

Summer Newsletter 2021

Volume 17-3



Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum,
Dereham Antiquarian Society
& Town Archive

Letter from the Chair *Trevor Ogden*

Everyone has been talking about how late growth is this year, with gardens and allotments well behind, so although that does not excuse the delays I have to report, we are at least in tune with the weather! In the April Newsletter I said that we hoped that building work in the Museum would be completed so that we could open in June. I'm sorry to report that building work will not start until 26 July, and may not be finished until late August. As the Cottage will then need extensive cleaning and rearrangement for new exhibits, and our season normally finishes at the end of September, the Committee has reluctantly concluded that it will not be practicable to open the Museum this year, so what originally looked like a possible few weeks delay early last year has now extended to two years of closure.



An example of Anna Kettle's original
parquetage work, from www.kettlenet.co.uk

One piece of good news amongst all this is that the restoration of the parqueting, the decorative plasterwork, will be in the hands of Anna Kettle, the national authority on parqueting who advised us last year. This means that it will get the best possible treatment.

The main new Museum display planned for this year was about the varied lives and work of John and Ellenor Fenn, who in the late 1700s lived in Hill House, in the corner of Theatre Street and Wellington Road. John Fenn is the better known, as the person who put years of work, wisdom and skill into transcribing and preparing for publication the Paston letters. These day-to-day letters of a Norfolk gentry family in the 1400s caused a sensation when they appeared in print, because of the story they told of the life and struggles of those years. But his wife Ellenor was a remarkable educational innovator and author, and deserves to be better recognised. She is to get a bit of sunlight this year with the opening of the Ellenor Fenn garden, a park which is planned to occupy the space behind the blue hoardings opposite QD and adjoining Wright's Walk. This is expected to last a few years and looks like providing a pleasant town-centre space to enjoy, and to be a venue for displays and events. The historical input to this is being provided by Sue Walker, so adding this to her work on the Wayfinding Panels (which should be erected in the next couple of months), Sue will have a very clear impact this year on the appreciation of Dereham's history.



Ellenor Fenn. (Redrawn by Sue Walker from a contemporary portrait)

As you may have seen, there are a couple of empty shops in Wright's Walk. To tie in with the opening of the garden, Dencora has offered us the opportunity to use one of the shop windows to showcase some of the items about Ellenor which will form part of next year's exhibition in the museum.

We had planned to open the Museum as part of the national Heritage Open Days on 17 and 18 September, but of course that will not now be possible. However, on behalf of the Town Council we plan to open the Napoleonic Explosives Store for visitors on Friday 17 September from 1 to 4 pm. The Store has an insignificant entrance off Cherry Tree Car Park, and is probably best thought of as a historical curiosity rather than a tourist attraction! Nevertheless, this occasion will provide an opportunity to have a look.

As in previous Newsletters, I would like to thank our monthly speakers who have bravely adapted to giving their presentations online. This was a new experience for almost all of them, and a bit of a technical challenge for us, as has been apparent in some of the presentations. However, with this we have managed to have a full series of talks since September, and although we were not trying to be pioneers, this effort has got us some good publicity county-wide, and some of the discussions have been joined by viewers in distant parts of the country. We hope that it will be possible to resume monthly face-to-face meetings from August, but the experience of recent months makes us wary of forecasts! Some people have found it an advantage to be able to view presentations at a time of their choosing, or even to have a cup of tea in the middle, so we hope to be able to make video recordings of the live presentations and to make them available online as well.

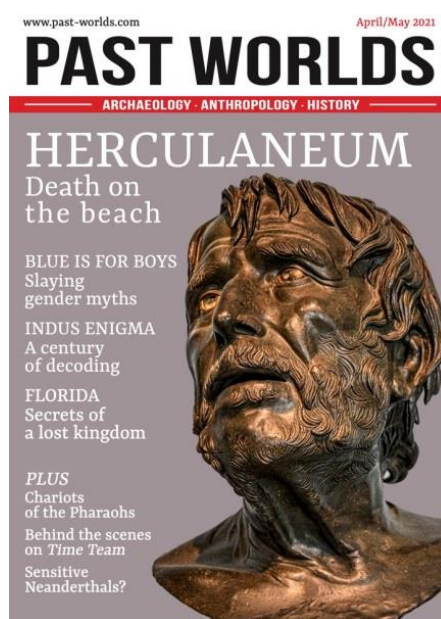
Finally, we have some good news on storage for the Archive. We have been increasingly concerned at pressure on space in our accommodation in the Assembly Rooms, as we continue to be offered material which ought to be preserved for the town's history. St Nicholas' Church has kindly made available to us a room in Church House, which will relieve the problem for a while, although it is not a permanent solution. The church is now open to visitors every day, and there is clear scope for cooperation with St Nicholas' in developing this area of Dereham as an historic quarter.

As we go to press, we are saddened to hear of the death of our President, The Rev Jonathan Boston. Please see the end of this newsletter for more information.

PAST WORLDS: a new magazine dedicated to the human past

We have received an offer from the editor to sample this new magazine, Past Worlds. "Past Worlds is the all-in-one digital magazine for everyone interested in archaeology, anthropology, and history. Written and edited by experts, it is packed with the latest stories, greatest discoveries, and biggest ideas. Early contributors include such top archaeological writers as - Guy de la Bédoyère, Time Team Roman expert and author of Gladius - Nadia Durrani, world archaeologist and author of Bigger Than History - Brian Fagan, Professor at Santa Barbara University and author of Rape of the Nile, and David Miles, former English Heritage chief archaeologist and author of Tribes of Britain."

The offer is to sample the full first issue for free, via our website www.past-worlds.com, and also take advantage of an exclusive early-bird subscription offer of the first three issues for just £1 each. To do this, go to [Past Worlds Offer](#).



Recent talks *Ken Hawkins*

April : Ten lost buildings of Dereham, presented by Robena Brown and Sue Walker

This account can hardly do justice to what was a photographic tour of 10 of Dereham's lost buildings. We hope to be able to publish a recording of the talk at some point in the future.



1 **Quebec Windmill**

The earliest record we have of the mill is from 1626 (when it could not have been called 'Quebec Windmill', as the 'Quebec' came much later - what is now Quebec Road was then Mill Lane). It was a post mill, the mill body being manually turned to face the wind, on a central post. By 1882 it had a solid base, and in 1889 in a *Tour of England in a Phaeton* was described as being old fashioned; it was recorded that the front was worn, through being always turned to face the weather. The site is now occupied by two houses.

2 **Mount Pleasant**

This building stood near the Market Place on the corner of the old A47 and what is now Quebec Road. As with many buildings of its era, the front looked simple, but the rear showed a complexity arising from additions and changes. There were extensive grounds alongside Holl (for ditch/hollow) Lane - now Swaffham Hill. It was demolished in the late 1930s, and on the site was built a garage and parking area for Post Office vans. The garage was later used by Hobbies, before itself being demolished, and a large house was put back on the site, with features that echoed those of the original house.

3 Theatre Royal

Records exist from 1740 of touring players using a barn at The King's Head for performances in Dereham. Visits were later made in alternate years, at the same time as agricultural fairs were held. By the 1770s, performances were in a theatre, though its location is not known. In the 1780s, David Fisher joined the theatre, first as a singer, then as an actor, and by 1792, he was managing it. He built 12 theatres across eastern England - Dereham was the second, in 1816. The theatre company was disbanded in 1844 but the building continued to serve as a theatre into the 20th century. By 1912, the building was used as a Drill Hall, and in WWII as an army canteen. Originally designed with the front much higher than the rear, it was 'restored' in 1935, with major changes. It was used for dances and other functions (in the 1960s as a school overflow), but replaced in 1970 by the present Theatre Royal surgery.

4 Becclesgate House

Becclesgate House had large grounds, down to the stream (see map), with the large paddock and lake landscaped (it was the venue for number of agricultural shows). It was the home of the Dunn family (of whom more later) - one of whom was a surgeon at Norwich Hospital in 1771. The sale details from 1890s give a description of the interior of the house. In 1947, it was under the 'care' of the Ministry of Labour, but a photograph showed it to be rather dilapidated, and it was demolished in 1964 to make way for the present uninspiring Post Office building.

5 Obelisk

The obelisk was erected in 1768 in tribute to Sir Edward Astley, MP. It was made from one of a pair of gateposts from Melton Constable, and showed a range of towns and their distances. Troughs were positioned close to it, for use on market days. When it came to WWII, and the instruction to deface mile markers to confuse any invading enemy, the destinations were chiselled off, but reportedly this was felt to look so bad, that the whole thing was removed and put down the well that had once fed the town pump (where it apparently lies, in pieces, to this day). As noted, it was one of a pair: the other went to Holt, and when WWII came along, they obscured the destination panels with wooden boards on which notices were pasted; when the war ended, the boards were removed, and the obelisk restored to its former state, where it can still be seen now.



6 Post Office

Before the existing building (mentioned in 4 above), the Post Office was in the Market Place, built in 1892, occupying the space of 2 shops which were demolished to make way for it. It carried a clock showing London time to assist people sending telegrams. It was itself demolished in 1964, to be replaced by the unappealing row of buildings housing Subway *et al.*

7 Cowper's House

William Cowper, famed writer of hymns and poems came to Dereham in 1796. His doctor was his cousin Donne (from the family at Becclesgate House). He lived in a house on the Market Place, and after his death in 1800, it was bought by a solicitor who was willing to show people around. Plans to demolish the house and replace it with a church prompted a strong plea, printed in the EDP in 1872, to save it, but to no avail. Two thirds of it was demolished the following year and replaced with the Cowper Congregational Church; the other third had been in separate ownership, and so remained.

8 The King's Arms

As shown on the 1757 map included in Puddy & Boston's Dereham: The biography of a country town, The King's Arms had a sign which was carried over the road, with the sign itself hanging from the centre. It was described as having an 18th century front, but an extensive rear, parts of which dated to the 16th century. It was demolished in 1963 (not even the fine coat of arms at the entrance being saved) and was replaced by Woolworth's (now Poundland).

9 The Lord Nelson

At the time of building, Lord Nelson had not come to fame, so this Inn must have had an earlier name, but we do not know it. In more recent times, it had a Polyphon, which enabled customers to select one of 37 records - a precursor of the juke box. The demolition of this building gave its name to Nelson Place.

10 Kingston and Hurn

At first just Kingston's, this shop was in some ways a forerunner of the supermarket, selling a wide range of food and drink, mostly requiring customers to bring their own containers. Members of the Hurn family were initially employed there, but in the 1960s came to share the Company name. In 1967, the shop was modernised, and the older building demolished (another one with a simple front and a complex rear). The firm ended in 1970; the site is now occupied by Argos.

As a teaser, we were promised a Part 2 of another 10 buildings at some future occasion.

May : Making tracks ... through Mid Norfolk, presented by Paddy Anstey, Heritage and Education Team, Mid-Norfolk Railway

Over the course of an hour, Paddy took us through the history of railways in the Dereham area, focusing on what is now the Mid-Norfolk Railway. The map shows the railway network as it existed in 1948.



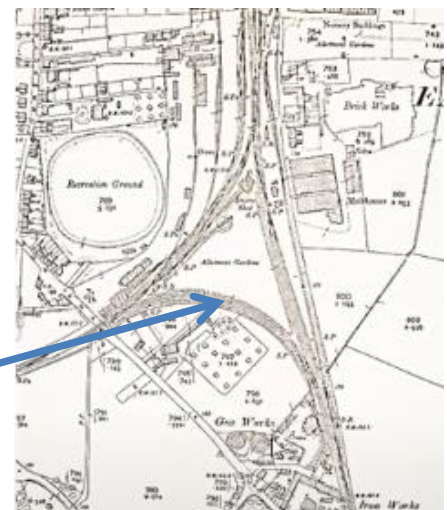
In the early 1800s, transport was slow, along rivers or the rutted and often muddy road network. A stagecoach ran between Dereham and Norwich, with a journey time of 3 hours. The local market was predominantly agricultural, and farmers sent produce mainly to those local markets. Cattle could be taken to London, but this took several days, during which they

lost weight, and therefore value. There was a strong desire to get their goods, still in good condition, to more distant markets and to London in particular.

The railways, first developed in the north east in the late 1820s, could run at 10 times the speed of a horse and cart, and in 1844 the Norfolk Railway Company opened a line from Norwich to Great Yarmouth, to bring fresh fish into Norwich markets. The Railway wanted to build a line from Norwich to Brandon via Wymondham, to meet another railway which ran from there to London. Proposals were also made for a line from Wymondham to Dereham, on to Fakenham and the north coast. The contractor was Samuel Peto, who lived at Somerleyton Hall and was involved in many railway schemes in East Anglia. In 1845, Parliamentary authority was given (all railway building required an Act of Parliament) for two lines to Dereham, that from Wymondham and another from King's Lynn. In the face of all these railway developments, the horse-drawn mail coach between Norwich and London (13 hours) could not match journey times and was withdrawn.

Lines opened to passengers in 1847 (Wymondham to Dereham), 1848 (King's Lynn to Dereham, and 1849 (Dereham to Fakenham), but money was becoming short. Thomas Coke (2nd Earl of Leicester) was not only the owner of Holkham Hall, but also of much land at Wells-next-the-sea, and invested in the Wells and Fakenham Railway, opened 1857. Paddy noted that this line featured, at Barsham, the only real railway tunnel (150 yards) in Norfolk, but around 1912 long-standing drainage problems prompted its opening out into a deep cutting. At Wells, the line had a branch down into the harbour, but Wells did not develop as a port, though later did so as a tourist destination. With these developments, Dereham gained new industry and growth, becoming the largest location in Norfolk for maltings.

In 1862, the Wells and Fakenham, Norfolk Railway Company and others amalgamated to form the Great Eastern Railway. In the later 19th century and earlier 20th century, agricultural traffic fell somewhat, while passenger traffic slowly grew. The Wymondham to Dereham line gained double track, but Dereham suffered from congestion, much arising because through traffic from King's Lynn to Norwich had to reverse in Dereham station, with all the time and disruption caused as the train's locomotive had to uncouple from one end of the train, run round, and recouple to the other end. This led to the building of a direct avoiding line just to the south of Dereham station.



During WWI, railways everywhere were heavily used, and came under government control, but maintenance was very limited; and in 1923, most railway companies were formed into one of four new companies, a process known as 'The Grouping'. Norfolk lines became part of the London & North Eastern Railway. Between the wars, traffic recovered, though road transport was starting to rise and rail to fall. (There were local exceptions, for example the pilgrimage trains to Walsingham, and day trip trains to Wells.) WWII again saw government control, heavy rail traffic and limited maintenance (as well as war damage); this time the government decided on nationalisation, leading to the formation of British Railways in 1948.

Behind Dereham Station, the railway stables were still in use to enable local horse shunting (Paddy had also shown a much earlier photo, of horses shunting a coach at Wymondham). As road competition grew, railways sought less costly operating means, with diesel multiple units and pay trains being introduced, though parcels were still being carried into the 1960s. By the start of the '60s, the line from King's Lynn to Great Yarmouth (built as the Midland & Great Northern Railway line) had been closed. Then in 1963 came *The Reshaping of British Railways* (the Beeching report): some of the Norfolk railways were identified as just about

viable, but the following year a new government decided to ask local authorities to support these marginal lines. Norfolk declined to do so, so our lines were steadily run down.

The Wymondham to Dereham line was reduced to single track, and in 1964, the Fakenham to Wells section closed, followed in 1968 by the King's Lynn to Dereham line. 1969 saw the final passenger trains between Wymondham and Dereham, though freight continued from North Elmham until 1989. Unusually, the track between Wymondham and Dereham was left in place, including the connection at Wymondham to the main rail network. Various groups were formed to try to revive the line, and in 1995, the Mid-Norfolk Railway (MNR) purchased it, starting public services between Dereham and Wymondham in 1999. In 2003, the MNR also bought the route between Dereham and County School. For the next 14 years there was steady progress, including work to restore the line northwards from Dereham. Progress has accelerated over the most recent 4 years with initiatives such as the Polar Express, filming (eg *Bodyguard*) and weddings, as well as the more usual catering trains (cream teas, fish and chips). Most recently, a contract with Greater Anglia provided for the storage of their new trains prior to being brought into use.

Currently, north of Dereham, trains can now reach North Elmham. County School station has also been brought back to a good condition, in readiness to welcome visitors. However, the track still needs considerable work (some is missing) before visitors can reach there by train.

When Paddy recorded this talk, an opening date for the railway had yet to be announced: it is pleasing to report that this took place on 23 June - see <https://www.midnorfolkrailway.co.uk/>.

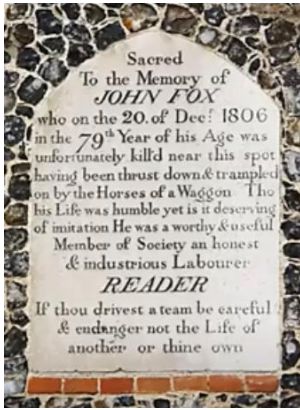
June : John Abel: horse dealer of Norwich, presented by Judith Havens

Judith opened her talk by explaining how she had become interested in John Abel, after coming across his tomb in Earlham cemetery and being taken by the horse on it. John died in 1883, aged 80. The other side of the tomb records the death of his first wife Frances, who died in 1859; but that side does not allow a good view of the horse. Following her curiosity, Judith reviewed the 1881 census, which said that he was a horse-dealer.



Further research showed that his name often appeared in newspaper reports. His parents Jeremiah and Alice had 5 children, John being born in 1803 in Ringland. In 1806, Jeremiah was indicted, with two others, when he 'unlawfully and forcibly did obstruct and hinder' Excise Officers. She discovered that this was the result of the Officers intercepting a group of smugglers bringing in brandy at Weybourne. Jeremiah reportedly offered a bribe to the Officers, who, being outnumbered, accepted it with the intention of pursuing the smugglers later. Jeremiah ended up with a prison sentence and a fine, though his two associates produced alibis and got off. Judith also showed a record of his petition to Parliament to challenge another sentence for smuggling ten years later, and although his property had been seized, he was able to re-establish a farming business.

By 1836 Jeremiah had moved to St Stephen's parish in Norwich. The same year we have the first record of John operating a horse-dealing business in Barwell's Court in the same area. At this time there were many such dealers. John began at the bottom end of this trade

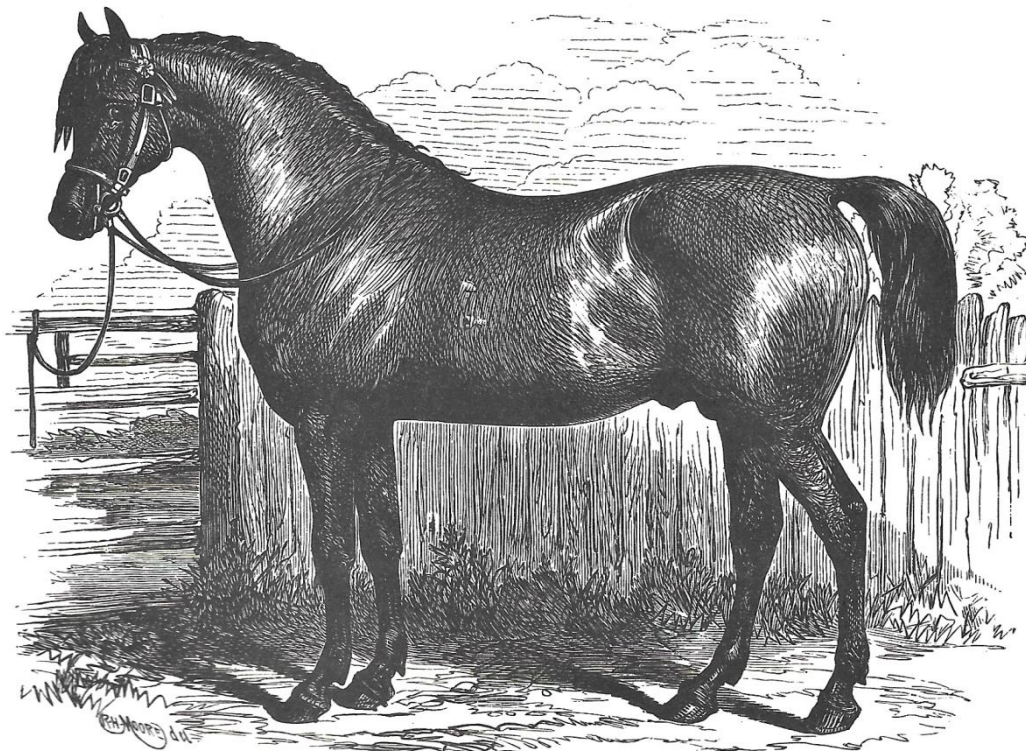


as a coper, but moved to jobbing, supplying the gentry with horses. He would also supply drivers (posting). The hazards of driving included many accidents.

From at least 1838, he was operating from Rising Sun Inn, and also had Kensington Gardens at Lakenham from 1852 to 1854, where he ran a pleasure garden, then very fashionable. In the grounds, he kept cattle and other animals. In addition, he had a farm on Earlam Road. He prospered in the 1880s.

He bought horses at fairs, both within and beyond Norfolk, and at cattle markets ('cattle' denoted any large livestock). These would often include demonstrating the ability of the animals, and Judith noted a report of John's 'furious riding' on one such occasion, riding at speed in crowded conditions: John was fined 5 shillings, but indicated his intention to appeal - he regularly made recourse to the courts to resolve conflicts.

Another source of horses was race meetings; the Racing Calendar recorded performance of horses so buyers could be informed. There were large race meetings, such as one at the Norwich Racecourse at Sprowston at the time of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838. There were also many smaller meetings, including one in May 1869 on The Neatherd in Dereham: these had a similar 'feel' to them as modern day gymkhanas. Transport to these meetings was initially difficult, with most horses being ridden or led to them. But the coming of the railway from 1844 made this better and Judith showed a horse box built in 1889 for the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway.



ROADSTER STALLION, THE PROPERTY OF MR. JOHN ABEL, OF NORWICH, 1871.

This picture appeared in the illustrated edition of the nationally acclaimed Book of the Horse, published in 1879. Only a few named breeders were mentioned, indicating Abel's status in the breeding world at that time.

Records also showed that John was hiring out stallions for mating. He specialised in the Roadster, also known as the Norfolk Trotter. These were a more robust version of the hackney horse, which had a long history, being mentioned in the Paston letters in 1462. Anthony Hammond, with other interested parties, started a register of trotting horses,

meeting at Downham Market in 1878, leading to the establishment of the Hackney Horse Society in 1883 in Norwich. To demonstrate the horses' capabilities, there were trotting matches, some involving quite large sums of money (eg £100 in 1850, when agricultural wages were 10 shillings a week). Horses were also displayed at county shows (such as that which grew into the Royal Norfolk Show).

All of this information and more is included in Judith's book, *John Abel: horse dealer of Norwich*. At the time of printing, she had no pictures of John Abel, but contact with the actor Geoffrey Palmer, a direct descendant, provided her with the name of a relative who had the Abel family album, and there is now an addendum to the book, with photographs.

Judith's book is available to DHT members for £8 (free postage) from her at 27 Sandringham Road, Norwich NR2 3RY; email jhavenspublishing@gmail.com.

A History of Norfolk in 100 Places Peter Wade-Martins

Here is the third extract from the book by Peter and Susanna Wade-Martins and David Robertson, using locations which have public access to tell the story of Norfolk over the last million years. This new paperback is soon to be published by the History Press: it will cost £17.99 but you may order it in advance for £13.75 (including delivery) at <https://www.hive.co.uk/Product/David-Robertson/A-History-of-Norfolk-in-100-Places/25945946>.

The Site of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral and early Norman bishop's chapel at North Elmham



Aerial photo by John Fielding of the 11th century chapel at North Elmham converted into a manor house in the 14th century

The early Norman chapel, faced with ferruginous conglomerate (naturally occurring iron-bound gravel blocks), stands either very close to, or probably on, the site of the Anglo-Saxon wooden cathedral for the diocese of East Anglia. No clear evidence for the cathedral building has yet been found, but a very extensive Late Saxon Christian burial

ground has been excavated in the park on the opposite side of the main road extending as far south as the parish church. These excavations have also revealed traces of Middle and Late Saxon timber buildings contemporary with the cathedral.

The bishops moved away in c1072, and the cathedral, described at the time as being built of wood, was replaced with a stone Norman chapel. At some stage, and we are not sure when, the chapel was converted into domestic use and it was later fortified by Bishop Despenser as his rural retreat in 1387. He was the 'fighting bishop' of Norwich who put down the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. So, he was no doubt very unpopular and in need of a place to sleep safely at night! The converted chapel was fortified with massive earthworks, which must have disturbed thousands of Christian burials when Despenser piled the earth against the old Norman chapel walls. So, the visible remains consist of the chapel converted into a fortified 14th-century manor house. The visitor needs to distinguish between these two main periods, and the key to the difference is that the conglomerate blocks are only used in the original chapel walls.

The chapel had a western square tower with thick walls and a stairway leading to a first-floor room. A blocked doorway can just be discerned in the west wall. The base of the tower arch is visible between the tower and the long thin aisleless nave leading to an eastern apse with transepts to either side. There were north and south doorways at the west end of the nave, and in the angles between nave and transepts there were small square towers.

The 14th century conversion involved creating a first-floor living space and an internal stairway down to the Norman ground floor which then became the basement - no doubt for the bishop's wine cellar. The Norman apse was removed in the digging of the inner moat, and a second half-round turret was added on the south side to flank the south door and to match the Norman stairway turret. The visitor will notice that this doorway is in line with the main street coming up the hill from the river crossing to the south, thus creating a sense of grandeur to impress the visitor.

The site is owned by the Norwich Diocese, in the care of English Heritage and managed by North Elmham Parish Council which keeps it open at all reasonable times. (Car park: NR20 5JU)

Further reading

Heywood, S. 1982. 'The ruined church at North Elmham', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 135, 1-10

Heywood, S. 2014. 'The Elmhams re-visited', *Landscapes and Artefacts: Studies in East Anglian Archaeology Presented to Andrew Rogerson*, 181-188 (Archaeopress).

Rigold, S E., 1962-3. 'The Anglian Cathedral at North Elmham, Norfolk', *Medieval Archaeology* 6-7, 67-108.

Mediaeval Coin

When searching for Dereham related information and items online, this was seen. It is such a beautiful old silver coin found in Dereham in wonderful condition. We hope you may enjoy seeing it too!



Trefoil quadrilateral type silver penny from the reign of King Edward the Confessor (died 6 January 1066)

Where did Norfolk get its iron from? Part 1 - The West Trevor Ogden

I noticed a recent article about an iron smelter dated to the 200s or 300s BCE, the middle Iron Age, which has been excavated at East Beckham Quarry (ref 1 - see end of article). The quarry is almost due south of Sheringham, and just south of the A148. Norfolk is not known for its metal ore mines, and you don't see belching chimneys as you drive from Holt to Cromer, but there were apparently local smelters operating until at least the late Middle Ages, and a hundredweight of nails were exported from Blakeney in the 1580s! (2) Where, I wondered, did the smelters get their iron ore from?

The answer is interesting. Fig 1 maps the sites of iron production recorded in the Norfolk Heritage Explorer (www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk), and we can see that there are two main concentrations, one in the north and one in the west, and some outliers. Of course there are probably others not recorded. When I asked around, it turned out that there is a lot of expertise on this in Dereham Heritage Trust. There is an article on "Ironworking in Norfolk" on Norfolk Heritage Explorer, co-authored by Megan Dennis (3), and in the 1980s Peter Wade-Martins did a detailed survey of the hundreds of iron ore extraction pits on the hills behind Cromer and Sheringham. The smelter at East Beckham Quarry was right on the edge of that major iron-mining area at the time it was operating. We'll come back to those pits in Part 2, in the next issue of the Newsletter, but this first part will look at the concentration in the west of the county. They seem to have got their iron ore from somewhere different.

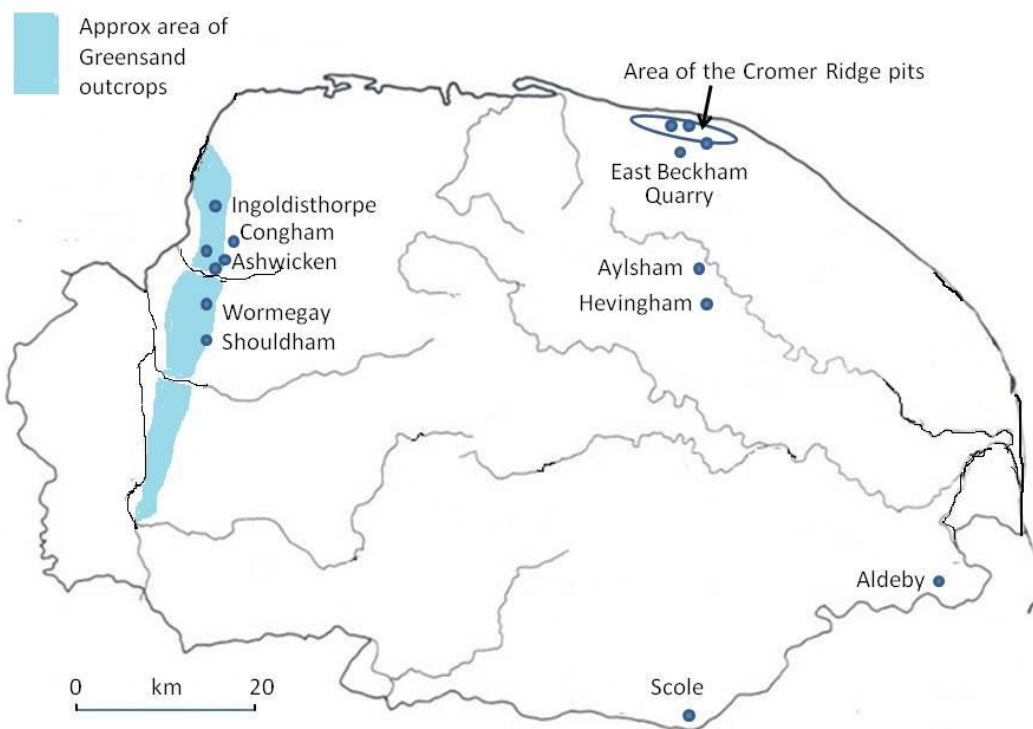


Fig 1. Sites of iron smelting recorded on Norfolk Heritage Explorer. Some reports of slag without much detail are omitted.

Driving to Kings Lynn from Dereham there is a noticeable change in building materials as you pass through the sandy belt this side of Lynn. It is obvious in Middleton church (Fig 2), which stands close to the A47 and is largely built of irregular lumps of carstone - a big change from the flint used in our part of Norfolk. Carstone is a form of sandstone, and is the gingery-brown rock which outcrops at the base of the cliffs at Hunstanton, and along the



eastern edge of the “Greensand” area southwards past Ingoldisthorpe (Fig 1). However, most of the Greensand in West Norfolk is not a hard rock, and is more like that at Dersingham Bog nature reserve (Fig 3) In the sand there are layers of ironstone (Fig 4), and Fig 5 shows a lump I picked up locally. I had not realised when I picked it up, but this ore was the basis of a significant local industry.

Fig 2. Middleton church, built largely of carstone. From www.norfolkchurches.co.uk, by permission of Simon Knott.



Fig 3. Greensand country. Dersingham Bog Nature Reserve.



Fig 4. Layers of ironstone in the sand at Dersingham



Fig 5. A loose lump of Dersingham ironstone

In about 1960, Tylecote and Owles excavated a Roman-era smelter at Ashwicken, in the Greensand belt (Fig 1) (4). They said (p 153) that the ore used was iron carbonate, but another report about the same time says that layers in the sand at Dersingham are “limonitic ironstone”, which is a mixture of iron oxides and hydroxides (5). However, the difference is unimportant, because to extract the iron the ore is first roasted, which must drive off the carbon dioxide from the carbonate and water from the limonite, and leave a porous iron oxide, ready for smelting. Tylecote and Owles found a large number of roasted ore nodules about 6 x 4 x 2 cm, about 84% iron (ferric) oxide. They found that the local carstone, which gets its distinctive colour from the iron content, is only about 27% ferric oxide after roasting, which was too low an iron content to be usable by primitive smelting methods.

To delve into a little technical detail, the principle of smelting is to heat the ore with charcoal; the charcoal partly burns to produce carbon monoxide gas, which penetrates the iron oxide and reduces it to iron. However, the process is complicated, and a molten slag is also produced, which can be run off or separated. The slag contains a lot of the impurities, but also a lot of iron in compounds which cannot be extracted by primitive smelting. Early smelters, like the middle Iron Age one at East Beckham, were in the form of steep-sided hollows about 30 cm deep, lined with clay, probably with a clay dome over the top. The Roman era one at Ashwicken (Fig 1) was more advanced, with a shaft perhaps a metre high, which gave a much better draft and made it easier to tap off the slag. There is a detailed and well-illustrated account of reproduction Viking shaft smelters, at http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/manufacturing/text/bog_iron.htm - worth looking at if you are interested. An important practical detail is that the process took many times as much charcoal as ore, and that affected where the smelters were placed.

These smelters did not reach a high enough temperature to melt the iron, but produced a spongy mass of iron called a bloom, which had to be hammered and worked while hot to produce wrought iron. Details are illustrated at the Hurstwic site already mentioned.

Most of the west Norfolk ironworking sites in the Norfolk Heritage Explorer and shown on Fig 1 are identified as Roman with varying degrees of certainty, though Congham is late Anglo-Saxon, and South Wootton (close to Ashwicken) is possibly 12th century.

So that is where the Romans in West Norfolk got their iron ore, which they processed for local use. Part 2, in the next issue of the Newsletter, will look at the sources of the ore for the northern smelters, and the small number elsewhere in Norfolk.

Acknowledgements. Thanks to Peter Wade-Martins for interesting discussions of this problem, and for putting me on to the Tylecote papers.

References

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Mensa at Church of St Nicholas, East Dereham

Paul Cubitt, Rector at St Nicholas' Church has kindly secured permission for us to reproduce here a report prepared by Stephen Heywood MA FSA in October 2020. Paul notes that the stone will be remaining where it is for the foreseeable future. New extensions to the altar table have been made and the altar is to be treated for any infestation.

Introduction

A large slab of freestone inscribed with three crosses and part of an inscription has been revealed set into the timber high altar. It may have been part of an altar table which since has been reduced in size and probably re-used as a floor slab. It was recovered in the last century and incorporated in the high altar. At present only one surface is visible, with sides and back obscured by the timber case.

The stone

The stone is a shelly limestone, possibly Purbeck, 5 inches (130mm) thick. It is rectangular, 3ft 5ins (105cms) long and 2ft 4ins (70cms) wide. Two corners have been knocked off. The surface is very worn and small areas of a smooth surface are probably the remains of a polished surface. Purbeck and other limestones were often polished and are often incorrectly described as marble. This polishing was particularly popular during the 13th century but not only during this period (Fig 1).

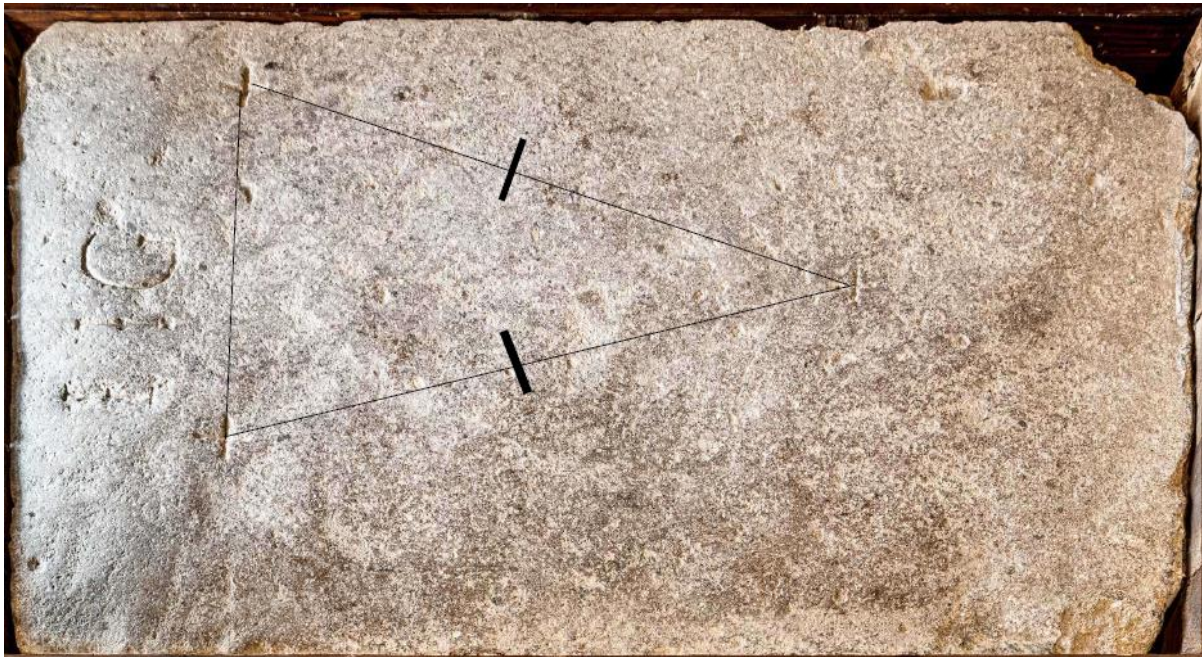


Fig 1 The mensa fragment from above - North to left. (Photo Bruce)

The surface has three small V-cut Greek crosses with the terminals rounded by a drill bit. These crosses form the angles of a regular triangle (Fig 1). This is not centrally placed on the stone and for it to have been so, the stone would have had to have been wider and for repetition of the pair of crosses at the south end, as to be expected, it would have had to have been considerably longer. The longer and wider stone would resemble in size the dimensions of a normal altar top.

At the north end of the stone is an inscription of three capital letters I I G. The letters are not symmetrically placed in relation to the crosses but more or less correctly placed in relation to the stone and thus the reduction of the size of the stone provides a terminus post quem (Fig 1). The script is classical V-cut with serifs and the Is with nicks at the centres of the stems. The western I is badly damaged but discernible. No ideas are forthcoming as to the meaning of the letters. It is most likely that they are initials (Fig 2).



Fig 2 Inscribed letters and one cross. (photo Bruce)

A faint painted or drawn line can be discerned close to the western edge of the stone. It appears to have defined a border, but the evidence is so slight as to defy further interpretation (Fig 3).



Fig 3 NW end of stone

Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, in summary, a mensa of a larger size can be deduced from the positions of the small crosses. The surface of the mensa was polished and dates from the later Middle Ages. Very little of the polished surface survives owing to a period of rough treatment. At the Reformation it was taken down and reduced in order to re-use it as a headstone or tomb slab.

It had an inscription of three letters probably the initials of someone and formed a simple floor slab until it was spotted during the 19th or early 20th centuries and taken up and incorporated in a timber altar table.

It is recommended that the stone is removed from its present position and to explore how it could be displayed or put back to its original use as an altar. Documentary research might reveal more of its history. Confirmation as to type of stone should be sought from a petrologist. No conservation treatment is required apart from careful cleaning.

Stephen Heywood MA FSA 10/10/2020

Developing a Town Plan *Trevor Ogden (standing in while Peter Wade-Martins is away)*

In the last two newsletters we have passed on news about a Breckland Council initiative to develop plans for Breckland's five market towns (Dereham, Thetford, Attleborough, Watton, and Swaffham). This has been led by consultants, engaging with any groups and individuals that are willing to participate. The idea is to "put Breckland in pole-position to leverage new external funding, whilst also using our shared resources better to deliver transformational change across the district". I understand that this means to develop a list of priorities which guides the district and town in applying for and spending available money, to steer changes in the town in the direction we want to go. The draft plan for Dereham is to be completed by July.

Peter Wade-Martins has been energetically leading our input into this, directly and through a working group of about Dereham and the Town Council (although Town Council participation has been very patchy). In the April Newsletter, Peter explained ideas about this.

On 17 June there was an online workshop at which the consultants presented their findings so far, and there was some discussion. Peter was unavailable, so I represented DHT. The consultants presented 23 "interventions" in six groups. I'm afraid that I am unclear about what is meant by some things, eg Number 8, and some proposals are obviously much vaguer than others.

It is easy to find fault with this process and outcome (and some participants in the discussion did this at length). Nevertheless, it has the potential to help local authorities in planning development, which at the moment seems driven by opportunistic commercial interests, and should help local organisations plan and seek funding in their own fields of interest, and we are going to be particularly interested in item 19. It is unclear how it will be led on a town basis, although one way or another, this should be Town Council responsibility.

As Peter emphasised in the April Newsletter, the most obviously needed change is radical reorganisation of the Town Centre, and this appears as items 1 and 2. However, it cannot be done without a reorganisation of the buses which meets the needs of passengers as well as other users of the Market Place, and this appears as the vague items 10 and 13.

Here are the 23 items in their six groups.

Town Centre regeneration

- 1 Re-design and re-configure the marketplace and town centre to make it fit for the future and a more appealing place to spend time and money
- 2 Re-develop Nelson's Place, Cowpers Road Car Park and surrounding shops into a high-quality mix use scheme to meet changing living and working requirements as well as encourage greater footfall
- 3 Invest in town centre amenities (Wifi, Toilets, Wayfinding etc)

Business and Enterprise

- 4 Sensitively refurbish and adapt the operating model of the Breckland Business Centre to meet the rapidly changing needs of small businesses and to capitalise on a shift to increased home working
- 5 Capitalise on the dualling of the A47 and the proximity to Norwich by investing in land assembly and enabling infrastructure to bring forward the employment site behind Elizabeth House
- 6 Consider redeveloping and intensifying the Council's industrial units on Bertie Ward Way to provide higher quality industrial space that meets the needs of higher value sectors
- 7 Develop a long-term plan to redevelop Robertson Barracks into a new business park and/or community centre for the north of the district

Physical and Digital Infrastructure

- 8 Deliver enhanced active travel infrastructure around the town and use this to improve connectivity between the centre and other major green, heritage, cultural and leisure assets
- 9 Bring forward major housing schemes and associated infrastructure improvements on the edge of the town, particularly south
- 10 Re-direct bus routes and work with bus companies to improve timetables
- 11 Re-connect Mid-Norfolk Railway to the commercial rail network
- 12 Build a bypass to the north of the town to reduce traffic travelling into the centre
- 13 Direct buses to out of town car parks to prevent centre being used as a Park and Ride for Norwich
- 14 Upgrade road signage to improve traffic (including electric signage for car parks) and conditions for pedestrians

Inclusion and Skills

- 15 Use public assets to provide discounted workspace for social enterprise, charities and new businesses
- 16 Provide additional space and capacity for community organisations and groups

Culture and Heritage

- 17 Convert inactive northern sections of the Mid-Norfolk Railway into a greenway for cycling, walking and leisure
- 18 Tie the town's main green, heritage, leisure and cultural assets together through enhanced wayfinding and local promotion
- 19 Create a new heritage and archive centre
- 20 Enhance the street scene of Norwich Street to celebrate its character and history

Environment and Sustainability

- 21 Develop East-West cycling link that connects to the National Cycle Network
- 22 Purchase and activate new open green space and sports pitches around the town
- 23 Enhance green spaces in and around the town centre, particularly the Queen Mother's Garden

In view of the short time available to make comments, we are responding to this as we go to press, but would still welcome your views.

Local royal connections

Dereham Church Street photographer Herbert Cave (1877-1952) took images of many local buildings including this one of Shipdham Hall c1910. They are stored in our archive as glass negatives.



When researching the occupants of Shipdham Hall through time to demolition in 1930 this online image of a Knightsbridge church marriage register was found. Mabel Lennox of Shipdham Hall enjoyed an aristocratic wedding in 1881 as family on both sides were lords of the realm; however, it is easy to miss the significance of the names of the primary witnesses - 'Albert Edward' and 'Alexandra' later to be King Edward VII and Queen.

1881. Marriage solemnized at <i>St Pauls Church</i> in the Parish of <i>St Paul within the Walls</i> in the County of <i>Middlesex</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
441	October 13. 1881.	<i>Frederick Alphon Hervey</i> + <i>Mabel Elizabeth Lennox</i>	<i>full</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Clerk in Holy Orders</i>	<i>12, Lower den St</i> <i>Parish of Shipdham Norfolk</i>	<i>Alfred Hervey</i> <i>Augustus Frederic Francis Lennox</i>	<i>Surgeon General of 1st Brigade of Bristol.</i> <i>Major General in the Army.</i>
Married in the <i>chapel church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by _____ or after <i>Banns</i> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>Frederick Alphon Hervey</i> <i>Mabel Elizabeth Lennox</i>		in the Presence of us,		<i>Albert Edward V.P.</i> <i>Alexandra</i> <i>Robert Liddell Vicar</i> <i>Alphon Hervey</i> <i>Augustus Lennox</i>		

A report of the wedding in the Norfolk Mercury of 28th October 1881 was then found giving the evidence needed to confirm this.

The *déjeuner* was given at Lady Walsingham's house in Eaton Square, and early in the afternoon the happy pair left for Ickworth Park, the seat of the Marquis of Bristol. The presents, which were costly and numerous, included a beautiful set of plate, the gift of the Prince of Wales, and a bracelet of gold and precious stones, which H.R.H. the Princess of Wales placed on the arm of the bride after the ceremony was concluded in St. Paul's Church.

Membership matters

Our membership year runs annually from 1 March to the end of February; the normal subscription rate is £12 for a single member, £20 for two people at the same address, the same as last year. In normal circumstances, we can take payment at one of our meetings, but while these are suspended, there are two ways open for payment, as set out below. **Please make sure you let us know of any change in your postal or email address.**

Not a member but want to join?

If you are not currently a member, can we invite you to consider joining? Go to http://www.derehamhistory.com/uploads/1/6/2/3/16236968/dht_membership_leaflet_2020.pdf for our membership form, or request a copy from Ken Hawkins. Then either send your completed form, with a cheque payable to Dereham Heritage Trust, to Ken Hawkins, DHT, 26 Hillfields, Dereham NR19 1UE, or scan and email ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk your details, and pay by bank transfer to Dereham Heritage Trust, sort code 20-28-20, account 10179752 - but if you use this method please make sure you quote your surname as a reference so that we can recognise the payment as coming from you.

Programme of events 2021

We have a full programme of speakers and events planned through the year, though it has to remain open to change. We still hope to resume meetings when government guidelines allow and are keeping this under constant review, but for now, we are showing on line presentations; if you get this Newsletter by email, we will send you links to these. Some of our talks have been recorded in advance; in those cases, we send you a web link which will enable you to watch a presentation at a time of your own choosing (up to the date of the meeting). We will also send you a second web link to a Zoom meeting to take place at the scheduled meeting time of 19:30 on the planned meeting date. This will enable you to join a virtual DHT meeting, usually involving the presenter, to allow you and the other participants to ask questions and join the discussion. For the others, the presentation takes place on the scheduled night as usual (but on line). Our recent 'meetings' have enabled those who had seen the talks to take part in some very interesting and extended discussions. We hope and believe that the same will apply for our future talks too. **If you get this Newsletter through the post, but would be able to get Internet access, please let Ken Hawkins know, and we will send links to your chosen email address.** Where possible, recorded talks are available to members for a week after meeting date; you can find them on our website.

We are not making the usual £1 charge to members to watch the talk or join the meeting, but we will be pleased to **welcome donations** to offset our costs - our speakers still deserve full recompense for their time and effort! Payment can be made by cheque or bank transfer as noted in the [Membership matters](#) section above.

The July talk is *An Introduction to Norfolk's Mills*, presented by Alison Yardy. Norfolk is known as a county of windmills. This fully illustrated talk is a guide to the great variety found in the county, the technological development of the mills and the millers and millwrights associated with them. The link for the talk, and that for the meeting at 7.30pm on Wednesday 14 July, will be sent on as soon as possible - look out for them!

If you know any non members who might enjoy the talk, please ask them to contact ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Planned meeting dates continue to be the second Wednesday of each month. We are hoping that, starting with the August talk, we can restart physical meetings at our usual venue. We will confirm this by email where we can, but suggest if you haven't heard that you phone 01362 691455 to check a few days before. All being well, the venue will be Trinity Methodist Church, 31 Trinity Close, Dereham NR19 2EP (off Theatre Street), and start at 1930. Admission to talks is £1 for members of Dereham Heritage Trust and £3 for non members. Visitors are always welcome, with the fee payable on the door, refreshments included.

14 July
An Introduction to Norfolk's Mills (on line)
Speaker Alison Yardy

11 August
The smallholding movement: a social and agricultural experiment
Speaker Susanna Wade-Martins

8 September
Five o'clock tea with Betsy
Speaker Elizabeth Fry (Georgette Vale)

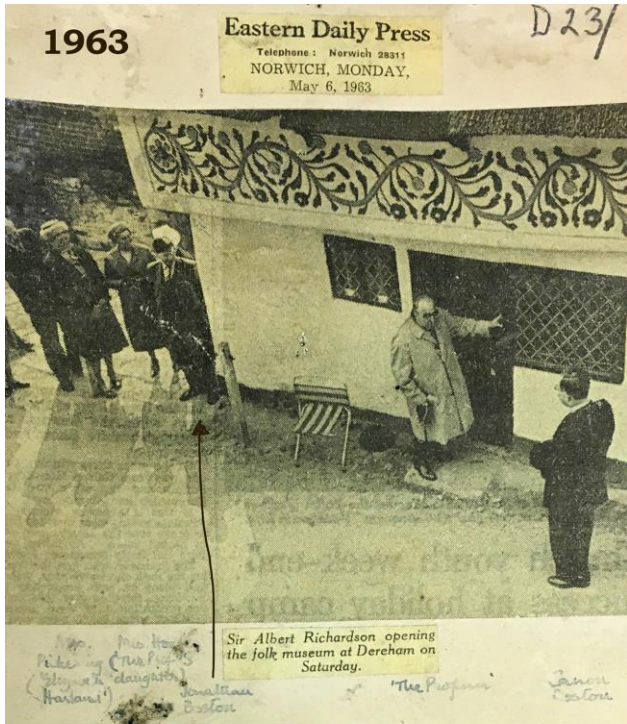
13 October
Hobbies
Speaker Martin Flegg

10 November
The Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England Project
Speaker Dr Robin Hanley Assistant Head of Museums, Norfolk Museums Service

8 December
Hexachordia
Venue Wellspring Family Church

Next issue

We plan to produce a Newsletter every quarter, in January, April, July and October; the press date for the next issue is **15 December**. If you have material for this issue, please send it to Ken Hawkins. And please don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you have any other comments of any sort. In between Newsletters, our website www.derehamhistory.com is updated regularly so please have a look now and again.



From the first opening of the museum in 1963 to our last opening in 2019 our President Rev Jonathan Boston has been with us.

Very sadly on June 13th Jonathan passed away suddenly in hospital.



Wednesday May 9th 2018
**The Annual William Cowper night with
 Rev Jonathan Boston**

This year the talk will also be a musical evening as it looks at Cowper's legacy as a hymn writer. He penned such lasting texts as "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "O! for a Closer Walk with God," and "Sometimes a Light Surprises,". "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" is thought to be the last hymn Cowper ever wrote.

At Trinity Methodist Church Hall,
 Theatre Street, Dereham,



