvassing for our votes. Thorpe Hamlet, which is in the east of Norwich, comes into the Parliamentary seat of Norwich South. In local elections we are either in the Crome or Thorpe Hamlet Ward. Within each division we can chose who we want to represent us in Parliament or in the County or City Councils, although our choice does not always win.

Some of these invisible lines seem to have expanded recently. Thorpe Hamlet History Group and the Friends of the Rosary Cemetery applied recently for grants from the City Community Awards scheme, and were successful We were awarded £300 for buying a comb binding machine to help us with publishing our 'Occasional Papers', and the Rosary is going to have bird and insect boxes made locally and plant more bulbs in the Cemetery. Thank you if you were at the event and voted for us. While there I looked at the map of Heartsease and Thorpe Hamlet in the Community Engagement Area and found that Thorpe Hamlet covered a much larger area than the name implies. The river Wensum is a natural boundary as are the City boundaries, but it seems that Thorpe Hamlet now goes as far as St. Crispin's roundabout near Anglia Square and to St. Clement's Hill. In the newspaper you will also see that properties in the planning section in King Street, Prince of Wales Road and Elm Hill are now referred to as being in Thorpe Hamlet. Whoever is in charge can draw their lines wherever they like, but we know where the centre of Thorpe Hamlet is and has been since 1852.

Published March 2010

63. The new Thorpe Railway Station 1886

On 1st May 1886 the new Thorpe Station was open to the public for inspection. It was built by the Great Eastern Railway Company in a classical brick and stone French style. It was the second station building on the site. The first, built in 1844 replaced a small sheltered platform and was in an Italianate style, a style which had been used for many of the larger stations owned by the G.E.R.C. The new 1886 station was built larger than the previous one in order to accommodate the increased traffic on lines that now went to London, Lowestoft and further into Norfolk. It was built by Messrs. Youngs and Son of Norwich from a design by Mr J. Wilson, the railway company's engineer, at a cost of £60,000. As well as being functional it was also meant to impress, and where "all classes" were catered for. The entrance arch, where taxis now wait, could accommodate the coaches and horses, and allow their passengers to alight under cover where porters would assist them with their luggage. The entrance hall has a lofty ceiling with decorated cornices. This building was a statement; the face of confidence in a new form of transport, which previously had often lost money for its investors.

It was also one of the first buildings visitors to Norwich, including Kings, Dukes, Lords and Ladies, saw as they approached the city. For many of the men from the Royal Norfolk Regiment and also those from the Barracks in Barrack Street, it was the last thing they saw of Norwich as they left for the Western Front and Gallipoli in World War I. Many wounded soldiers also came home through the station to hospitals in Norwich and the surrounding area. Edith Cavell's body was met there by a military escort for her last journey to the Cathedral for her burial.



Thorpe railway station
Photo : John Trevelyan

World War II saw a repeat of many of these journeys. An additional effect of the war was the bomb damage to the building, and a war memorial to commemorate those railwaymen and women who died was placed in the station. There is also a sculpture of Sir Morton Peto, who had such an influence on our railway system in Norfolk, What would he have thought if he knew that Thorpe Station would be the only remaining station in Norwich and that if Norwich becomes the City of Culture it would be one of the gateways into the city.

Published April 2010

64. The Peasants' Revolt

In Thorpe Hamlet we have names such as Ketts Hill, Ketts Tavern, and the face of Robert Kett in the Thorpe Hamlet sign, to remind us of Kett's Rebellion of 1549. We have however nothing to remind us of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This rebellion was nationwide and was started in part by Richard II introducing a Poll Tax on every man and woman over the age of 16. It started at 4d, the equivalent of two days wages for a peasant. The King needed the money to pay for the wars with France. Three taxes were imposed in the space of four years and they increased to one shilling. Once the Revolt began, other demands by the peasants, such as the abolition of serfdom, came to the fore. The Revolt in London crumbled on 15th June when the leader Wat Tyler was killed.

In Norfolk the Revolt continued with King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Norwich under threat. The rebel leader Geofrey Litester or Lister, a dyer from Felmingham near North Walsham gathered his followers on 18th and 19th June on Mousehold Heath overlooking the City. Lister then led the rebels into Norwich killing a J.P., causing destruction and establishing himself in Norwich Castle. Although in command of the City, Lister decided to negotiate for peace and sent some of his men with money and hostage knights to London.

These were intercepted by the man who would finally end the rebellion in Norfolk - Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich. He was a man whose family could claim kinship with Kings, and who in his early years had lived with men-at-arms. Even before this revolt he had earned the title of 'The Fighting Bishop'. Having dealt with the deputation Despenser returned to Norwich and pursued Lister and the rebels to North Walsham where they were defeated. Retribution was swift. Bishop Despenser took up his spiritual duties by accompanying Lister to the gallows and heard his confession. Lister was hung, drawn and quartered, and the four quarters of his body were displayed in Norwich, King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and North Walsham.



View from St James's Hill
Photo : John Trevelyan

When you go to view Norwich from the hill in front of the old Britannia Barracks, be reminded of Lister and later Kett with their followers looking down on the City of Norwich and thinking what a prize it would be. Maybe some of the Parliamentary candidates for Norwich, North and South did just that.

Published May 2010

65. The changing face of Thorpe Hamlet in the 19th Century

From the 1870s, the character of Thorpe Hamlet underwent a gradual change from a rural aspect with large houses built by individuals to houses for artisans built by speculative builders. One sign of these changes to cater for a growing population was the building of St. Matthew's Church in 1851 in an area where the development was centred.

The river was a place for the wherries to trade, and they were built at Petch's corner near the Cow Tower. In 1833 sea-going ships came to use the new port of Norwich. In 1831 the Norwich Gas Light Company built its gas works near Bishop Bridge, and in 1844 Thorpe Station began its train service to Great Yarmouth. All this development began on the sloping ground near the river, but then things began to go up on to the heights of Thorpe Hamlet.

In recognition of these changes, in 1877, the Church Commissioners approved a scheme to build a St. Matthew's Mission Hall on land on Ketts Hill, and ten years later in 1887, Thorpe Hamlet was to be home to the Norwich Prison and about the same time Britannia Barracks, later to become the headquarters of the Royal Norfolk Regiment was built at the top of St. James's Hill.

In 1888 the first Reservoir was built on the site of a windmill in Telegraph Lane, and additional reservoirs were built in 1889 and 1902 to supply clean safe water to the expanding population. After the Education Act of 1871 a school was built. Theses changes and the growth of the population were once again recognised by the Church when land was bought at the top of Ketts Hill for a new daughter church for St. Matthew's. On 25th July 1907, the church was dedicated to St. Leonard. This was a suitable dedication because of its situation almost at the end of St. Leonard's Road. This road passed the site of St. Leonard's Priory, which had been established at the same time as the Cathedral. St. Leonard is also patron saint of prisoners, captives and slaves so being near Norwich Prison seems appropriate. This chapel-of-ease, with its slender spire and half timbered facade, served the local community until it was demolished in 1982. The pulpit was put into storage until it found a home in the new St. Matthew's Church.



The former St. Leonard's Church
Photo : Steve Bloomfield

Published June 2010

66. Heritage Open Days

August is the month for holidays and a time to relax, except for those involved in preparing the Heritage Open Days in September. This national event runs from Thursday 9th until Sunday 12th September, and Norwich is one of the best cities in the country for opening buildings and places of historical interest on those days.

The Thorpe Hamlet History Group has for the past three years, with the kind permission of the architect Christopher Codling, been able to offer tours of the Old St. Matthew's Church. Like many other of the Heritage events, the numbers of visitors are limited and those wishing to attend will need to get a ticket, which is free, to book a place. You have to send in your request with a stamped addressed envelope to the Tourist Information Office, The Forum, Millenium Plain, NR2 1TF, There will be two tours of the Old St. Matthew's Church on Friday 10th September, one at 10 a.m. and one at 2 p.m. Friday is a working day for the offices in the old church, but you do get a chance to see more of the building. There are stairs involved.



The chapel in the Rosary cemetery
Photo : John Trevelyan

The Friends of the Rosary Cemetery are also participating in the Open Days, and there will be tours of the Rosary on Friday 10th September at 5 p.m. and then on Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.. Once again free tickets are available and can be obtained from the Tourist Information Office.

During September the Plumstead Road Library is also taking part in a History Month, and in conjunction with this the Library have generously offered to help the Thorpe Hamlet History Group who is preparing its second occasional paper which will be about shops, past and present in Thorpe Hamlet. The Library will be open on Saturday September the 18th between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. to give members of the public to discuss their memories of shops and shopkeepers with members of the Thorpe Hamlet History Group. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be available.

Published July 2010

67. Gas Hill and the car

In September 1901 a Mr Edge drove his motor car up Gas Hill. One hundred and nine years later a car can still be driven up the hill, but even with all the improvement in car engines, gears and brakes, it's still a climb that needs skill. Mr Edge certainly was testing his car and his skills on the steepest hill in Norwich, if not in Norfolk. Those that watched that day must have thought that the motor car would always be a novelty and that it would never replace the horse.



The former 'Bishop Bridge Inn'
Photo : George Plunkett

The car however has changed our lives and the shape of Thorpe Hamlet. Roads were altered in many ways, for instance the widening of Harvey Lane in 1929 when Pilling Park was opened and also by the loss of the 'Bishop Bridge Inn' on Riverside, when the pub was demolished in the 1960s. The roundabout at the bottom of Ketts Hill is on the site of the vicarage of St. James Pockthorpe, which was bought in 1938 and demolished a year later. The war intervened and the roundabout was not finished until 1954. Traffic lights, white and yellow lines on the roads and posts with signs telling us where we can park all mark the growth of car ownership. When houses were built in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was never thought that there would be a need for garages for the cars. Streets that were laid with trees, which in Victorian times made pleasant vistas, are now hemmed in by parked cars.

The job of 'Traffic Warden' came into being together with fines for bad or illegal parking. There were other effects such as the growth of out-of-city supermarkets. Most of their customers use the car, and this kind of shopping helped with the decline of the corner shop. Few children are now sent on errands to the local shops where they would be known. They are missing out on experiences which gave them a form of independence. Street games have also disappeared, but luckily Thorpe Hamlet is fortunate that it still has many open spaces. The internal combustion engine is here to stay in one form or another and among its blessings are the response speed of the ambulance and fire services. Mr Edge and those watching on that day in 1901 could not possibly have foreseen the revolution that was about to take place. Since then we have electric lights, radio, television and now the internet. Things are always changing. It makes me wonder what's next.

Published August 2010

68. We'll Eat Again

While working on the Thorpe Hamlet History Group's second Occasional Paper on shopping in Thorpe Hamlet, and also while preparing material for the display for the Plumstead Road Library's History Event, I came across a book called 'We'll Eat Again'. It was produced in association with the Imperial War Museum and contained a collection of recipes by Margerite Patten, the Delia Smith of her day. This book, with some old ration books I had recently acquired brought back childhood memories, but surprisingly amongst these memories there was never one of the feeling of being short of food. Looking at Margerite Patten's recipes I now realise how inventive the war-time housewife had to be to make tasty and filling food for growing children.

Three pages covered the use of corned beef which at one time provided a seventh of the meat ration. It was reminiscent of the Monty Python sketch on Spam. You could make Corned Beef Mould, Corned Beef with Cabbage, Corned Beef Rissoles, Corned Beef Fritters, Corned Beef Hash and Curried Corned Beef Balls. Somehow they managed special teas for birthdays and Christmas dinners, although I heard of a Wedding Cake which had an ornate pretend cover on the outside with a much simpler real cake underneath. Ration books for some products had to be registered with one shop, such as the butcher. Meat was rationed by the price of the meat, so the cheaper the meat the more you got. Sausages were not rationed but hard to come by, and the meat content was variable.



Massingham's Fish and Chip shop in 1974

The food rationing, together with fuel shortages, constant queuing, make do and mend, and the blackout was the housewife's lot. This didn't include coping with the air-raids, working in the factories, being Air Raid Wardens and often being alone when loved ones were away.

The work on this project has left me with great admiration for my mother who made my childhood seem completely normal. Food was always there, and I never thought of danger when we went to bed in the Anderson shelter in the garden.

Next month we will be remembering and honouring the servicemen and women of the two world wars and those who have died since, but this month we shall remember those who kept "the home fires burning".

Published September 2010

69. Christmas past - Christmas present

December is a month when the preparations for Christmas gain momentum. The shops, of course started at least a month ago. The Thorpe Hamlet History Group has for some time now been looking at how our shopping habits have changed over the last century, and in particular how we paid the bills, and I thought I would especially look at how Christmas has been affected by those changes.

One of the major differences is the way we budget and pay for all those Yuletide extras. The way people were paid weekly with cash in brown envelopes is almost a thing of the past. Very few had bank accounts and any major savings were probably with the Post Office, or with a policy from an insurance man who called at the door to collect the payments. Household linen or school uniforms could be bought with such things as Provident cheques which would also be paid weekly, or items could be bought from a catalogue, often run by a neighbour. More practical gifts could be bought from the Kleeneze man who called at the door.

Other ways of paying for those seasonal extras were Christmas Clubs, usually run by the public houses or the butchers. Money could be 'put down' on items in the shops, who then 'put them by' until they were paid for. The Co-op divi could also be taken out. In the same way that soldiers can always remember their army number, most people can remember their Co-op number.

Wages, pensions and allowances now are usually paid into a bank account, and paying by cheque became fairly normal. Then came plastic credit cards and credit and debit arrangements, and the long gone Green Shield stamps were replaced by the 'loyalty card'. Now, instead of saving up and paying for those extras before Christmas, they are often 'put on the card' which means paying after Christmas. Planned budgeting has virtually disappeared and replaced by paying later with interest.

Whatever changes have taken placed, one thing about Christmas remains the same, and that is that it's really about people and what we are celebrating, and also the once a year contact with a Christmas card, although at my age I do put a sticky return address label on the back of the envelope in case the recipient has moved on in more ways than one.

The food, the presents and offers of hospitality will make Christmas Day, but for all these things we need friends and family.

Published October 2010

70. Looking forward to the New Year (2011)

The start of another New Year is a time to look forward and make New Year's Resolutions. As you grow older you find you can look back further than you can forward. I'm getting to the stage that when I hear of plans for the future to improve the train services or for better treatment of illnesses and health care, I find myself shouting "Get a move on". But being able to look a long way back has its advantages. Thorpe Hamlet has a fascinating past, from its woodlands and heaths in medieval times to the development by landowners such as the Earl of Surrey, the son of the Duke of Norfolk and then the Harveys of Mousehold House and Holmwood. Later gentry and owners of manufacturing businesses started building villas along the main road. These houses have now become hotels, nursing homes and offices. Areas of open pastures and marshland were developed by the railway, and factories such as Boulton and Paul were built on them.

The river Wensum has gained four bridges since Bishop Bridge was built - Foundry Bridge, Carrow Bridge, the railway bridge and the latest, the Lady Julian Bridge which is a foot and bicycle bridge. The river trade which once had trading wherries and sea going ships now is used by pleasure craft.



The Lady Julian Bridge
Photo : John Trevelyan

Thorpe Hamlet has also lost its military connection, now that Britannia Barracks, the home of the Royal Norfolk Regiment, and the Cavalry Barracks have closed. We still have Norwich Prison, the temporary home for some and the work place for many others. There are fewer factories but Laurence Scott and Electromotors remains, and did you know that there is a jam factory in Thorpe Hamlet. Norwich City Football Club has made its home here, and the ground is sometimes used as a venue for music.

Near Lollards' Pit, where one kind of Christians were burnt to death by other Christians, stand the houses of St Martin's Trust where the real Christian message is practised.

Paraphrasing a quote from the latest edition of Norwich HEART News "Whether you are completely new to the area or have worked, lived or socialised here in the past, your experiences and memories are part of the distinct and fascinating history of this part of Norwich".

Happy New Year.

Published November 2010

71. Reading the Riot Act

On 1st February 1826, the Scots Greys were called out to quell a disturbance in the City of Norwich. The mounted troops from the Horse Barracks went to deal with a large number of weavers who were causing damage in the city. The weavers had previously attacked a carrier's cart which was taking material for workers in the countryside, but on 1st February the mob stopped all country carts and took all the goods that had been made in the county and broke the windows of several factories in the city.

The weavers were dispersed by the Scots Greys, but on 13th February rioting broke out again. Many citizens were sworn in as special constables and after the Riot Act had been read the cavalry cleared the streets. The use of the Scots Greys on their horses would have stirred memories of the use of the cavalry in Manchester seven years before in 1819, in what came to be known as the Peterloo Massacre. The reason for the gathering in Manchester was different, with a demand for reform of parliamentary representation and the introduction of the Corn Law. There was an organised gathering in which more than 60,000 people took part. When the cavalry charged the crowd, 15 people were killed and over 400 injured.

The military presence in Norwich, and especially the cavalry regiments that used the barracks in Barrack Street, were not made up of local men on the whole, although they were always on the lookout for new recruits.

Some of the old public houses in Norwich reflect this in their names, such as 'The Recruiting Sergeant'.

These regiments of Hussars, Lancers and Dragoons were seasoned troops who had fought at Waterloo. They added glamour to the City's life, with officers and their ladies attending numerous social events. Each regiment had a military band which performed in the city in such places as the roller skating rink in Bethel Street.

The local pubs gained customers and there was an input into sporting gatherings such as boxing and horse racing. But these were military bodies of men who would follow orders. When the Scots Greys left Norwich on 23rd February, I wonder how many were glad or sorry to see them go. On 3rd March, the 1st Dragoon Guards came to take their place.

Published December 2010

72. What's in your garden?

March is the month when thoughts seriously turn to the gardens. The bulbs are appearing and there are seeds to sow, but unlike Brian Wild's 'Garden Mardles' in past church magazines, my interest is in what is under the soil, the artefacts left by those who passed over Thorpe Hamlet, or lived here. People over the ages have come and gone and some have left remains of their buildings and other remnants of their time here.

Probably the earliest remains were found in 1998 when excavations took place before the housing and shopping complex was built at Riverside. The archaeologists dug deeper than we would in our gardens. They were looking for the remains of insects, plant seeds and even pollen, but amongst their finds was a prehistoric cattle bone which showed signs of having been cut up. In 1935 and 1974 Palaeolithic flint tools and a hand axe were found on Mousehold Heath.

A Roman road cut across Thorpe Hamlet from near Bishop Bridge and headed towards the river near Brundall. In 1863 a Mr Fitch reported the finding of Roman remains in the garden of the Rev. Frost, including a coin of Nero, fragments of urns, spear-heads and a bronze brooch. There was a further Roman find in 1863 in Harvey Lane of Roman burials which had disturbed "an Anglian warrior with spear and shield". Later in 1894 more Roman remains were found in Telegraph Lane West, and again in 1950 a female cremation with a flagon, beads and a mirror was found in Stanley Avenue, so the Romans did not just pass through.

St. Leonard's Priory and St. Michael's Chapel have left ruins, but the sites were robbed of stones. Some were used around the parish, and can be seen in walls or maybe even in your garden. Kett and his followers, who it is said numbered twenty thousand, camped here and must have lost some items. Did the smugglers who used Mousehold Heath leave any of their goods behind?

So, when you plant your vegetables and flowers, if you find something that looks interesting, the Norfolk Museum Service is willing to identify found objects. They work from the Shirehall near the car park entrance of the Castle Mall. If you go there they will try to advise and then return the find to you.

One group of finds that might need a different approach are those left by those who passed over Thorpe Hamlet very high in the sky. My children found some very large pieces of shrapnel at the top of our garden. If you have any doubts about such items, call the police.

Published January 2011

73. Windmills

Around midnight on 16th April 1795, the Pockthorpe Windmill near the barracks on Mousehold caught fire, the flames rapidly took hold and the mill was gutted before the firefighters could get there. The Norfolk Chronicle reported that "the effect of the light upon the surrounding objects and the stillness of the night, rendered the scene awfully grand". Fire was always a hazard with windmills; the speed of the sails could be difficult to regulate, flour dust produced an explosive mix, and turning the millstones without grain could cause sparks. Being a miller was a dusty job. People with the surname 'Miller' often get the nickname 'Dusty'.

In 1558, William Cuningham, a Norwich man, produced the first town map in the country, which shows Norwich's main buildings and street plan. He did this in part as a straight plan and partly diagrammatic. Thorpe Hamlet is shown on the horizon with two post mills. Mousehold was proper heathland with far fewer trees than today, open to the wind and perfect for windmills. It was the same wind that George Borrow wrote about when he said "there's the wind on the heath brother".

The windmills on Thorpe Ridge were for grinding corn, unlike the now derelict mills we see dotted around the Broads which pump water from the land into the rivers.

An 1834 map depicted a windmill near the site of St. Michael's Chapel. It stood by the junction of Camp Road and Wolfe Road. Camp Road was once called Mill Road. Another mill which was recorded stood near the junction between St. Leonard's Road and Ladbrooke Place.



Today the only reminder of this part of Thorpe Hamlet history is the 'Windmill' Public House in Knox Road, just off Plumstead Road. Built on the site of a windmill and house, part of the pub dates back to 1852, with an extension added in the 1930s. It was first licensed to sell beer in 1883 although I expect the miller and his customers had imbibed long before that. All our mills are now lost. If only there had been a preservation society to care for one of them. The wind still blows across the Thorpe Ridge but now it heads towards Great Yarmouth and the new turbines in the off shore wind farms. They may look elegant in the distance but they lack the romance of Dusty Miller of our long lost windmills.

Published February 2011

74. Archery in Thorpe Hamlet

In May 1886, the Norfolk & Norwich Archery Society held a competition in Thorpe Hamlet. The President of the Society was R. J. H. Harvey Esq., MP. Although the Harvey family no longer lived in Mousehold House, the tenants at the time, Mr and Mrs Hackblock, were known to enjoy arranging social events.

There were competitions for Gentlemen and Ladies; the gentlemen's targets were at 80 and 60 yards and the ladies' targets were at 60 and 50 yards, and there were many prizes of about a guinea (approx. £1.10). The Best Gentleman was the Rev. W. C. Safford and the Best Lady was Miss Hansell. It sounds like a gentle Victorian early summer's day. Ladies in long skirts and big hats, gentlemen with moustaches dressed in their finery, and servants serving tea and maybe something a bit stronger. All so very different from the origins of archery.

Cave drawings have shown hunters with bows and arrows, and the use of the longbow has been part of English history from the Norman Conquest to Agincourt and beyond. Archers and their bows and arrows were so important that in 1252 a decree called the Assize of Arms stated that every man between the age of 15 and 60 had to equip himself with a bow and arrows. A law in 1363 commanded that men should practice archery on Sundays and holidays and no other sports were to be played. This was a kind of 'National Service' because Kings never had a permanent army and would call men to fight when needed.

In Norwich areas are shown on maps as 'Butts' which were the places where the archery took place; one was in Chapelfield Gardens and another in an area near Bishop Bridge. Large areas were needed as a good archer could shoot an arrow 200 yards. Health and Safety must have been a problem, because Henry I proclaimed that an archer would be absolved from murder if he killed a man during archery practice. All so unlike that May day in 1886. The Rev. Safford would have had to spend many hours of his Sundays at the butts to get anywhere near the distance of an ordinary archer in medieval times. These days archery is a sport in the Olympics and Paraplegic Olympics. Archery targets used to be seen on Heartsease School playing field. That is now gone, but another school in Norwich has a junior club. These days the nearest clubs are the Taverham Archers and the Hingham Bowman. The archery connection has not completely left Thorpe Hamlet, as a new archery shop has opened in the shopping parade in Borrowdale Drive.



Clickers archery shop
Photo : John Trevelyan

Published March 2011

75. The visit of the Chief Scout Sir Robert Baden-Powell

On 21st June 1926, Thorpe Station was a scene of great excitement for a parade of Wolf Cubs who were awaiting a train bringing Sir Robert Baden-Powell for the Scout Rally at Mousehold Aerodrome. Their moment of glory, when they were to be inspected by the Chief of the Scouting Movement, was somewhat curtailed by the train being 31 minutes late. Sir Robert was taken from the station to a canoe waiting at Riverside, in which he was paddled by scouts to the landing point at Pull's Ferry. From there he went to Cathedral Close to inspect Scouts parading near the Nelson monument.

A lunch in his honour was held at the Maid's Head, after which there were speeches. As the luncheon party included Lord Albermarle, the Lord Mayor and the Sheriff of Norwich, the High Sheriff of Norfolk and the Dean of Norwich Cathedral, I expect the speeches took some time. Once over, Baden-Powell was then escorted to Mousehold Aerodrome by outriders of Rover Scouts on motor-bikes. The public lined the streets to see and greet the hero of the Siege of Mafeking in South Africa and the founder of the Scout Movement. Once on Mousehold he spent the afternoon inspecting scouts, who gave demonstrations of saving a boy from drowning in a pond, cooking on a camp fire, gymnastics and first aid. The Great Yarmouth group sang some sea shanties. After a full day Sir Robert Baden-Powell returned to London by train leaving the scouts, I hope, with fond memories, without any burnt food in the camp fire, the rescued drowning boy not having caught a cold, and the canoeists not having caught a crab and splashing the Great Chief.



Mousehold Aerodrome
Photo copyright Edward Bulpit

This remarkable man, who spawned an idea that became an international organisation for boys and young men, had served in the army for 34 years all over the world. He refined all his experience into codes of conduct, with a scheme that was practical and adventurous. His wife Olave St. Clair Soames and his sister Agnes Baden-Powell were also actively involved in Scouting, but promoted a similar organisation for girls which became the Girl Guide Movement. Their legacy remains to this day, with active Scout and Guide groups meeting in Thorpe St. Andrew. The working of the Girl Guides can be seen closer to home in their headquarters at Pull's Ferry, where on Saturdays and Sundays between the beginning of June and the end of September afternoon teas are served.

Published April 2011

76. Murder in Rosary Road

In 1916, with the continuing lists of casualties from the battlefields of France, it might seem that one death in Thorpe Hamlet would be of little interest.

On the morning of 20th July 1916, Charles Thompson was walking along Rosary Road towards the factory of Messrs H. Thompson, where he was managing director. It was a day like any other with children making their way to school when as Thompson neared his Chalk Hill Works, a man ran up behind him and stabbed him, first in the back, and then as he fell, in the chest. As he fell to the ground, his attacker retreated down St. Matthew's Road and threw his knife into the churchyard.

One of the first to reach Thompson was a thirteen year-old girl, soon to be followed by others. Henry Bushell left his shop on Rosary Road to help Thompson who was still conscious. Bushell ran to ask the foreman of Chalk Hill Works to phone for the ambulance. When it arrived he was taken to the Old Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, but died shortly afterwards.

The assailant was soon apprehended after leaving the scene of the crime by a Private Smith, who handed him over to the police. When arrested he gave his name as William Crosskill, and in the following trial the past history between the two men was revealed. In court it was reported that Crosskill had been employed at Chalk Hill Works, but had been sacked in November 1915, when the foreman complained of his work. After this he felt that Thompson had personally stopped him from getting further work and had tried to get him fired from any further job he obtained. His brother, as a witness, said that Crosskill had suffered an injury when he was knocked off his bike by a car, and since that time thought that everyone was against him. A medical expert who had examined Crosskill was asked if he was fit to stand trial and was able to understand the proceedings. After careful consideration he answered to the effect that he was not. Croskill pleaded guilty and wanted to be tried, but a jury agreed with the judge that he was in an unfit state to plead. He w as ordered to be kept, in custody at His Majesty's pleasure, which meant that he would probably spend the rest of his days in a mental institution.

The decision of the court shows that whatever we feel about the harshness of the judgement of the period, the existence of mental health problems was recognised in civil cases. For those serving in the armed forces it was a different matter. They were given no consideration for the mental problems caused by warfare and men were shot for desertion.

Published May 2011

77. The floods of 1912

The weather around the world has been in the news recently, notably floods in Australia and America. In August 1912, Norwich hit the national headlines with its own flood, the worst in its history. On the two days of 25th and 26th August, nearly 8 inches (200 mm) of torrential rain fell in Norfolk. The reason Norwich suffered so much was because the water in the river Wensum was squeezed through the city by its river banks, buildings and bridges. Some of the water in the river Wensum that passes between the Walled City and Thorpe Hamlet starts miles into the countryside beyond Fakenham near Weasenham St. Peter, and is also joined by the river Tud near Hellesdon. The river Tud carries water from as far away as East Dereham. After two days of the rain all over Norfolk draining into the river system, an enormous amount of water reached Norwich on 27th August. On the first night 3 people were killed and 2,200 took shelter in schools and halls.

Thorpe Hamlet is divided geographically into two levels - firstly the heights leading to a plateau safe from the floods, and secondly, the flood plains of the riverside. As the waters came round to the stretch bounding Thorpe Hamlet, it covered the Cathedral playing fields until the river and fields looked like one lake. River trade came to a halt. The flooding and the rain caused the road at the bottom of Ketts Hill to subside and wash away the front wall of the 'Ostrich' public house.

Shops and houses in Kerrison and Carrow Roads were flooded, as were the Laurence Scott factory and offices. Their workshops were under two feet of water. The workforce raised machinery to a safe level, and drawings and plans were saved.

On 30th August the water subsided, leaving an estimated £100,000 of damage to the city and with 15,000 people losing homes and property.



1912 flood marker at Bishop Bridge
Photo : Philip Marriage

After the floods, the river near Fishergate was widened to allow an easier flow of water. In the Guildhall there is still a room named the Flood Room, where the city gave financial help to the city's inhabitants wherever possible.

The river Wensum, which flows through Norwich, carrying water from a large part of Norfolk, continues until it merges with the river Yare at Trowse, where, now as the river Yare, it flows down to the sea at Great Yarmouth.

Published June 2011

78. The Thorpe railway crash of 1874

On Thursday 10th September 1874 at approx. 9.30 p.m. the Great Yarmouth Mail Train and the London Express crashed head on at Thorpe St. Andrew, just past the 'Cottage' public house, now known as the 'Rushcutters'. On hearing a large explosion people came rushing out in the dark and in heavy rain to help to rescue the injured. The flimsy wooden carriages became a mass of tangled debris, making the work more difficult. The drivers and firemen of both trains and the guard of the London train were killed as were 20 passengers. Seventy-eight others were injured. The 'Cottage' public house and its boat-house were used as shelter for caring for the injured, and also as a mortuary.

This was the worst disaster in railway history. Although the crash happened in Thorpe St. Andrew, the cause stemmed from mistakes made at Thorpe Station. A signal had been sent from Ely to say that the London train was 40 minutes late, but after the signal had been sent the train somehow made up the lost time. The track between Norwich and Brundall was single track, and the use of it was controlled from Thorpe station by a telegraphic signal system between Brundall and Norwich. Within two days a Court of Enquiry was set up to find out the reason for the accident. On the night of the crash the usual procedures had been confused by the fact that the London train had been late and then made up the time.

The Great Yarmouth train should have been held at Brundall until the London train had passed. As the night shift came on duty, Cooper, the Night Inspector, was anxious to get the Great Yarmouth train, held at Brundall, on its way. The first misunderstanding happened between Cooper and Sproule, the Station Master, which led to Cooper ordering a signal to be sent to Brundall by the Signal Clerk, Robson. A further complication for the Court of Enquiry was that Cooper had written this order but had not signed it. When the London Train came into Norwich the Station Master, Sproule, let it go on its way to Brundall, which resulted in the inevitable crash. It immediately became obvious that a crash would happen, but by that time nothing could be done to stop it. Cooper was the only person blamed for the accident and he was sentenced to 8 months' hard labour. To add to the sadness of this tragedy a second rail track was already being laid at the time. John Prior, Driver, and James Light, Fireman of the Great Yarmouth train were buried side by side in the Rosary Cemetery.



John Prior's tomb in the Rosary cemetery
Photo : John Trevelyan

Published July 2011

79. Petch's Corner

When Jim, my husband, was planning the Thorpe Hamlet Quiz for the History Weekend at St. Matthew's Church we visited all the sites to take photographs, one of which was Petch's corner. We took the path down to the river by Zaks cafe, which led us to the area where William Petch had a boatyard where he built Wherries. He was first recorded in a Norwich Directory in 1845 as a boat builder and also as the publican of the 'Horse Barracks' public house. Petch has given his name to the area but he was not the first to build boats here. John Thirtle, one of the Norwich School of Painters, painted 'Boat Builder's Yard near the Cow Tower, Norwich', around 1812. The painting, now in the Castle Museum, shows a wherry under construction on the slipway at the side of the Wensum.



Petch's corner
Photo : John Trevelyan

Looking at the site now it is difficult to believe that a boat as large as a wherry was built here. The names of at least three are known 'Jessie', 'Hand of Providence' and 'Jenny Morgan'. Each wherry has a weather-vane, a thin six foot pendant at the top of the mast. The first 'Jenny Morgan' wherry weather-vane depicted a girl in welsh costume. Later all wherry weather vanes were called 'Jenny Morgans'. Petch ceased boat building in 1865 but he continued to manage the 'Horse Barracks' pub for another thirty years.

Changes in the area since Petch's day are partly due to the widening of Barrack Street in the 1930s which encroached on the site. The 'Horse Barracks' pub was demolished and then rebuilt in 1938 closer to the river. In April 1942 the pub was partly demolished in an air raid, but re-opened in January 1943 in a temporary building. The name was changed to John W. Stokes in 1975, but finally closed in 1989 and then demolished in 2002. In 1977 the Norwich Society, with the approval of Norwich City Council and the assistance of pupils of the Blyth-Jex School, undertook work to transform a derelict piece of land along the riverside to commemorate Petch and the Wherries. A former mast of the Wherry 'Albion' was erected on the water's edge by Venture Scouts and apprentice engineers. The river Wensum is possibly quieter now than it has been for a thousand years. Now holiday makers in their boats, fishermen and walkers can now enjoy most of the riverside in Thorpe Hamlet. Petch's Corner, however, is in need of some loving care to bring it up to standard to take its place as part of one of the best stretches of the footpath along the river Wensum in Norwich.

Published August 2011

80. A soldier's life

Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck the brute!"
Saviour of 'is country, "when the guns shoot",

Kipling's poem 'Tommy' was first published in 1890 and in it he was expressing the regard in which the lower ranks were held. Today most families have either a member who has been a member of the Armed Forces or a father or grandfather who has served. This fact, together with greater news coverage, has given us a better understanding of the life of the modern soldier.

This contrast in the regard for the private soldier was brought home to me while reading Neil Storey's 'A Grim Almanac of Norfolk'. Thorpe Hamlet has had for over two hundred years a strong link with the Army; first it had the Cavalry Barracks in Barrack Street, used by the Lancers, Dragoons and Hussars, and then the Norfolk Regiment in Britannia Barracks on Mousehold Heath.

In peacetime, soldiers, once trained, seldom went short of leisure time. Cavalrymen did not get quite so much because they had to take care of their horses, and maintain elaborate equipment. An infantryman was often left to his own devices after 4 p.m., whereas the poor cavalryman often had to attend an evening 'Stables Parade' which sometimes went on as late as 7 p.m. In October 1832 men of the 7th Hussars started to complain of being overworked. While on parade, the soldiers refused to come to attention when commanded to do so by Colonel Keane. Retribution was swift. One, Private William Pitman was taken to the officers' quarters, tried and sentenced to 200 lashes. He was returned to the parade ground where the punishment was administered at once.

A further group of soldiers were court-martialled in November. Private John Martin was sentenced to transportation to Australia for life, Thomas Almond was transported for 7 years, Henry Bone for 7 years, John Clason for 14 years and Charles Edwards for 12 months. Five Non-Commissioned Officers were reduced to the ranks and a Regimental Sergeant Major was suspended.

Further evidence of the harshness of a soldier's life is to be seen by the three tombstones in the Rosary Cemetery of men of the 16th Lancers who died of diseases in the Cavalry Barracks and were left behind when the Regiment moved on.

The battlefields are, as always, dangerous places, but at least the soldiers of today are more valued at home.

Published September 2011

81. Walls

Recently work has been in progress to repair and preserve the City Wall, which was begun to be built as early as the late 13th century. Thorpe Hamlet has no defensive walls, but we do have one of the boom towers. The tower is by the river near Carrow Bridge by the football ground. There were two towers, one on each side of the river, which had an iron chain suspended between them. This chain was normally kept on the river bed and only pulled up when necessary to protect the city from danger by boats coming up river. The other point of our connection with the defence of the city was Bishop Bridge which originally had a Gatehouse in which all the armaments pointed towards Thorpe Hamlet, and which were used against Kett's men in his rebellion, when they were camped on Mousehold Heath.

Central Norwich has not got all the interesting walls. Thorpe Hamlet may not have defensive walls but many of our walls are protective. The buildings along the ridge way often have strong retaining walls to top them sliding down the hill. One of the biggest was at the back of the Nest, the old home of Norwich Football Club. One part was so close to the pitch, it was said to intimidate the away teams when the ball went near it, and was considered to be worth an extra goal to the Canaries. Aspects of the history of Thorpe Hamlet can be seen in the walls. The oldest walls in our area are those of the remains of the ruins of St. Michael's Chapel on the Jubilee Heights. These were built at the same time as the cathedral, circa 1096. An unusual specimen is the Crinkle Crankle wall at the bottom of Harvey Lane, built in the early 18th century by John Harvey to mark the boundary of his estate when he extended the grounds of Thorpe Lodge. The tallest walls are those around Norwich Prison, opened in 1887. Built on Mousehold Heath, the prison stood out as a black grim monument. It is now surrounded by houses and hidden from view to the majority of people. Thorpe Hamlet's military connection are there to be seen in the remains of the gateway in Britannia Road. This wall is now part of the prison. Walls are not always of brick. Flint is often used, either in its natural state, or knapped to show its inner natural colour and texture. On some garden walls, the mixture of flint and brick has been painted with a pitch-like substance which could be bought from the Gas Works at the bottom of Gas Hill. A row of houses on St. Leonard's Road were built from bricks used in the retorts at the Gas Works which converted coal into gas. But this is the month for Christmas good cheer, and the walls all have doors to welcome in friends and family. Except for Norwich Prison where not everyone can come out.



Thorpe Hamlet wall of gas works materials
Photo : John Trevelyan

Published October 2011

82. New Year's Resolution (2012)

New Year's Resolutions are often broken within days of them being made, but this year we have made one which will not be broken. It is that the Thorpe Hamlet History Group will finish its second occasional paper. The subject this time is 'The shops in Thorpe Hamlet', a subject which we thought would be fairly straightforward. We started by collecting information about shops from 1867 until the present day. This was more complicated that it at first appeared as records so far back are limited. Shops could be purpose built or adapted private houses. For this study we excluded mobile shops that drove around the streets selling goods, as were hairdressers, piano teachers, shoe repairers and dressmakers working from home. They will have to wait for another time.

We found that some shops had been in the same families for two or three generations. There were many independent bakers who baked bread on the premises. Those who say "the best thing since sliced bread" have forgotten what a pleasure it was to smell and taste a warm crispy freshly-baked loaf. Refrigerators were unknown to most butchers and fishmongers, and meat and fish would have been bought as needed. Whilst we have been doing this work, I have become more aware of the skills the shopkeepers required. They knew their customers and would stock their shops with products that would sell. They had their own money tied up in the stock so mistakes could be costly. Vegetables could decay, cheese go mouldy and butter rancid - it took considerable skill to buy and store efficiently. There were no 'use before' dates on tins or 'use before' dates on butter etc.

During World Wars I and II, shopkeepers also had to contend with rationing. On top of buying stock they had to deal with all those little coupons cut from ration books and keeping lists of registered customers. Supermarkets of today have accountants and managers to help them. The local shops just had to get on with it. For those shopkeepers who lived through all this, decimalisation would have seemed easy. After changing all their prices and tills, and getting to grips with the new coinage, they also had to cope with befuddled customers.

We still have our corner shops but fewer of them. Their decline has been caused in various ways from the bombing in World War II, road widening schemes, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, and the loss of customers with the closure of the barracks in Barrack Street and the factories of Boulton and Paul and Laurence Scott and Electromotors. Changing shop habits were also significant - the most important probably brought about by refrigerators and the use of the car. Supermarkets are not the only changes; there also 'take away' food outlets and charity shops. Maybe in another ten years time another 'Occasional Paper' will be needed to record other changes in shopping which will surely come.

Published November 2011

83. Norwich Prison

In 1887 the new Norwich Prison was opened on Mousehold Heath, replacing the Norwich Castle and the Norwich Gaol as prisons. It was built when Mousehold was a true heath with few trees and houses. The road to the prison had gravel pits along it and a windmill for grinding corn. Attached to the windmill was a beer house that had been licensed in 1883. It is now the 'Windmill' Public House and must have been busy while the builders worked on the prison with its high forbidding walls. The walls may have been tall and the gates solid but on 11th February 1888 two men escaped. Robert Annison was serving 12 months for stealing fowl and Robert Large, a 21 year old, already a well-known criminal, was serving three months hard labour for poaching. Escaping across a wintry Mousehold Heath they went their separate ways; Annison fled to Constable Clipperton at Martham where he was captured 5 days later, and Large made it to his father's house in Lenwade and arrested after 6 days. As Robert Large was brought back to Norwich Prison, news of his capture spread and crowds gathered to shout abuse, not at Robert Large but at the arresting officers. At Thorpe Station a cab to be used to take the party to the prison was threatened, and it was feared that it would be overturned. In Neil Storey's book 'A Grim Almanac of Norfolk', it is clear that Robert Large continued his life as a "notorious poacher".

In August 1904 a photograph and a description of him was issued on a poster to aid in his capture. He was described as being aged 37, six foot and one inch tall, brown eyes, and with a moustache and brown hair. There followed a list of his scars - on his forehead, neck, left thumb, palm of hand, little finger, right wrist, and right and left shins. This description, along with his photograph would have made it difficult for him to hide.

In the last 125 years Norwich Prison has been on the edge of Thorpe Hamlet in an almost unseen world of its own. If Annison and Large returned they would still recognise some of the structures, but they would also see a prison with a unit especially designed for the elderly. Seeing prisoners growing plants to brighten the streets of Norwich would I am sure be quite a surprise to them. What might surprise them even more is an artefact we have in the Thorpe Hamlet History Group 'archives'. It is a piece of wood from the main door of the prison, where it is said that a man took an axe to it trying to get back inside.



Norwich Prison
Photo : John Trevelyan

Published December 2011

84. Gateway to the world

Arthur Ransome in his children's book 'Coot Club', about adventures on the Norfolk Broads has as its first sentence "Thorpe Station is a terminus; trains from the middle of England and the south run in there, and if they are going east by way of Wroxham, they run out the same way they ran in". This was written in 1934. In 1950 more than 20,000 holiday makers and passengers used the station on Summer Saturdays. Thorpe Station was not the only station in Norwich. There were two others, Victoria Station, now the site of a Sainsbury's supermarket on Queen's Road, which closed to passengers in 1978. The other, the City Station, was bombed in 1942 and the last passenger train from there ran on 28th February 1959. It was the terminus of the M. & G. N. company, often called the Muddle and Go Nowhere because its line wandered around the Norfolk countryside.

It was an article about Mohammed Ali's 70th birthday in 1971 which said that on his visit to Norwich he came by train to Thorpe Station, that made me think of all those who had previously gone through those arches in Thorpe Station. King George VI inspected troops in the station car park in the 1940s, and the Queen came in 1951, as Princess Elizabeth, to a civic welcome, after her journey on the 'Norfolkman' festival train. Edward Heath used a carriage in a siding there to sign and sell his books. Edith Cavell's last journey back to Norwich passed through the station before she was buried with full honours in Life's Green in the cathedral grounds.

Like all gateways, people go through them in both directions. During the Boer Wars troops from Britannia Barracks marched to the station as thousands gathered to watch, many marching along beside them. A train seven carriages long carried them away as the band played 'Auld Lang Syne'. Troops also left Thorpe during World Wars I and II. For some this was their last view of the city. Thorpe was also the freight station which took away the ammunitions made at the Laurence Scott factories during World War I, and in peace times goods such as shoes from our manufacturing bases.

As you go to Thorpe Station to take a journey or to meet someone coming to Norwich, look around and think of those who have gone before. My husband and I like train journeys, and before the Iron Curtain came down we decided to go to Prague by train via Eurotunnel. We went to the booking office and asked the clerk for two tickets. He sent us away for a coffee. When we returned half an hour later all the tickets, reservations and couchette bookings were ready. With these pieces of paper we travelled across Europe and passed through all the customs posts and the Iron Curtain. Thorpe Station is a real gateway to the world.

Published January 2012

85. Upstairs, Downstairs in Thorpe Hamlet

Television at the moment seems to be on a nostalgia trip with programmes such as 'Downton Abbey' and 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. If the producers ever need another source of inspiration they could do no better than come to Thorpe Hamlet. Although it is on a smaller scale, the estate of which Mousehold House is the centre would provide all the necessary elements. The Mousehold Farm Estate covered 150 acres of woodland and fields, bounded by Plumstead Road, Harvey Lane and the main Great Yarmouth turnpike, now called the Thorpe Road. When Sir Robert John Harvey returned from the wars in Spain and Portugal as a Lieutenant Colonel on half pay, he decided to buy the Mousehold Estate. He had just married Charlotte, a distant relative and an heiress. He was born in Thorpe Lodge, which now houses the Broadland Council Offices, and he would have known the area as a child.

He set about developing the property as a home, and engaged the services of William Mears to re-model the building by adding various rooms and storage areas, but the most noticeable aspect of all the additions was the large four pillar portico and pediment to form an imposing entrance to the house. The transformation was completed in 1821 and, together with the parkland and gardens, it was all set to be a place to entertain Norwich Society. The Harvey family was growing, and so also was the number of indoor servants, from butlers to scullery maids. The coaches and horses needed grooms, stable boys and coachmen, and three lodges were built for all the other farmworkers and estate workers.

Sir Robert died on 18th June 1860, aged 75. His widow continued to live in Mousehold House until her death on 23rd March 1869. The year before her death, another house, called Holmwood, was built for the family on the estate. By now however the main family base was in Crown Point, Trowse over the river and Mousehold House was leased out to a Mr. Hackblock, the Director of Morgan's Brewery. The Census of 1881 shows that there was still an 'Upstairs' and 'Downstairs' in Mousehold House. Mr. Hackblock lived there with his wife and children, aged 11, 8, 7 and 6, together with a resident Governess, Nurse, Housemaid, Cook, Parlour Maid and Kitchen Maid.

Other information can also be seen on the Census, such as for instance, place of birth. The Census for Mousehold House shows that although most of the servants working in the grounds were from Norfolk, two of the female servants came from Middlesex. As a Middlesex girl myself who has been here for 45 years, I'm sure they loved it here and stayed.

Published February 2012

86. The Penny Black and Twopenny Blue

In May 1840, the Post Office issued its first postage stamps, the Penny Black and Twopenny Blue. Letter writing was never to be the same again. Our postage stamps were the first in the world and they are still the only ones that do not have the name of the country on them - the monarch's head in profile is considered to be enough.

Rowland Hill is usually credited with the introduction of prepaid letters with adhesive stamps. Before this, letters were sent via receiving offices, and the recipient of the letter had to pay the postman when the letter was delivered. If you couldn't pay you didn't get your letter.

A later innovation was the Post Box introduced into Britain in 1853 by the novelist Anthony Trollope who was a senior official in the Post Office. He adapted a system already used in Europe. Now you could buy stamps and go to the nearest post box to post your letter. Sending letters was now easier and the cost to send a letter to anywhere in Britain was known. A whole new industry was born with the production of writing paper, post cards, and Birth, Valentine and Christmas Cards. The increase in the number of letters being posted increased the number of postmen needed to deliver the letters twice a day, to empty post boxes and sort letters; some even worked on trains sorting the mail as the trains sped through the countryside. The stamp on the envelope was franked with a postmark that showed the place, time and date that it reached the sorting office. A recently bought postcard at a Stamp Fair showed all these things, and the writer of the card had written "I will see you tomorrow afternoon". Such confidence that the card would be delivered so quickly.



Former Mousehold Post Office, St. Leonard's Road
Photo : Michael Everitt

In Thorpe Hamlet there were Post Offices in Bishop Bridge Road, Plumstead Road, St. Leonard's Road and two in Thorpe Road. Here you could post parcels, collect pensions, use Post Office Savings Banks, buy postal orders and send telegrams - all now gone as has also the second daily delivery .

The new price of a first class stamp is now 60p, or in old money 12 shillings. With the increase in e-mails, you print off the letters, thus paying for the paper and the ink, so you are again paying to receive a letter. Such is progress.

Published March 2012

87. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee

This year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee will be full of celebrations, and 5th June, the actual day of the anniversary, will be a National Holiday. There are plans for street parties, and many schools and care homes are having special events. On the first of May Greater Anglia Trains unveiled the plaque on the side of a freshly-painted train. Its new name is 'The Diamond Jubilee'. The engine will run on the Norwich to London line. On 25th April Thorpe Hamlet was visited by Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, when he visited the Sea Cadets to celebrate their 100th anniversary. This was his 2nd visit to the Sea Cadets; his last visit was in 2005.

The centre of Norwich has often had visits by members of the Royal Family, but only a few have crossed the river to come to Thorpe Hamlet. King Edward VII reviewed the troops on Mousehold on 25th October 1909, and on 27th June 1923, David, Prince of Wales (later to become the Duke of Windsor) on his visit to Norwich came to Thorpe Hamlet when he opened the then new Carrow Bridge. When King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, later to be the Queen Mother, came to open the City Hall on 29th October 1938, the King came to Thorpe Hamlet to see Norwich City Football Club play Millwall. He shook hands with the players and saw the start of the game but left before the end of the match and probably never saw Millwall score its two goals to beat Norwich. It was the first time that a reigning monarch had ever attended a Second Division match.

These days we don't have to see the Royal Family in person, exciting though it still is, as we can see them on television, and can read reports about them in the newspapers.

If you are as old as I am you realise that this is the Queen's third Jubilee we have seen - the Silver Jubilee in 1977 when an area of land in Thorpe Hamlet was laid out as a large terraced garden with the aid of the Queen's Jubilee Fund and named Jubilee Heights. It has now been renamed as Kett's Heights. There was the Golden Jubilee in 2002.



Cathedral view from Kett's Heights
Photo : John Trevelyan

I was in London on the day of the Coronation and saw the celebration for a new Sovereign, a young mother who was crowned in Westminster Abbey and took on a life of dedication. Like the Queen I too am a grandmother. However I was able to retire, but as we will see in this Diamond Jubilee year Queen Elizabeth II is still performing her duties.

Published April 2012

88. Barnum and Bailey

Although outside the centre of Norwich, Thorpe Hamlet was often the place to see spectacular events. On 29th July 1899 a special train from Great Yarmouth pulled into Thorpe Station carrying the famous Barnum and Bailey's Circus. When it disembarked, the animals, performers and circus workers together with all the tents and wagons made their way to where the circus was to be set up. The American Circus had started its European tour in 1897 and called itself the 'Greatest Show on Earth'. With this reputation and all the forward publicity crowds would have thronged to see this world-famous circus. After only a few days the whole process was repeated in reverse as the circus returned to the station to board the train to go to Bury St Edmunds.

When you see photographs of the funerals of Jeremiah Colman of Mustard fame and Sir George White, shoe manufacturer, it is clear that the city must have been almost at a standstill as the funeral procession made its way over Foundry Bridge and along Thorpe Road to the cemetery. The funeral cortege would have been led by a hearse pulled by plumed black horses. Following the hearse were the family mourners and the entire workforce from the deceaseds' factories. Even after the funeral, people would visit the cemetery to view the floral tributes on the grave and the on the surrounding area.

There was always something interesting happening. Boulton and Paul produced aircraft which would have been taken through Thorpe Hamlet to their aerodrome on Mousehold Heath to have their first flights. The Cavalry Regiments from the barracks in Barrack Street would have paraded in their smart dress uniforms astride their horses on the Heath.



The Olympic flame arrives in Thorpe Hamlet, July 2012
Photo : John Trevelyan

This year colour has returned to Thorpe Hamlet with street parties for the Queen's Golden Jubilee, and on the morning of Thursday 5th July, the Olympic Flame will be carried through Thorpe Hamlet from Riverside opposite Pull's Ferry up Ketts Hill and along Plumstead Road. A few days later a 'Duck Race' will take place on the river. These events may not be as spectacular as Barnum and Bailey's circus but they still give us a chance to have some fun.

Published May 2012

89. The Marion Day Centre

Some parts of Thorpe Hamlet, such as Lion Wood, seem to have been untouched for centuries, but others have packed so much activity in just a few decades. One such area is the site between Marion, Ella and St. Leonard's Roads. The land was sold by Isaac Bugg Coaks to the School Board for schools for girls, boys and infants which were opened in 1887. Fifty-five years later the schools were damaged by bombing on 25th April 1942. Temporary huts were built and the schools continued into the 1980s. On the site now are the Ellacombe Residential Care Centre, part of the Hamlet Centre, the Marion Road Day centre and a play area for young children.

The Marion Day Centre, behind its façade, hides a very active place for the care and support for the elderly in the community. It was started as a joint venture with Norwich Consolidated Charities, the Health Authority, Social Services and Age Concern. Work started on the Centre in 1985 and was handed over to the Trustees on 23rd June 1986. By August the Centre was up and running with its first manager Judy Buntin. An official opening took place in October 1986 with a visit from Gillian Shephard, the Chair of Norwich District Health Authority. Now 25 years later the Day Centre has developed and encompasses many aspects related to the care of the elderly and fragile. For the physical care there are specially designed baths. A hair dresser is frequently available for those who wish to take advantage of the facilities. Properly cooked food is prepared in the Centre's kitchens to cater for the inner man or woman. This also includes lunches and cakes for afternoon teas. The social side is full and varied. Activities include a weekly Internet Club, Quizzes, Table Games, Handicrafts, Bingo and Reminiscing sessions, occasional shopping trips and just meeting friends. There are enough rooms to allow a choice of activities, and there is a very pretty garden with two small summer houses.

Not all the work that the Centre does takes place on the site. It reaches out and involves the larger community. It also gives support for carers which, although administered from the Centre, can take place in different venues. Students from the City College get work experience, and there are contacts with the Lionwood and St. William's Way Schools, and St. Matthew's Church. Today, the Manager, Jane Skingsley of Age UK, with Alison Bessey, the Care Co-ordinator and Rita Cushion, the Administrator and Co-ordinator of the Carers' Group, run the complex work of the Centre.

The original owner of the land, Isaac Bugg Coaks, in his old age, brought two of his adult children home to his house in Fernhill to die. I'm sure they would have all benefitted from the care and compassion found at the Marion Road Day Centre.

Published June 2012

90. Thorpe Hamlet's part in the Napoleonic Wars

Now the Olympics are over most of us will have memories of the Games, even if it is only who was in charge of the TV remote control switch. One of my memories is the Women's Rowing Pairs finals when Heather Stanning and Helen Glover won the race for our first gold medal. Not being interested in sport, what impressed me was the speed of communication between London and the troops in Afghanistan. Heather Stanning, an officer in the Royal Artillery, was congratulated, via television, within an hour by her army comrades. It made me think of the site of the Water Tower where a semaphore station stood, which is about 200 yards from my home. Just over two hundred years ago, when the Napoleon's troops threatened our shores, it was important to get messages from the coast to the Admiralty, and also to get orders back to the ships. The French had been using a semaphore shutter system as early as 1795, and soon after the English carried out trials. By 1796 the system was used to send messages along the south coast from Deal to Portsmouth, but it was not until June 1808 that a line between Great Yarmouth and London was established.

Because of fog at sea, the line of the shutter stations came inland to Norwich at Thorpe Hamlet via one station at Strumpshaw. Thorpe Hamlet was the highest point in Norwich which would avoid the smoke and smog in the city. From a Shutter Station in Thorpe Hamlet messages were passed to a station at Wreningham for further transmission to London via 14 other stations. A message could be sent from Great Yarmouth to London, in daylight hours and if the weather was reasonable, in 30 minutes.

Where the Water Tower now stands is the probable site of a single storey building in which three men would have been on duty during daylight hours. Above the building was a large framed wooden structure holding six shutters which could be opened or closed to encode the messages. Two men were needed, keeping an alert lookout in each direction for incoming messages. A third man was needed to open and close the shutters to encode outgoing messages. A clear view was needed between Thorpe Hamlet and Strumpshaw, and also from Thorpe Hamlet to Wreningham. There would have been fewer trees on Thorpe Ridge in those days. For those on duty it must have been a long day. There were no local pubs to visit - the nearest, the William IV, was at that time a shepherd's hut. The station was closed in November 1814, when the war in France was coming come to an end. So it had already been closed by the time when Napoleon escaped from Elba in March 1815 and the Battle Of Waterloo, which took place in June of the same year. All that remains to remind us that the station was here is the street name 'Telegraph Lane'.



Photo: John Trevelyan

Published July 2012

91. Thorpe Hamlet power station

In the 1920s the need for electricity in Norwich had outgrown the capacity of the original power station in Duke Street, which had been working since 1893. It had been started as a private company and then taken over by the City of Norwich in 1902. The Duke Street site could provide the whole of Norwich and also the outer ring of villages around the city. Electricity was being used for more and more different purposes. Lighting in the home, cooking, heating and soon there would be radios, irons and vacuum cleaners. Norwich industries, especially shoe manufacture, Caley's Chocolate, Colman's, Boulton and Paul, Laurence Scott and brewing, all made more demands on electricity supplies. In 1922 it was decided that a new power station was needed.

When looking for a new site, an area in Thorpe Hamlet was found to be suitable for the purpose. The site of 11 acres between the railway lines and the river Wensum was ideal. The land was firm and not marshy and the river would provide a constant supply of much needed water, and the coal needed to power the station could be brought in by train or river. The new power station was opened on Thursday 28th October 1926 and was a gala affair. The dignitaries left the Guildhall to attend what was called "elaborate ceremonies" at the power station site and then returned for a civic lunch at St. Andrew's Hall. What they saw was a rather classical building that cloaked behind its facade all the machinery of the boiler houses, turbines, steam feeding pumps and switch gear. The building was steel-framed with walls of concrete blocks. The concrete blocks were moulded on site and faced with china clay quartz from Cornwall. The finished effect produced a granite-like appearance - a view the general public only saw if they were travelling by river or train.

Once up and running the Thorpe Power Station could supply all Norwich needs and also of towns and villages into Norfolk as far as North Walsham, Attleborough, East Dereham and Stalham. The demand for electricity was increasing and therefore by 1938 the size of the station had to be increased. Times changed and Thorpe Power Station became part of the National Grid. It was nationalised in 1948 and oil fired gas turbines were introduced. The Power Station was downgraded in 1968 and closed in 1974. Great Yarmouth's Power Station at the South Denes became the main source of electricity. The Thorpe Power Station buildings remained empty but secure until 1979 when demolition work began.

Anyone who is interested can find more technical details of the history of the site in the journal of the Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society Vol 9, No 1, 2011.

Published August 2012

92. "We will remember them"

My husband, Jim, and I have just returned from a holiday in the Netherlands and Germany. One thing we always look out for are war memorials, partly because we are Regional Volunteers for the War Memorials Trust, and partly because other countries' memorials often show another angle on history. In the case of the Netherlands the lack of war memorials is noticeable because in World War I Holland was neutral. Being one of the few countries in Europe that avoided the conflict they have no November 11th Remembrance Service. In the United Kingdom war memorials can be seen in every city, town, village and parish. A few memorials commemorate wars that took place before World War I, such as the one at the top of Prince of Wales Road which is for the Boer or South African War. The memorial in front of Norwich City Hall records no names and is used for civic occasions, and the names of those who died are commemorated in the Norwich Castle Keep, on a series of large boards in a wooden cabinet. One in nine of the men from Norwich who went to war in World War I died, and many of those who returned suffered from the result of their service. The war memorials we now have result from the sense of loss the country felt after the war. All over the country committees worked to raise funds and to choose the form their memorial would take.



St. Matthew's war memorial
Photo : John Trevelyan

The war memorial that now stands in the grounds of St. Matthew's Church was chosen by a committee formed from members of the whole community, and was first erected in the grounds of the old St. Matthew's Church. One hundred and twenty eight men from Thorpe Hamlet died in the First World War. This is an amazing number when you think of the size of Thorpe Hamlet between 1914-1918. What the committee did do was to collect the names of those who died and had those names carved on the monument. This gives us the chance, at least once a year, on or near the 11th November, to say with meaning, "We will remember them". We cannot say this of the servicemen and women who died in World War II, Suez, Korea, Falklands or Afghanistan or any other conflict, since there seem to be no records to help us to find who they are. These people made the supreme sacrifice and should also be remembered by us in their home parish. If anyone knows of any Thorpe Hamlet resident who died on active service in the conflicts in or since World War II, could they please inform Rev. Chris Ellis, Mark Chapman, Bridgid Everitt or myself.

Published September 2012

93. Christmas Crackers

Now that December is here I'm happy to think about the preparation of the Christmas Day family get-together. It's strange to see mince pies in the shops with a sell-by date which runs out before Christmas. One thing that has no sell-by date is the Christmas Cracker. Crackers were said to have been devised by Thomas Smith in 1847. He was an English confectioner and stationery manufacturer, who, when on a visit to Paris saw French sweets wrapped in a twist of coloured paper. He copied the idea and sold the sweets as bon-bons. Sales were good for a while but when they declined he borrowed the idea of Chinese fortune cookies and included a small love motto to the sweet. Italians had a custom of putting a surprise trinket inside chocolate Easter eggs, so Tom Smith replaced the sweet with a trinket, and later added a 'snap' which was two strips of cardboard coated with a small amount of explosive powder which when pulled apart produced an audible bang. He had almost all the ingredients of our Christmas Cracker. The only difference is that we have added a paper hat.

Other companies, including Caleys in Norwich, followed Tom Smith's lead. Mackintosh's who took over Caleys, ceased production of crackers for the duration of World War II, but after the war Mackintosh's Christmas Cracker department and the Tom Smith company agreed to a merger, under the name 'Tom Smiths'. It was agreed that the new joint company would be based in Norwich, and a site for a factory was found on the Salhouse Road and purchased about 1951. Although Salhouse Road is not in Thorpe Hamlet, the factory employed out-workers. Many homes must have had an area filled with bits for Christmas cheer. How did they manage to control the inquisitive fingers of their children? There was a set-back in October 1963 when the Salhouse Road factory burnt down. Much of the material used was inflammable. One witness described the sight as "an enormous firework display". The factory was rebuilt and production resumed about a year later. The Queen's Warrant was granted on 1st January 1964. With their subsidiary factory in Stockport, Tom Smith's produced 50 million crackers a year. By the 1990s the share of Tom Smith's sales was in decline and another take-over took place in 1996, but eventually the new company went into liquidation. The name 'Tom Smith' had a value however and with every change the name has survived.

Christmas Crackers brighten up the Christmas Dinner table, and give the cook time to clear the plates away for the next course, while the others pull the crackers hoping they will get the cracker end that holds the trinket, exchange riddles and mottos, and put on the paper hats. After 150 years the Cracker has become part of the Christmas tradition for many families, and for nearly 50 years Norwich played a major part. Best wishes for Christmas.

Published October 2012

94. The UNESCO literary award and Thorpe Hamlet

Norwich is now officially the UNESCO Britain's City of Literature. The award is not for just a year but is a permanent accolade to our literary heritage. My husband Jim and I are both Blue Badge Tourist Guides and together with our fellow guides have been devising a walking tour in the City of Norwich to include as many of our Norwich authors and writers as possible, ranging from Mother Julian's 'Revelations of Divine Love', to Sir Thomas Browne and his 'Religio Medico'.

While working on this project I began to think of literary connections to Thorpe Hamlet. One of the first writers I thought of was Thomas Monmouth, a Benedictine monk of Norwich Cathedral who wrote about the life and miracles of St. William of Norwich around 1170. It is the story of a boy who was found murdered on Mousehold Heath, and it records the miracles of healing later attributed to him. Later in the 'Paston Letters' written between 1422 and 1509, Margaret Paston tells of her pilgrimage to St. Leonard's Priory to give thanks for the health of her husband. At the top of Gas Hill was the grand house built around 1540 by the Earl of Surrey, the eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk. The Earl was a notable poet. He and his father the Duke were charged with treason by Henry VIII. The Earl was executed in 1547. The Duke's life was spared because Henry VIII died the night before the execution was to take place. Another author with a connection to Thorpe Hamlet is George Borrow who wrote about the gypsies on Mousehold Heath, most famously in 'Lavengro'. It was Borrow who wrote "It was from Mousehold Heath you could see the best view of a Fine Old City". There is now a monument, overlooking the same view, to Ralph Hale Mottram, a prolific author on Norwich and famous for his trilogy 'The Spanish Farm', which drew on his experiences in France during the First World War. The book won him the Hawthorn Prize for literature. Mottram is buried in the Rosary Cemetery. He was encouraged in his writing by the author John Galsworthy who married Ada Nemesis Pearson, a Norwich girl whose mother is also buried in the Rosary in the mausoleum of Emanuel Cooper, a local surgeon. More recent authors were Geoffrey Goreham, who not only wrote about Thorpe Hamlet, but also worked to save Mousehold House. Frank Meeres, who lives locally, has written books on Norwich History, as has also David Berwick who attended the Crome School. Mark Cocker, who once lived here but now lives in Claxton, writes a nature column in a national paper. He has also written an encyclopedia called a 'Birds Britannica'. Two other authors who visit here, if only to see Norwich City Football Club play, are Delia Smith and Stephen Fry.



Geoffrey Goreham when Sheriff of Norwich in 1985 Photo courtesy Mrs Goreham

Published November 2012

95. New Year's resolution (2013)

Have you made and broken your New Year's Resolutions yet? In the January edition of the Parish magazine last year I wrote of the Thorpe Hamlet History Group's New Year's resolution to finish our 2nd Occasional Paper on the shops of Thorpe Hamlet. Well we did it, even if it wasn't completed until our December meeting. Apart from a late check which showed that we had written "Bistro" instead of "Bisto", it was finished. After a discussion about the subject of our next project we all went home to have a relaxed (for some) Christmas. By the end of December however I found that our new shops paper had already become an historical document. Since publication the Shell Petrol Station on Plumstead Road had become a BP Station, Godfrey's announced that they were having a sale in preparation for a complete overhaul of the business, and the shop and ex-post office which was formerly Paul's and then Tracey's had been closed - all proving once again that history is really only yesterday.



Shops at the Riverside Centre
Photo : John Trevelyan

We have placed a copy of 'Thorpe Hamlet Shops' in Plumstead Road Library and will give copies to local schools, to the Local Heritage Centre in the Forum, the Archive Centre in the Norfolk Record Office and the Bridewell Museum which has a good display of shopping memorabilia. Anyone who would like a copy can buy one from me at a price of £4.50 (Telephone 01603 436149). We also still have some copies of our previous paper 'Thorpe Hamlet Street Names' at £2.00 each.

The next project we have decided to work on is Thorpe Hamlet in World War One. With 2014 being the centenary of the start of World War I, when many will be looking back to that time, it seemed to be an appropriate subject. Even in the short time we had at the end of the meeting when we made our decision, ideas began to flow and led us in many directions from the military to the home front and the aftermath of the war. It is history which is almost close enough for us still to feel the effects. A very visible reminder of those times to be seen in the grounds of St. Matthew's church is the Thorpe Hamlet War Memorial. If anyone has any information about any of the 122 men listed on that memorial or any other information or reminiscence relating to World War I, the History Group would be pleased to hear from you.

Published December 2012

96. The Vikings



The bombing raids on Norwich between 1940 - 1942 were known as the Baedeker raids. They were said to be in retaliation for the Royal Air Force raids on Lübeck in North Germany, and were named after the Baedeker tourist guide books. Hitler had chosen from the English edition, cities and towns to be bombed which were noted as being of special interest. These included Norwich, Coventry, Bath and Exeter. This was not the first time Norwich had suffered from a retaliation raid.

On 13th November 1002, St. Brice's Day, there was a massacre of Danes in Oxford which included a woman called Gunhilda. She was the sister of the Danish King Sweyn (also known as Forkbeard). In 1003 King Sweyn had begun raiding Wessex and East Anglia. In 1004 Norwich felt the wrath of one of his attacks. They came up the river to Norwich from Great Yarmouth which at that time was only a small settlement. There were no bridges to impede their voyage or walls to protect Norwich. The inhabited areas of Norwich on both sides of the river Wensum were defined and protected by earth embankments only. The people were no match for the fighting men of King Sweyn. The name of Norwic appears for only the second time in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle which contains a report of the coming of the Danish King Sweyn with his fleet to completely ravage and burn the borough of Norwich.

Did those who survived make for the heights and woods in Thorpe Hamlet for refuge, or did the Danes come uphill to watch the havoc they had caused? After the destruction of Norwich the Danes made their way to Thetford. This was one Royal visit to Norwich that was not welcome.

For the next nine years the Danes kept up their attacks and visits to England. In 1013 Sweyn returned and was proclaimed King of England. He died in 1014 and the Danish army elected his son Canute as their King but it was not until 1017 that Canute could really be said to rule. He died in 1035. The Danes may not have left us much in the way of artefacts, although a gold ingot was found on the site of the Forum, but they did leave us words. Some of their settlements have place names ending in 'by', such as Filby and Hemsby and others with 'Thorpe' in their name. So maybe some of King Sweyn's and Canute's men settled and their descendants are still here in Thorpe Hamlet.

Published January 2013

97. General Sir Robert Harvey

Recently I went to a talk given by Patricia Wagstaffe for the Norwich Society on the subject of General Sir Robert Harvey. Sir Robert was a man who owned much of Thorpe Hamlet from 1816, which he inherited from his father. Many of us must live on land which once belonged to his estate. He came from a well-established Norwich family which made its fortune from weaving and later the manufacture of the famous Norwich shawls. They held most of the important civic posts in Norwich; a John Harvey was a sheriff of Norwich in 1470, and before Sir Robert Harvey was born there were 8 mayors and 7 sheriffs from the Harvey family.

The Harveys first built in Thorpe St. Andrew what is now the Broadland Council offices, and it was here that Harvey was born in 1785. He was the second child of what was to become a family of 15 children giving him 3 brothers and 11 sisters. It must have been a family full of life. They initiated horse racing on Mousehold Heath and the Water Frolics on the river Yare. Some of his education was in Leipzig in Germany. Members of the family went into banking, but Robert joined the Army in 1803, aged 18.

Robert had a very distinguished military career, but to gain honour and glory in the army you needed to be involved in war. For Robert this was the Peninsular War in Portugal and Spain against the Napoleonic Army. He served in various capacities. In 1810 he was made a Major and appointed Assistant Quartermaster General of the Portuguese Army. He worked on organising nine Portuguese Guerilla Corps and the Intelligence Service, where his skill in languages, especially French and German, was useful. A year later in 1811 he was appointed to the General Headquarters of Marshal Lord Wellington, as Liaison Officer to the Portuguese and their Chief of Staff, until the end of the war in 1814. He was at most of the major battles and gained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Portuguese Army, and on Wellington's recommendation he was given the same rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. After the war the King of Portugal made him a Knight of the Order of the Tower and Sword. The British Prince Regent awarded him a Knighthood and in 1831 he was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath.

He returned to England and Thorpe Hamlet in 1815 on half pay. It was then he married his cousin Charlotte, daughter and heir of Robert Harvey of Watton, so going on to half pay was not a problem. Mousehold House and the surrounding area was developed, but Robert also had wider interests than Norwich and was a member of various clubs and societies in London. When he died in 1860 it was reported he was "among the bravest of Norfolk's children".

Published February 2013

98. Horses

While writing the last article for the Parish Magazine about General Robert Harvey I began to realise that horses seemed to play a large part in his life. As an officer in the Army he would have been expected to able to ride even if his troops were in an infantry regiment. Horse riding skills were often honed by taking part in races for pleasure. In May races were held on Mousehold Heath. Booths were set up, bookmakers plied their trade, and a stand was erected for the judges who settled disputes and adjudicated on the winners.

There had to be at least three horses in each race, and the race was three miles long. It's difficult to imagine how all this took place on Mousehold as it is today. In the 1700s the heath stretched further out, and it was true heathland with far fewer trees than there are today. I have seen postcards of trams going up to Britannia Barracks with hardly a tree in sight. The bookmaker Dicky Dowson was born too late to participate in these races; a successful bookmaker who built Berwick House, now the offices of The Wildlife Trust at 22 Thorpe Road. The house was nicknamed "Mugs' Hall". At the back of the house still stand the stable block and coach house, which have been converted into offices.

These were not the only horses on the heath; gypsies often camped there, and the cavalry regiments stationed in Barrack Street also trained there. The cavalry Regiments, the Lancers, Hussars, and Dragoons spent time in the barracks. When on parade in their dress uniforms on their horses, they must have been a grand sight.

Fast horses were not always appreciated. In Carol Twich's book 'The Norwich Book of Days' she records complaints of Railway Men recklessly driving horses and wagons through London Street at a speed of at least eight miles per hour. More sedate groups of horses often seen in Thorpe Hamlet were the black plumed horses that pulled hearses for the funerals of the famous such as the Colmans and George White the shoe manufacturer, as they made their way to the Rosary Cemetery.

Horses needed blacksmiths, grooms, coachmen, pastures, hay and fodder. A site of one blacksmith later became the 'Rosary Tavern' in Rosary Road. There are now residential flats on the site.

It could be argued that our life was richer with horses playing a large part in it. Cars may need less care, but they don't respond as animals do. Horses do not need oil or petrol or cause air pollution but you do need a bucket and shovel.

Published June 2013

99. Proposed lock near the Cow Tower

Norwich City Council may consider Thorpe Hamlet to cover a larger area than the original Thorpe Hamlet, but to me the river Wensum is one of our boundaries, and to get into the centre of Norwich everyone has to cross a bridge. The first bridge to connect us with the rest of Norwich was Bishop Bridge, built in 1340 and one of the oldest bridges still in use in England. We now have two road crossings, one at Carrow Bridge and the other at Foundry Bridge, and two pedestrian bridges, the Novi Sad bridge opened in 2001 and the latest, the Lady Julian bridge which was opened in 2009. As we cross the river and look down to the water we see the holiday boats, but it was not so long ago that Norwich was a busy port with sea-going ships moored along its river banks. Not all the river Wensum was suitable for larger boats. All the bridges, until you reached the Foundry Bridge, could be raised to allow ships to pass, but wherries could lower their masts, so were able to continue up river as far as New Mills. The factories, breweries and warehouses beyond Bishop Bridge were always at a disadvantage, with the narrowing of the river and the water levels changing with the tides. Because of the importance of the river trade to Norwich, different ways were always being considered to make improvements. Maybe the work of the Norwich and Lowestoft Navigation Company inspired the city, in 1834, to make a lock on the Wensum. The lock would control the water levels along the 1.5 mile stretch beyond Bishop Bridge. The location chosen for the lock was near the bend of the river by the Cow Tower and Petch's corner. The plan was to build a canal behind the Cow Tower leaving the tower on an island, with the suggestion that the Cow Tower could be used as a house for the lock-keeper. The original course of the river would have a weir with a sluice-gate to be opened in time of floods.



The Cow Tower
Photo : John Trevelyan

In January 1837, as part of their plans, there was a recommendation that Bishop Bridge should be removed to improve the scheme. The wherry men must have looked forward to these plans to speed up their visits into the upper reaches of the navigation, as sometimes it would take three days for a wherry to get from Bishop Bridge to New Mills. However they may not have been so happy to pay the lock fees.

By April 1838 the Commissioners invoked an Act of 1835 and revised their original vote of 6 to 5 in favour in favour to 6 to 5 against, so Bishop Bridge was saved and the river kept its old course.

Published August 2013

100. A green history book of Norwich

When I walked through the Rosary Cemetery using it as a short cut home, I often felt I was walking through a green history book of Norwich.



Mottram memorial in the Rosary cemetery
Photo : John Trevelyan

Anne Drummond, who died in 1819, aged 41, was the first to be buried in the cemetery. She was born in 1778, which means that some of those buried here have histories dating back into the late 1700s. One path can lead you past the resting place of the Colman family, take another and you find the family plot of Ralph Hale Mottram. Others go past George White, shoe manufacturer or Edward Boardman, architect of many of the grand buildings in Norwich. Many of our roads and schools take their names from those buried in the Rosary. As well as the 'Good and the Great', including 16 Mayors and Lord Mayors, such as Ethel Colman, the first woman to be a Lord Mayor in the country, there are family graves whose tombstones tell stories of child mortality, or railway men who died in accidents on the railway. Being the first non-denominational cemetery in the country, we have many ministers of the various chapels and churches in the city. Not only is the history of Norwich recorded there, but also records of the military and wars around the world. George Wilde fought in the Maori Wars in New Zealand and took part in the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimea. Three men of the 12th Lancers who died in Norwich and buried in the Rosary Cemetery had fought in Afghanistan and in the Indian Mutiny. There are 17 graves of those who died in the armed forces in World War I, and 12 of those who died in World War II, some of which are Commonwealth War Grave Commission headstones.

The Rosary can always spring surprises on you. During June this year we had a call from the Tourist Information Centre saying they had a request for help in finding a burial plot. When I asked the name and they said "Ringer", I was pleased because I could reply straight away "Frederick Ringer of Nagasaki". Sure enough those who wished to visit his resting place were a group of Japanese wanting to pay their respects to a Norwich man who did so much in Nagasaki, and who left a company and family who worked there from 1868 until 1941. The name Ringer is still known in Nagasaki and the Japanese issued a postage stamp in 2002 showing his house. The Rosary's history covers so much - the industrial past of Norwich, the World Wars, religious diversity, railway disasters and childhood illnesses. Hidden in Thorpe Hamlet is this peaceful area that reflects so much of the history of the last 200 years.

Published October 2013

101. Natural history

While watching a robin in the garden who looked as if it should be on a Christmas card, two muntjac deer walked down the path. Very pretty they were too, but not big enough to pull Santa's sleigh. The deer have started visiting our garden in the last two years. They come down towards the house and watch us, and only casually walk away if we open the door. I hope they only eat the weeds and not the flowers. The foxes have been wandering through for years. Seeing them reminds me that we tend to think of history only in human events.

Living in our house for 47 years, we have seen many changes in the wild life in our part of Thorpe Hamlet. The first to disappear were the sparrows and starlings - they went within a year. Bats, housemartins, swallows, or swifts visit less frequently. The bird table is still visited by the robins, blue tits, great tits, coal tits and blackbirds, but they have recently been joined by bigger species of birds such as collared doves, magpies, jays and now crows (or are they rooks?). One seagull visits the table only if what he likes is on offer. He must have exceptional eyesight. The greater spotted woodpeckers come in the spring when their tapping can be heard in the woods. The magpies like cheese and bread, but if the bread is stale, they dunk it in the water bowl.

The jays have learned to balance on the peanut holder. All the birds have got used to the visiting grey squirrels. It's fun to put the peanuts just out of the squirrels' reach and watch the acrobatics as they try to get at them. It wasn't so much fun though when they got into our loft and chewed through the electricity cables and fused all the lights. The grey squirrel, a foreigner from America, and the muntjac deers, originally from China and Taiwan, were both introduced into England as novelties, but escaped into the wild. The muntjacs were escapees from Whipsnade Zoo and Woburn Abbey.

Not all our new visitors are as visible and can merge easily into our native species, such as our Bishy Barnabees and the harlequin ladybirds. The newest invader is the Spanish slug, first spotted in Norfolk a year ago. The John Innes Institute in Norwich has a 'Slugwatch' website - 'Slugwatch.co.uk', because this slug, which is large and yellowish brown, has a voracious appetite, and is apparently immune to slug pellets.

Now it's winter and the leaves are off the trees, our fellow animal residents will be easier to see. Maybe they would like to share some of our Christmas fayre, but not salted peanuts.

Merry Christmas.

Published December 2013

102. Changes in the river Wensum

On 14th December 2013, the 200th Carrow Cup boat race took place on the river Wensum. The race started from Pull's Ferry, went down past Norwich City Football Ground and the Colman's factory to finish at Thorpe railway bridge. Those who took part in the first race in 1813 would not recognise much of the river bank the crews passed in 2013. At the start the 1813 crew would have met John Pull whose name is given to Pull's Ferry. Pull held the licence for the inn next to the ferry, as well as being the ferryman until 1841. The inn building is now a house. The ferry took passengers to Riverside, which was then a towpath and not a road. Foundry Bridge had been under construction since 1810, but the bridge that they would have gone under is not the same Foundry Bridge we see. A new bridge was built in 1844 to replace the 1810 bridge to accommodate the extra traffic to the railway station.

Before the advent of the railway in the 1840s the boat race crews would have seen a house on the site of the station. Nor would they have seen the Sea Cadets' vessel or the Chinese restaurant that is constructed on top of a Dutch barge. The barge, which was towed across from Holland, is said to be one of the adapted barges Hitler intended to be used in the invasion of England. What they would have seen, which is a rare sight on the river today, is wherries. Wherries were used to take cargoes from and to the city from Great Yarmouth and along the rivers of the Broads. The East bank of the river was mostly water meadow, with no Boulton and Paul or railway sidings. Along the West bank were timber yards and other unloading sites, such as Wensum Lodge, and public houses that reflected their clientele such as 'The Old Barge', now 'Dragon Hall', and 'The Ferry Boat Inn'.

There was no Carrow Bridge for the 1813 crew, but they did pass the Boom Towers. The Boom Towers were part of the City's defences in medieval times, when a chain of Spanish iron stretched between the two towers could be raised, when needed, to stop boats going in or out of the city. From here the crews in 1813 would now pass mainly open ground, no Norwich Football Club, no Colman's factory, but just possibly a glimpse of the ruins of Carrow Abbey. There was no power station or railway bridge for a finishing line. The 1813 crews also did not see Norwich as a port for international vessels of 350 - 500 tonnes as far as Foundry Bridge.

The last sea-going ships came to the port in 1988. Now our river is a place of leisure - raft races, duck races, fishing, holidaymakers' boats using Norwich Yacht Station, and a swimming pool. Footpaths show another side of Norwich, and there are houses with riverside views. Whether Norwich City Football Club comes under leisure is sometimes debatable.

Published February 2014

103. Mousehold Heath and the military

Just a short walk to Mousehold and we have an area for relaxation and sport, with two football pitches, a Pitch and Putt course, and areas of open space for walking. On a dry day, a band playing on the bandstand and with an ice-cream van nearby, it has the makings for a very nice day out on our own doorstep. Go back a hundred years and the Heath would still have been an area for leisure, but very different. The Heath was given by the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral to the City in 1886. In those days there were far fewer trees and therefore it was more heath like than it is today. The landscape was very suitable for the cavalry regiments that came to the barracks in Barrack Street. Regiments of Hussars, Dragoons, and Lancers used the Heath for training and exercising their horses. It would have been especially interesting to watch the Lancers riding with their 3 metre long lances. The lance was part of the weaponry of the regiment and was used against the German machine guns in World War I. The lance ceased to be used as a weapon by 1928.

World War I also brought other changes to the Heath, with special tracks being laid for a train which transported aeroplanes and parts made by Boulton and Paul to their aerodrome on the Heath in the area now known as Heartsease. After the War the Heath became more peaceful, but the army was still in Barrack Street and also Britannia Barracks.

World War II brought different changes to the Heath with German and Italian Prisoner of War Camps. The German Camp is now the site of the Pitch and Putt Course, and the Italian Camp was on Salhouse Road. Mrs Siano, who married an Italian prisoner of war who settled in England always had an interest in the area. She, together with the Mousehold Heath Defenders, were instrumental in having a memorial placed for five airmen who died in two different crashes in 1942. The memorial lies near the side of Gurney Road close to the junction with Gilman Road and was unveiled on 22nd April 1990. In 1947 the War Office proposed that 150 acres should be used as a battle training ground, but there were strong objections and the idea was dropped.

With the Royal Norfolk Regiment and the Cavalry gone, Britannia Barracks, home of the Royal Norfolk Regiment, was taken over by H.M. Prison Service, and the Regimental Museum moved to Norwich Castle. Now we have a new place to enjoy - Café Britannia. Part of the old Barracks overlooking the city offers breakfast, lunch and tea. It is a partnership between Davina Tanner, general manager of Chapelfield shopping centre, and the prison service. This is a win-win project, for prisoners to gain skills and experience to prepare them for their release, and for us to enjoy another place to visit on Mousehold Heath.

Published April 2014

104. Past residents of Thorpe Hamlet

While working recently on the History of Thorpe Hamlet in World War I, I became aware that Thorpe Hamlet was very industrial around the Riverside area, with Boulton and Paul, Laurence Scott and Electromotors and the Gas Works. But as you move away from the river the area becomes more residential. Scattered around Thorpe Hamlet there are still large houses which have often become hotels, nursing homes, or as is the case with Mousehold House, flats. There has always been variety in this area because it was outside the inner city, but within easy reach of the city centre.

When looking in street directories to see who found the area a good place to live in I came across Pigots and Co. Directory of 1830. There was a section headed Nobility, Gentry and Clergy. Thorpe Hamlet only had one entry - Roger Kitson Esq. Other directories such as Kelly's, White's and Jarrold's show that a number of solicitors had homes here. This may be because Thorpe Station was handy for any London businesses. The best known solicitor here was Isaac Bugg Coaks who built a house 'Fernhill' just off Cotman Road, and also two others for his family in Cotman Road itself. These two houses are still standing. 'Fernhill' itself was demolished, but the cul-de-sac built on the site was named after the house.

Manufacturers and merchants such as Joshua Wormesley who made starch and paper, Hindes who made crepe and silk and Robert Aspland Cooper, a wholesale confectioner, all lived here. These merchant families also produced interesting children. George Jewson, a timber merchant, had a daughter Dorothy who was born in 1884 in Thorpe Road and lived here into her teens. Later she was known for her work with the suffragettes and in World War I as a pacifist. In 1923 she was elected as a Labour Member of Parliament. Earlier the Stark family lived in Thorpe Road. They were involved in the cloth industry producing unique dyes, and later expanded into agricultural fertiliser. The family of six boys, with the exception of the youngest, followed into the family business until it ceased trading in the 1870s. James Stark was to become an artist exhibiting in the Royal Academy in London. He was not the only artist to live in Thorpe Hamlet - John Berney Ladbrooke built his house in St. Leonard's Road. He was another prolific artist and tutor. Both these men are buried in the Rosary Cemetery.

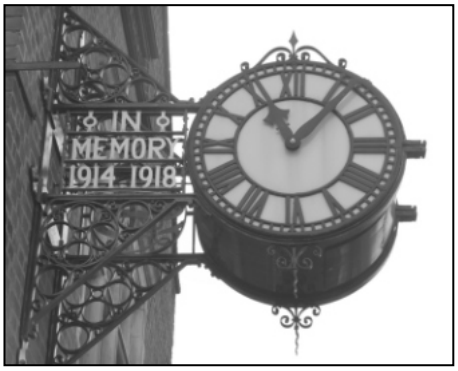
Some came to Thorpe Hamlet to retire. One of these was Louis Marchesi, a restaurant owner. On returning from World War I, he found that the older men seemed to dominate the Rotary Clubs, so he founded the 'Round Table', which put an upper age limit on its members. Today Thorpe Hamlet still has in its midst artists, authors, craftsmen and women. There must be something in the air.

Published June 2014

105. Commemorating World War I

You may receive this issue of the St. Matthew's Parish Magazine after 4th August, the day which marks the 100th anniversary of the start of WW I. The Thorpe Hamlet History Group has, over the last few months, been working to record the history of Thorpe Hamlet during the war.

Thorpe Hamlet has always had a close contact with the military. The Norfolk Regiment was based in Britannia Barracks, and the Cavalry regiments of Hussars, Dragoons and Lancers used the barracks in Barrack Street. During Queen Victoria's reign, Britain was involved in 37 wars. Many of these were far from Britain. We have, buried in the Rosary Cemetery, George Wilde who had fought in the Crimea and also in the Maori Wars in New Zealand, and also there are 4 men of the 12th Lancers who had fought in India and Afghanistan. World War I was different in that the war was much closer to home. Until that time Servicemen had been professionals, but when the war claimed so many lives, conscription was introduced. Zeppelins brought the war into the skies of Norwich, and at sea submarines were a danger to shipping and threatened food supplies.



War memorial, Laurence Scott & Electromotors
Photo : John Trevelyan

This has been a very different project for the Thorpe Hamlet History Group, in that there have been so many aspects to work on about the changes the war made to life in Thorpe Hamlet during the war, with the men going into military service and the consequent role of women in the workforce. Boulton and Paul expanded its factories into Riverside Road in Thorpe Hamlet and both they and Laurence Scott's worked on military contracts. Many regulations were introduced which affected everyday life, such as pub opening hours and the strength of beer. It even became a crime to buy another person a drink. Food prices rose and eventually rationing was introduced. All this was on the Home Front, but one could not be unaware of casualties of war when special trains were arriving at Thorpe Station bringing the wounded back from the battle zones. From the station the wounded were transferred to the military hospitals such as Thorpe St. Andrew's Hospital. Less visible were the telegrams that were delivered to inform a family that one of their members had died or was missing. The saddening list of those that were lost is commemorated on the War Memorial in the grounds of St. Matthew's Church. This silent reminder stands there to reinforce the promise "We will remember them".

Published August 2014

106. Postal services in World War I and now

When the Thorpe Hamlet History Group was working on Thorpe Hamlet in World War I, one of our members, Tony Smith, included a section about the Post Office. In 1914 Thorpe Hamlet had 3 sub Post Offices, one on the Thorpe Road close to the 'Fat Cat and Canary' public house, one in St. Leonard's Road, and one on the corner of Thorpe Road and Rosary Road where the café is now. There were also 5 pillar or wall post boxes. In some places there were collections 8, 9, or even 11 times a day during the week and twice on Sundays. Collectors of old postcards often find messages on them arranging meetings for the following day, so sure were the senders of the speed and reliability of the postal services. Very few people had telephones in their houses, so important messages had to be sent by telegram. The cost of the telegram depended on the number of words, which included the address. Deliveries were usually made by telegraph messenger boys on bicycles. Once war broke out telegrams were sent to families with news of the deaths of their relatives, or that they were reported missing. The messenger boys must have had an increasingly difficult job, knowing that their appearance at the door would be bringing grief to the family.

The Post Office had to adapt to war conditions. Postal workers joined the military and women were employed to take their place. In time a uniform was designed for the women who delivered the post. Extra work caused by the war, disrupted normal service to a considerable extent. Payment of Separation Allowance for the wives and children of servicemen was paid at the post office. Parcels of food and other comforts could be sent free to servicemen. More letters were being written because of the separation of families. The Government needed to finance the war, and to help with this, in 1916 War Savings Certificates were introduced.

When you look at the services that post offices provided a hundred years ago in those difficult times, you begin to realise just how much was lost when our last post office in Thorpe Hamlet closed in August 2008. It was a place to pay your car tax, buy television licences, send the now defunct telegrams, use postal orders to send money, draw the weekly family allowance, draw the old age pension, and Wives Allowances to servicemen's wives. Near Christmas there was the queue when customers sent off their parcels of presents, and bought stamps to send off their Christmas Cards.

Cash from a 'hole in a wall', e-mails, phone calls and texting have taken over many of our needs, but a human behind a counter who knows you, often gives you a friendly smile and who can help and give advice cannot be replaced.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Published December 2014

107. Why does Thorpe Hamlet finish at Harvey Lane?

When we first came to Norwich 47 years ago, it was for Jim to attend a job interview, in which luckily he was successful. We had never been to Norfolk before and we were lucky enough to rent a flat in Harvey Lane while we looked for a house in Thorpe Hamlet. We have never left. Because our children went to the local school I was used to the name Thorpe Hamlet, but Jim tended to tell people we lived in Thorpe, not knowing the difference. It is always interesting to know where and why boundaries are drawn, and who owned the land before us. The river made access possible for many foreign visitors such as, the Romans. Saxons and Vikings. Some came as invaders, some as traders, and some settled. It was after William the Conqueror defeated Harold at Hastings and became King of England that Norwich gained two of its oldest buildings, the Castle and the Cathedral. The Castle was necessary because William found the county was not easy to control. He did not know who owned the land, and what he could give to his supporters.

In 1086 - 1087 the King had a survey of England drawn up which showed not only the ownership, but the number of villeins on the land and also the slaves. Also recorded was the number of ploughs, how much woodland the land included, number and types of animals and how much the land was worth. These records, which became known as the Domesday Book because they were seen as a record of Judgement Day, were in fact kept in two books. There was the Great Domesday Book and the Little Domesday Book. The records of Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk are to be found in the Little Domesday Book. In the Little Domesday Book, there is a reference to a wood at Thorpe which encircled the north east of Norwich. In 1101, Bishop Herbert de Losinga acquired by Charter from Henry I, The Manor of Thorpe and Thorpe Woods for the church. He used the land to build St. Leonard's Priory and St. Michael's Chapel while Norwich Cathedral was being built. Thorpe had wood and chalk to make lime for building, both valuable assets.

It was in 1403 that the city made a gift of 1000 Marks to Henry IV. In return, he granted the city a new charter. This gave the city the right to elect a mayor and two sheriffs, and the city was able to extend its boundaries, which included the western part of Thorpe up to what is now Harvey Lane. The area became known as 'that part of Thorpe within the city liberty'. The rest of Thorpe has been called at different times 'Thorpe St. Andrew' or 'Thorpe next Norwich'. Thorpe Hamlet did not get its own parish church until the old St. Matthew's was built in 1852.

There are two History Groups in the area 'Thorpe Hamlet History Group', and somewhat confusingly 'Thorpe History Group'. The Thorpe History Group is for the Thorpe St. Andrew area.

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108. World War II civilian casualties

Last year we commemorated the start of World War I. Over the next four years, some of the events of it will probably be highlighted, and its history will continue to be remembered. This is important, but it must not be forgotten that there are people who still remember World War II and the dangers they lived through. Air warfare, which had started in WWI, had shown that this was a new kind of fighting, which could reach into areas once considered safe from attack. In Norwich a series of public air raid shelters were built, including some in the old chalk tunnels under Gas Hill. Families were offered one of two types of shelters. The Anderson shelter was for use outside the house. A hole was dug in the garden, and a shelter made of corrugated iron, was placed in the hole, with steps leading down into the entrance. The shelter was then covered with earth. The other shelter was called a Morrison. It was for use indoors and consisted of a steel table-like structure. Norwich became a special target. Cities, such as Norwich, Bath and Coventry were chosen from the German Baedeker Tourism Guide Book, for their historic interest, and bombed in retaliation for the British bombing of Lubeck and Rostock. Even if Norwich had not been on the Baedeker list, it would have been targeted because it had so many sites that were of military importance. In Thorpe Hamlet alone, we had Britannia Barracks with the Royal Norfolk Regiment, the factories of Boulton and Paul, Laurence Scott and Electromotors, Thorpe Station and the Port of Norwich. The first air raid on Norwich was on 9th July 1940. At 5 p.m. the sound of aircraft was heard, but no air raid siren was sounded. Bombs were dropped on Barnards on Salhouse Road, Carrow Hill, the Boulton and Paul factory and the locomotive sheds at Thorpe Station. Twenty seven people were killed in this raid, of which two were from Thorpe Hamlet, Charles Bacon of Pilling Park Road, who was at Boulton and Paul's, and Bertie Hoult of Ethel Road, who died of injuries sustained at the locomotive sheds at Thorpe Station. Air raids continued and on February 4th 1941, bombs were dropped on Womersley Road and Plumstead Road, killing Arthur Peach and Violet House. Herbert Howes of Ella Road died in a raid on Thorpe Station Goods Yard on 1St August 1942. The raids between 27th and 30th April 1942 were the worst of the war and covered the whole city. Joan Banger's book 'Norwich at War' has illustrations showing the devastation. One hundred and sixty two people were killed, ten of which lived in Thorpe Hamlet. Cyril Raven and his two daughters, Gladys and Zena were killed in St. Leonard's Road as were Harry Smith, his wife Edith, and children, Malcolm aged 5 and Graham aged 6 months at Vincent Road. Caroline Barkway aged 89 died of her wounds at a First Aid Centre. Herbert Brighton and his wife Dorothy died when the Ethel Road shelter was hit. Lydia Hewitt of Ethel Road, Winifred Gamble and Helen Wright in Ella Road, and Frederick Kett of Ketts Hill were also killed. Two months later Hetty Lester and Laura Blomfield were killed at Cotman Road, and George Mann was killed in Spitalfields. In the Earlham cemetery there is a garden of remembrance, but not all the names are recorded. St. George's Chapel in Westminster Abbey has a Civilian War Memorial Roll of Honour. It has 7 volumes containing 66,400 names including those from Thorpe Hamlet. A different page is displayed each day.

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A Thorpe Hamlet Miscellany brings together in one volume more than a hundred articles written about this fascinating area of Norwich by local historian June Marriage.

The articles cover a wide range of subjects including gas-filled balloons and the building of the R101, the coming of telephones and cars, hangings at Norwich Prison, floods and the visits of royalty and the Chief Scout.

The book will appeal both to local residents and to anyone wanting to know more about this part of Norwich.

Published by Thorpe Hamlet History Group £ 8