

# Autumn Newsletter 2024

## Volume 20-3



Dereham Heritage Trust  
& Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum

*Promoting Dereham's History & Heritage*

### Chair's Report *Peter Wade-Martins*

We are now halfway through our museum season, and we can feel some satisfaction with the level of public involvement so far. The new displays in the museum have been well received and our visitor figures up to 3 August are 282 compared with 164 for the same period last year. Attendance at our monthly lectures has also been increasing with good numbers of non members (some of whom have then become members). This is largely due to better publicity through Facebook and the very attractive posters designed by Katie Goodman for each lecture.

**Come to our Annual Dinner - bookings and deposit needed by 22 September - see p21**

We are now looking forward to Heritage Open Days, this year on 6, 7, 13 and 14 September. If it is to be anything like last year the museum on those days will be really busy. Also, for the first time, with the permission of Dereham Town Council, we are opening the town's Assembly Rooms for HODs on 7 and 14 September (10-4). For that we have prepared a special new guidebook to the Assembly Rooms which will be published soon.

### A Heritage Centre for Dereham?

Members by now will know that the committee is actively searching for a suitable location to establish a new Heritage Centre which would give us enough space to reflect the town's really interesting past. Bishop Bonner's Cottages are ideal for small-scale cottage displays, but they are limiting when we want to attempt anything more ambitious. They are also too damp in winter to store many sensitive items. There are no toilets and there is limited teaching space for school parties.

Dereham was possibly the first Norfolk market town to have a museum, so while a cottage museum was innovative at the time, other towns, like Swaffham, which established their museums later, have rather more suitable premises. Our visits to the other museums have shown us that to create such a centre is very difficult without the active support of the Town Council. So, I have had two meetings with the Mayor, Linda Monument, to start discussions on what more can be done for Dereham's heritage provision. It will take a while before options become clear.

We have also now invested in a roller banner in a bid to increase awareness of Dereham Heritage Trust when out and about in the local community. Most recently, the banner accompanied some of our committee members to Dencora's Family Fun Day in the Ellenor Fenn Garden.

### Dating BBC

We all want to know how old Bishop Bonner's Cottages really are. We do know that the 1502 date on the southern gable and over the front door has nothing to do with the construction of the cottages. Why that date is there we may never know.

We have had the cottages surveyed by two timber-frame experts, Susan and Michael Brown, who have concluded that the three cottages are of different dates. The oldest is the southern one with the jetty in the front wall, from the early 1600s. That date comes from the carving on the beam over the fireplace. But can we get a more precise date?

Dereham Heritage Trust  
& Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum  
*Promoting Dereham's History & Heritage*

**Bishop Bonner's  
Cottage Museum**  
*Discover the story of Dereham's past*

From its academic beginnings in 1953, Dereham Heritage Trust has evolved into an enthusiastic group of people with a shared interest in the history of Dereham and the surrounding areas.

• Town Archive • Museum • Newsletters • Monthly Talks •

www.DerehamHeritageTrust.org.uk  
Facebook.com/DerehamHeritageTrust

Tree ring dating is where you look at a cross section through a piece of wood and compare the sequence of ring widths year by year with known dated sequences to establish a felling date for the timber. We have had a tree ring dating expert drilling out samples from the roof beams, but the only sample with enough rings to be of any use was from a rafter in a truss put into the northern cottage to strengthen the frame and is therefore not from the original construction. That gave us a date of **between 1680 and 1705**. But we still want to know when the southern cottage was first built.

This is where **Stable Isotope Dendrochronology** may come in. This is a new developing scientific dating technique using a mass spectrometer. The method is similar to ordinary tree-ring dating but rather than using physical measurements of tree rings widths, this technique measures the chemical composition of each tree ring and compares that against an isotopic reference chronology.

The method is usually applied to oak timbers, although other species may be suitable. Samples are normally provided to the isotope laboratory in Swansea after conventional ring width dating has been attempted without success.

Not all samples will date. Some may not be suitable. Others may simply not record chemical patterns that can be securely matched against reference data. This is most often due to the presence of disturbed growth, contamination of the wood or just decay.

As we reported in the last Newsletter, we have recently had another sample removed, this time from the oak beam over the fireplace in the southern cottage. This produced a ring sequence of 43 years (see picture). Once in the laboratory sample preparation and analysis normally takes about six months. Our sample has now reached the Swansea laboratory, and we await the results, with a sense of real anticipation.



## There's a Mouse in the House! *Katie Goodman*

Summer holiday fun at Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum began with the introduction of our first ever children's character. Meet Bonnie and family, our resident museum mice; an exciting new way to introduce children to Dereham's history and heritage.



While the museum already has an activity sheet aimed at children, we felt it important that all ages and interests were catered for - and so Bonnie was born. We then just needed someone to bring Bonnie to life. Our museum mice were made and donated to the museum by Angela Almond, our wonderfully generous Dereham Heritage Trust member.

Bonnie and her six brothers and sisters are dotted around the museum ready to play hide-and-seek with our younger visitors, with each mouse relating to either an aspect of life in the cottages or this year's museum displays. There is a free Bonnie trail sheet available upon entry which features fun facts and leading questions to encourage children to properly explore the museum and engage with the displays, all while having fun trying to track down our hidden mice. Once all seven mice have been found, stickers can be collected from the front desk!

Now that Bonnie and family have moved in, we hope to reinvent the mouse trail every year, with each new season bringing a different theme and new hiding places for our mischievous museum mice.

## Visit to Hoe Common *Trevor Ogden*

On 30 June our members Dick and Sue Malt took half a dozen of us round Hoe Common, to look at some of the history and maintenance of this 12-acre area of acid soil. It is not technically a common, but at the Enclosure in the early 19th century the area was left in the care of trustees for the use of the poor, for them to harvest gorse and bracken, and graze livestock. It has been under other threats since, including proposed extension of the neighbouring gravel diggings, the natural spread of birch woodland and bracken, and more recently the ever-present deer. With teams of volunteers, Dick and Sue have spent much of the last 40 years maintaining and improving it.



*The old oaks on the left are growing on the old boundary bank at the southern edge of the Common. On the other side of the bank the ground falls away where the gravel has been extracted. (Photo, Trevor Ogden)*

The Common has had other users. Under the bracken are practice trenches, used during the World Wars. It is also a good place for adders. In the winter they snuggle down in hibernaria in the roots of the trees on the northern side of the Common, and in March and April they emerge and can be seen sunning themselves in the shelter of the gorse patches.

One of the photos shows the southern boundary of the Common. On the northern side, the volunteers have been building a dead hedge using materials from the Common, and planting seedlings from a 200-year-old crab apple, which Sue has grown on and which have now been incorporated into the hedge.

At the west end of the site, a footpath runs down to the Holt Road, the B1110, and across it to reach the Nature Reserve of Hoe Rough, which has been recently extended to include Beetley Meadows.

We met Jeff Shea, who with his Suffolk Punch Alex rolls the bracken on Hoe Common. The ridges on the roller break the stalks, and repeated use eventually weakens the rhizomes, which are very difficult to deal with otherwise without the use of chemical sprays. The local poor may no longer gather gorse and bracken, but the volunteers, with the occasional help of Alex and Jeff, work to maintain the Common as an open space for our enjoyment, hopefully for another 200 years.



*Alex and some of his human admirers. Behind them, we can see what the bracken would be like without the treatment. (Photo, Sue Malt)*

## Willam H Sampson Defence Medal *Robena Brown*

In line with our collection policy, we recently bought a World War II Defence Medal for the archive. The medal came complete with original ribbon, waxed envelope and certificate, all within the original box addressed to William H Sampson of 5 King's Road, Dereham.



*Certificate and Defence Medal obverse and reverse with ribbon*

Although World War I medals, British War, Victory and the 1914/15 star, all show the recipient's details, the government decided this was not necessary for medals issued to British personnel during World War II. Thus, William Sampson's Defence Medal typically does not bear his name.



The September 1939 Register was compiled just after the outbreak of World War II providing an illuminating snapshot of the civilian population. William Henry Sampson then worked as a postman living in his King's Road home with his wife Hilda. According to post-war Dereham street directories he continued to live there until his death in 1971.

ADDRESS.		SCHEDULE.		SURNAME AND OTHER NAMES.		O, V, S, P, or I.	M. or F.	BIRTH- Day. Year.		S, M, W, or D.	PERSONAL OCCUPATION.
1	2	No.	Sub. No.	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5 King's Road	95	1		Sampson William H	-	M	4	Aug	99	M	Postman
		2		Sampson Hilda	-	F	16	Oct	04	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties

*Register showing William and Hilda Sampson*

We look forward to carrying out research to learn more.

## Craske Crafternoon *Katie Goodman*

On Tuesday 6 August we hosted our first ever children's activity session at Dereham Library, a 'Craske Crafternoon', where each art activity on offer was inspired by the story of Dereham's famous artist. We were joined by 43 children and 23 adults, which made for a wonderfully busy afternoon!



After introducing everyone to John Craske and examples of his artwork in the Dereham Heritage Trust collection, we began creating our own seascapes and beach-inspired pictures using the art supplies the Trust was able to purchase through grant funding earlier in the year.

Paints, crayons, and glitter were flying everywhere but, in all the happy chaos, it was lovely to see so many children interpret the famous Craske red-sailed smack. For those who weren't quite sure where to begin, we also had a selection of Craske-themed colouring-in sheets to choose from.

Once the pictures were finished it was time to frame them. In his early days, John Craske used scrap wood to make picture frames for his watercolour paintings. He then decorated these frames using seashells and beach debris he collected along the Norfolk coast. While we didn't make our own frames, we were able to offer picture frame decorating which proved a big hit - we ran out of frames within the first 20 minutes!

Aside from all the arty fun, it was seeing John Craske's story and art resonate with a new, much younger audience that made the afternoon particularly special for all those involved.

We hope our Craske Crafternoon has opened the door to us hosting various history-themed craft activities at the library in the near future.



## A Roman farm in Dereham? Trevor Ogden

Norfolk County Council's Norfolk Heritage Explorer website says of Dereham, "the absence of evidence for Roman settlement is unusual". Unusual, and discouraging to us who are interested. However, where the new houses are being built on the Swanton Road, on the other side of the railway, an archaeological investigation showed signs of Roman-period agricultural activity in the field between the road and the northern boundary of Neatherd Moor. The investigation was commissioned by the developer of the site, Abel Homes, and carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology. It took place in January to March 2022, but a summary report has recently been published in the journal *Norfolk Archaeology*.

After preliminary investigation trenches on both sides of the road, the team put most effort into the field on the south side, between the road and Neatherd Moor. Near the western edge there had earlier been finds of prehistoric flints, notably three Neolithic axes (see the Norfolk Heritage Explorer, NEHR 2867, 2836 and 11379). My sketch-map (Fig 1) shows the approximate location of the two excavated areas. The excavators found pits and ditches, which from their alignments were interpreted as defining a field system. Crucially for dating, the ditches were associated with Roman pottery, suggesting use in the first and second centuries. This is roughly the period of the Roman fort which occupied a bluff near the River Wensum at Swanton Morley about 6 km north. Almost 5 kg of pottery were found, about 98% of it in Area 2 (see Fig 1).

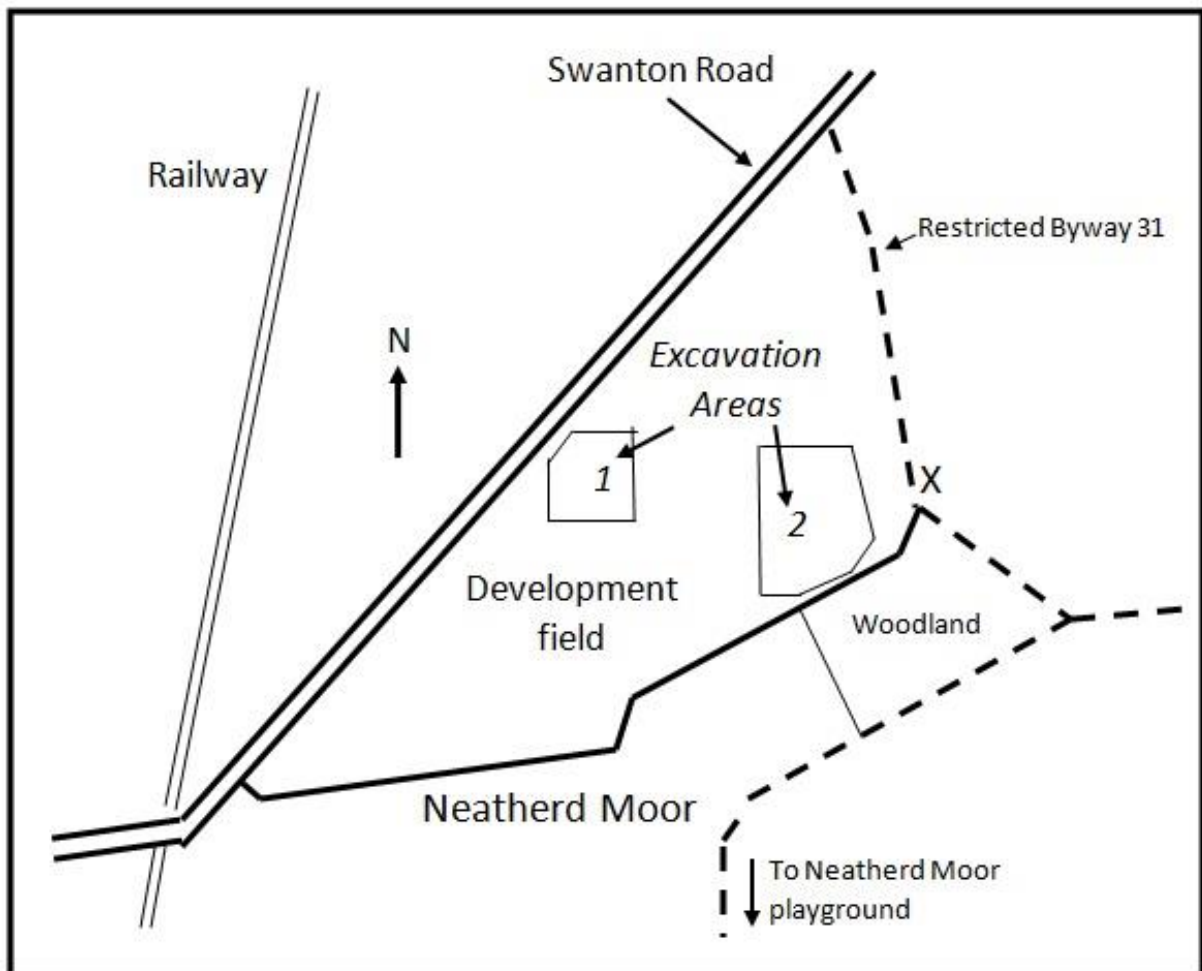


Fig 1. Sketch-map showing the area of excavation between the Swanton Road and Neatherd Moor. For more detail, see the report in *Norfolk Archaeology*.

The other feature of interest was a trackway, delineated by parallel ditches about 4m apart, crossing Area 1 and aligned almost north south (more exactly, on an alignment about 9° east of north, judging from the plan in the summary report).

No buildings were found, but because of the field system the investigators thought that there might have been a farmstead nearby. The springs now over the hedge on Neatherd Moor would have given a water supply and may be the reason for the farming activity being here. Hopefully the investigators would have found the farmhouse if it had been in the development area, because this is now subject to the destructive methods of modern estate building as the work on the houses begins. The photograph (Fig 2) was taken in early July and looks across the site and the location of Area 2, from the Restricted Byway to Northall Green, which runs up the east side of the site. [Editor's note: a Restricted Byway is a public right of way legally open to use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers - the restriction is that motorised use is not permitted.]



*Fig 2. View of the site in early July 2024, with house-building beginning. The photograph is taken from the Restricted Byway along the east side of the site, at point X on Fig. 1, looking west across excavation Area 2, where the Roman pottery and ditches were found. Dereham's water-tower can be seen on the right and the trees on the left are on Neatherd Moor.*

Source (which should be consulted for more details): Kerry Boughton, A Roman field system at Swanton Road, Dereham. *Norfolk Archaeology* (Second Series, 2 (2023): 178-190). Although the volume is dated 2023, it was only distributed in June 2024. The site archive, including a fuller report, will be deposited with Norfolk Museums Service (Accession Number NWHCM:2022.6).

For the Norfolk Heritage Explorer and details of the NEHR references, see <https://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/home>.

## Trinity Learners

When the WEA was subsumed into the Education Sector it became very bureaucratic, wanted everyone to be digitised and threatened us with "End-of-term tests", so, guess what, we left and became the independent Trinity Learners. We are the same group, meeting in Trinity Methodist Church Hall on Wednesday mornings for 2 hours with various speakers during Autumn and Spring terms. From 18 September to 16 October Stephen Poulter will give us a series called *Stand and Deliver* and on the 23rd two local Metal Detectorists will come and show us some of their finds. From 8 to 29 January John Vigar will give us a series on Norfolk Churches and from 5 to 26 February Charles Lewis will talk to us about Mosques and Minarets, the building of Islam. All are welcome.

Prices on request to Kathryn Rogers - [kathryn.m.rogers@gmail.com](mailto:kathryn.m.rogers@gmail.com).

## A Tragic Story *Robena Brown*

*This article was originally published by Shipdham History Group*

Every writer knows, when researching information about any subject, that as soon as an article or book is printed then more relevant detail will come to hand. In many cases it is that which is already written which brings about the receipt of more information which is, of course, very welcome.

Last month, a fascinating document came into our hands which explains how Shipdham's youngest casualty of World War I was lost on 4 July 1917. We can now add to his tragic story.

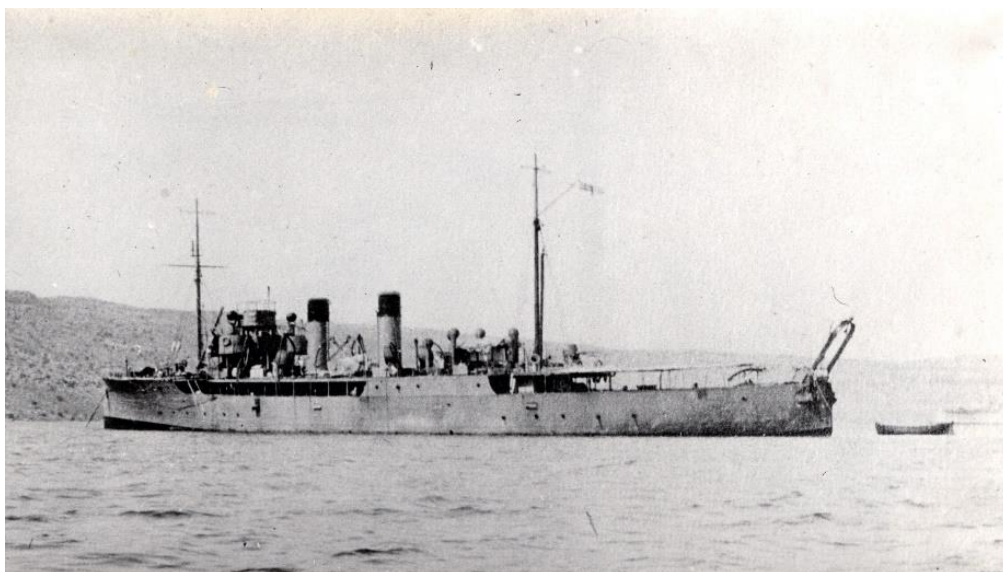


*Arthur Macro (1898 – 1917)*

In 2016, we wrote the life story of Arthur Macro using all the information at hand at that time. Arthur was born in 1898 at the workhouse in Islington after his mother Laura left Shipdham to be admitted to the Poor Law Union workhouse in order to give birth to her child. She returned to the village soon after and married twice having a total of ten more children. Arthur does not appear to have lived with his mother after their return to the village but spent time with his Macro grandparents at Crows Hill Farm, and later his aunt Sarah and farmer uncle Albert Knott, in Watton Road working as a 'Farm Boy'.

He enlisted as a 'Boy' of 17 years in Chatham, training at HMS Ganges from 1915, serving on HMS Europa I, then HMS Aster from July 1915. He became an 'Ordinary Seaman' in November 1916 when aged 18 and enlisted for 12 years while serving on HMS Aster.

It is poignant that the above photograph was taken in a studio in Malta before Arthur left port and was sent home to his family. It almost certainly arrived before the news of his death.



*HMS Aster in the Mediterranean in 1915 (photo sourced in 2022)*

On 4 July 1917, Ordinary Seaman Arthur William Macro sailed out of Malta Grand Harbour on his ship HMS Aster, which together with HMS Azalea, acted as escort for the hospital troopship HMS Abbassieh bound for Salonika (now Thessaloniki) in northern Greece. Neither of the escort ships had been built for war, being brought into service in 1915; they were never designed for the role, they were just available. HMS Azalea, however, had a triple-skinned bow which gave some protection to the vessel and men on board.



*Malta Grand Harbour - Port of Valetta before World War I*

Some 11 miles out from Malta HMS Abbassieh unfortunately took a wrong course into a known minefield which had been laid by the mine-laying U-boat SM UC-25. By the end of the war this submarine was responsible for the loss of 28 allied vessels. Though the hospital ship passed safely through the minefield, both escort vessels, HMS Aster and Azalea, hit mines head on.

At this point, we refer to a first-hand account written by Lieutenant Ernest L Rooke-Keen, a Royal Navy officer on board HMS Aster that day, whose original account of the fatal incident has recently been purchased and will be retained with Shipdham village records for future generations:

'The first sensation was a "drop". I suppose the whole ship was lifted bodily a few inches and then dropped back into the water - at any rate it was the drop one felt accompanied by a tremendous jar and concussion which caused the whole ship to shudder. ... A fraction of a second later came the noise of the explosion, a flicker of lights and the sounds of breaking timber, smashed crockery and falling objects. At the same time the ship commenced to lurch down by the bows. ... [W]e leapt to our feet and rushed on deck. We met a crowd of men coming up from below and at the word "steady" they went to their stations in perfect quietness.

I remember as I went up on the boat deck seeing the foc's'le smashed and buckled in, the ship down by the bows with the water on the upper deck washing through the foc's'le door and the foremost rigging hanging loose in an idle hapless way ...

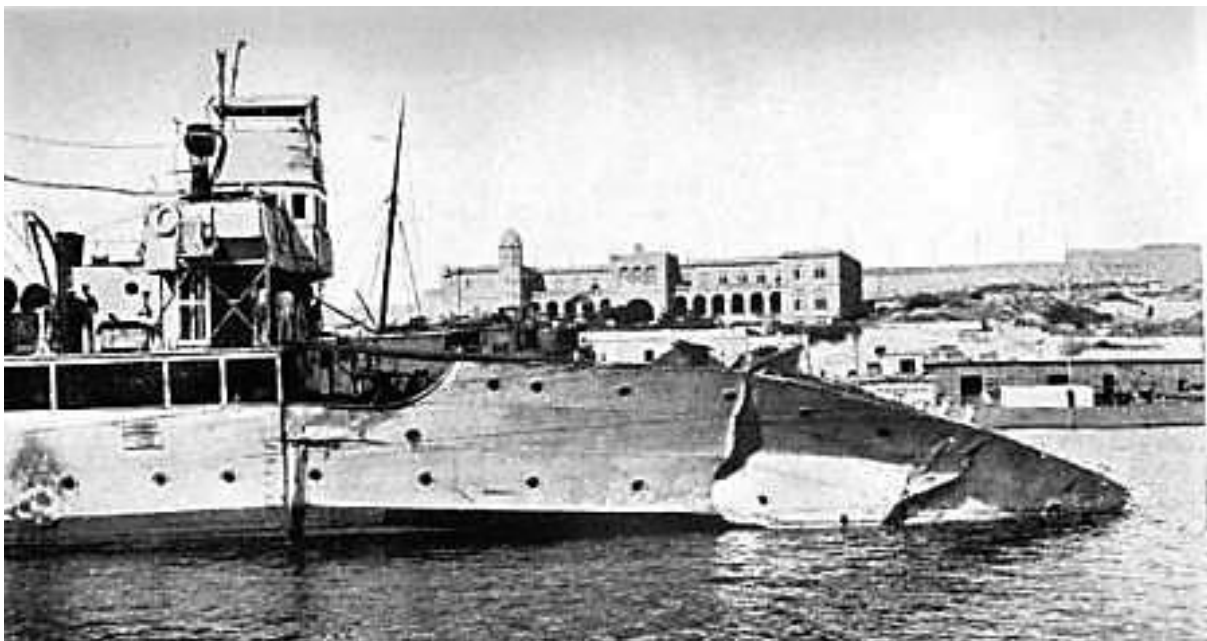
I then went down on the upper deck and for'd on to what was left of the foc's'le. There was a poor boy lying there who had been blown out of the crows nest and must have fallen on his face. I helped to carry him aft but he died almost at once.'

Nine more of the crew died when HMS Aster later sank, though none were recovered. Their names appear on Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth memorials to those lost at sea with no known grave.

The only crewmember whose body was recovered was Arthur, so we now know that it was he who was the unfortunate lookout in the crow's nest on that fateful day and that it was Lt Ruck-Keene who was with him when he died.

The Lieutenant continued: 'Minesweepers, trawlers and motor launches were now arriving but the old ship was going fast. Everyone had left except the Captain who remained on the quarter until her stern was high in the air and then seeing that she was going to take her last plunge he first threw us his helmet and then after a last look round made a magnificent dive from 40ft up into the water and was picked up by the whaler. The "A.1." [code word for HMS Aster] sank in a very stately and dignified way. Her stern gradually lifted higher and higher in the air, until she was practically vertical and then she slowly slid down into the depths. Yellow smoke poured from each funnel as the sea reached the stokeholds and her siren gave a little, mournful, farewell wail, her ensign flying to the last.'

HMS Azalea then collided with another mine, yet despite a tremendous explosion and due to her reinforced bows, survived and was towed back by a minesweeper to the safety of the Malta harbour.

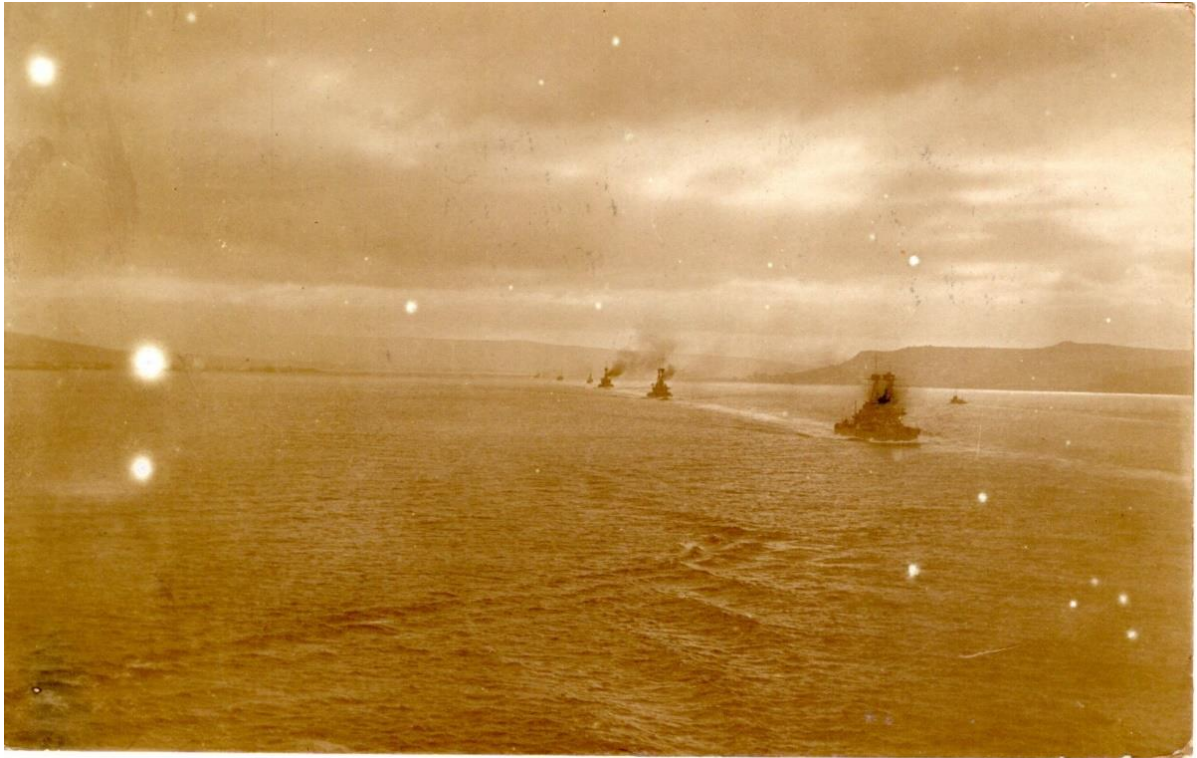


*HMS Azalea back in Malta after the tragedy*

Reading through the whole four-page account of the sinking of HMS Aster (a remarkably important historical document) is reminiscent of watching the emotional sinking of RMS Titanic in James Cameron's 1997 film but even more so because we know so much about young Arthur Macro, who from the worst start in life in a London workhouse, to his untimely and tragic end aged only 18 years, has always been a boy that we feel we know personally.

Lt Ernest Ruck-Keene's own story is also a tragic one. Accompanying the written account of 4 July 1917 is a photograph taken of the 'British Fleet steaming up Dardanelles Nov. 12th 1918', the day after the armistice was signed, annotated in his own hand 'with every good wish to the clan for Christmas & New Year', and sent to his family in Lexden near Colchester. The photo looks to have been privately taken and may be unique.

The Lieutenant was, however, tragically drowned in the Turkish Mediterranean on 24 December that year suffering with 'neurasthenia and suicidal tendencies' while awaiting a return to Malta. It is moreover doubly tragic that both Arthur and the Lieutenant sent items demonstrating love to their families which would have arrived after the terrible news reached home that they had been lost.



*British Fleet steaming up Dardanelles following armistice on 12 November 1918*

Arthur's body was returned to Malta where he is buried in the Capuccini Naval Cemetery. In 2022, his relative, James Albert Youngs, visited Arthur's grave to honour him and his sacrifice.



*Capuccini Cemetery, Malta*

When you are passing, or in, All Saints Church, Shipdham, do have a look at the beautiful 2018 World War I peace commemoration window and think of young Arthur and remember his story. Everyone thinks of soldiers in trenches on the western front and the image of the soldier in that window reflects the image in our minds, but we must also remember the sailors such as Arthur Macro, and indeed Ernest Ruck-Keene, all who died defending our shores, our service personnel and the families they loved at home.

## Recent talks *Ken Hawkins*

### June : Oxburgh Hall - Raising the roof : Matt Champion

Matt Champion described his talk as being about archaeology in the air, unravelling the story of the building. The Bedingfelds were given a licence to crenellate in the 15th century - and Oxburgh remained in their ownership until the mid 20th century when it passed to the National Trust (though they still live there).

The present story began in 2016, when a 19th century dormer window slipped off the roof without warning. As it landed in the courtyard where visitors passed regularly, it required rapid investigation. This revealed that the medieval and Tudor work was mostly good, but the later work was unstable - the dormer window above the café was found to be held in place purely by its own weight. 19th century chimneys were found to be unstable and many timbers were badly affected by death watch beetle. Extensive repair work was needed, but had to be planned to take account of the moat, which couldn't be drained as it was the home of freshwater mussels. Months were spent designing the approach, which involved 400 bags of sterilised sand to form a dam, on top of which scaffolding was erected. All of this was on multiple levels and was sheeted to provide protection from the weather, making it sometimes hard for workers to know just where they were.

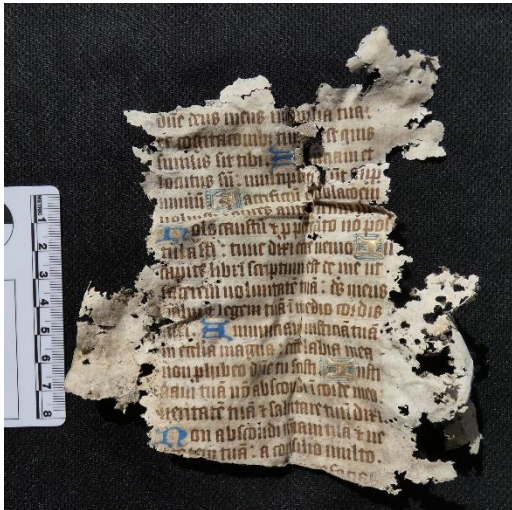
All the roof tiles were removed and labelled. Then covid struck. Paradoxically, as the construction sector was not locked down, but work on other sites and projects had been halted, work at Oxburgh was speeded up. The National Trust archaeologist had been furloughed, which led to Matt being asked to take over for a few weeks - which eventually turned into 6½ months. The socially distanced team removed all the floorboards, recording and numbering them as they went; the remaining dormers were also taken down.

Matt was interested in what lay under the floor, seeking anything interesting. The roof was undulating, which was found to match gaps between the floorboards of the floor above. A fingertip search under the floor produced finds from Day 1. Among the finds were

- what was thought to be a witch bottle
- a box of chocolates, apparently hidden and with all the wrappers still in the box
- cigarette packets, often with messages written inside
- hundreds of pins, still very sharp - more than 700 in one small area alone
- threads and needles by south facing windows
- fragments of documents in odd shapes, so believed to have been used for packing or clothes making
- scattered tiny pieces of 15th century stained glass

Because of covid, the usual process of sending the artefacts away for conservation could not be followed, so all were given a light clean and were numbered and photographed.

There were few encounters with vermin, but a large rats' nest (5 feet by 6 feet) was found, which was dry and had provided perfect preservation; it was thought this had been built up from the collection of materials from all around. Among these were pieces of a 16th century music manuscript, possibly of Thomas Tallis. There were also fragments from three identified books, again from the 16th century. There were textile fragments from the same period - linen shifts, collars and cuffs, a child's silk doublet sleeve in rich colours, a lady's headdress of gold silk netting - all of high status but much suggesting the fabrics were being re-used. One piece was period specific - a child's doublet, of white linen with black embroidery.



*Photo courtesy of M J Champion*

The gap between the inner and outer walls was filled with debris swept beyond the outer edge of the floor. In this gap were found thousands of walnut shells, providing heat and sound insulation. A very special find here was a single page from a medieval manuscript, a Book of Hours made in Bruges in 1450. Another book, which looked a mess, turned out to be from the late 16th century; it had a gold leaf cover and the inside was in perfect condition. The final find Matt reported was a leather 15th or 16th century knife scabbard.

All of these finds threw new light on the history of the building. Examination of carpenters' marks evidenced how the timbers had been put together. It was also found that some bricks were very different from the 15th and 16th century brickwork. These enabled it to be deduced that the previous

building had not been entirely demolished, as had been thought before, but incorporated into the present Hall.

At the end of the work, the timbers were replaced exactly into their previous positions and the chimneys and dormers rebuilt. The finds are still being recorded and conserved but some are already on display. And of course, the Hall is once more open to visitors.

### **July : Goddard Johnson : Dr Wilkins-Jones**

Dr Wilkins-Jones, a Research Fellow at UEA, opened his talk noting that his introduction to Goddard Johnson arose from his being a friend of George Borrow. At various points, he had to say that there were many things not known about Goddard and there was no known photograph of him. He was known to have been born in Shipdham in 1777, one of ten children to his farmer parents. Aged 26, he married Maria Harrison (18) from Little Dunham, though their marriage took place in St Nicholas' Church, (East) Dereham. At first they lived in Little Dunham, but moved to North Elmham, later Marsham and in 1841 to Norwich. The 1851 census recorded them with their daughter (also Maria), two grandsons and a servant. In 1858 they moved to Dereham, where he died in 1860.

From his early 30s he showed an interest in archaeology and was involved in a number of sites: he sent finds from Sporle to the Castle Museum and in 1824 had written to the British Museum about coins found in Caston. Over time, he gave some 50 items, mainly coins, to the British Museum.

In 1825 he was a founder member of Norfolk Museum and in 1846 a founder of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, for whose journal he wrote articles. He was still active in the 1850s and in 1857 shared a torc found in Ashill. He had a wide circle of friends with a range of interests; his correspondence included local history and antiquarian matters. He had contacts in the British Museum and in 1821 was invited to bid on its behalf for a collection of coins.

Dr Wilkins-Jones set out a range of Johnson's activities. He visited 250 Norfolk churches, but also apparently 'borrowed' items - a parish register was discovered in his effects after his death. He also spent many years preparing additions to Blomefield's History of Norfolk, though none were ever published. In 1834 he was considering a listing of dialect words for publication; this too never came to fruition. In 1845, Norwich City asked him to put their records in order and he produced a 160 page catalogue in 1847, the original of which is in the Norfolk Record Office.

He apparently experienced considerable financial difficulties. 1842 saw him in debt for £300 to John Blake and he was forced to sell most of his library, auctioned in 1252 lots by Sotheby's. The books covered a wide range of subjects including jokes, Shakespeare's plays, archery, poetry, songbooks and a history of Wales. They raised £300 8s 6d (around £23000 today). His daughter was also in debt, with 10 children between newly born and 14, and Goddard negotiated a settlement of 5s in the pound, but had to surrender property for cash. In 1885 he sold his furniture and 250 books.

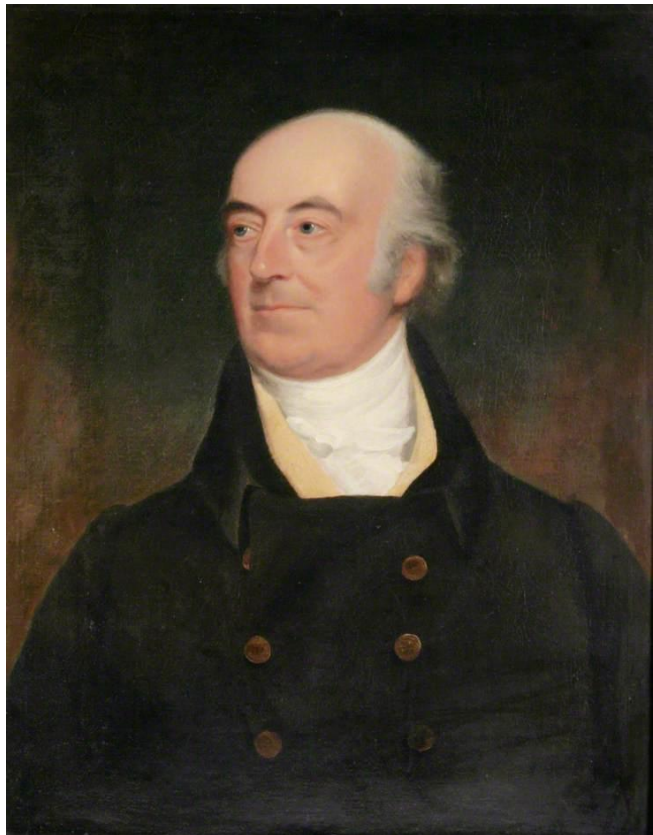
He met George Borrow, possibly in 1842, and they shared an interest in Romany culture and language; Dr Wilkins-Jones knew of a letter in 1843 from him to George Borrow, though in 1844 Borrow left for Eastern Europe.

Johnson left no will, but an anonymous eulogy printed in the Norwich Mercury demonstrated considerable respect for him.

Both the talk and the questions which followed revealed considerable lack of information about him - he wrote many letters, though few have been found. Letters to him can be found in Castle Museum.

### **August : Coke of Holkham - Farmer and Patriot : Susanna Wade-Martins**

Susanna introduced us to Thomas William Coke by noting first, that he was usually thought of at the same time as Jethro Tull and Turnip Townshend, even though they were of different generations, and second, that his statue graced the top of the Corn Hall in Dereham (now the cinema) until struck by lightning which toppled and smashed it. His role, and how he chose to be portrayed, was illustrated by a number of paintings shown during the talk. The first picture showed him as a 'hands on' farmer (though Holkham Hall was clearly visible in the background) with a group of shepherds and their sheep. He was indeed the son of a gentleman farmer in Derbyshire, though he inherited Holkham Hall from his great uncle. The Cokes were at Godwick Hall, a Tudor building, not grand or large (and no longer existing). Holkham Hall was built as a 'temple to the arts' between 1730 and 1750. Thomas Coke and his wife Lady Margaret Coke had a son, but he was embroiled in several scandals; he died in 1759, meaning that the inheritance was destined to pass ultimately to 'our' Thomas. As their own son's scandals were attributed to his attendance at university, Thomas was sent instead on the Grand Tour - producing a second portrait of him in classical surroundings.

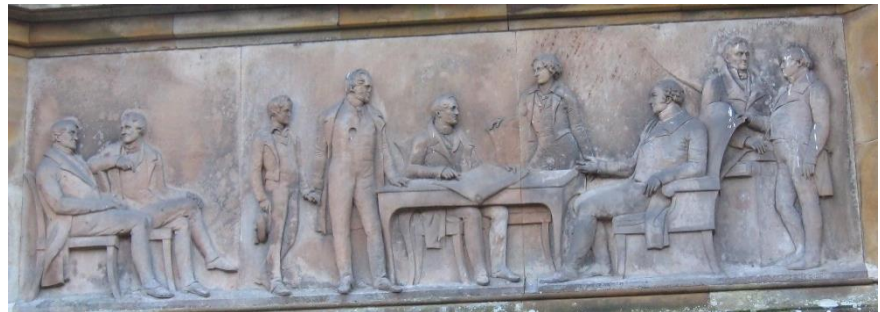
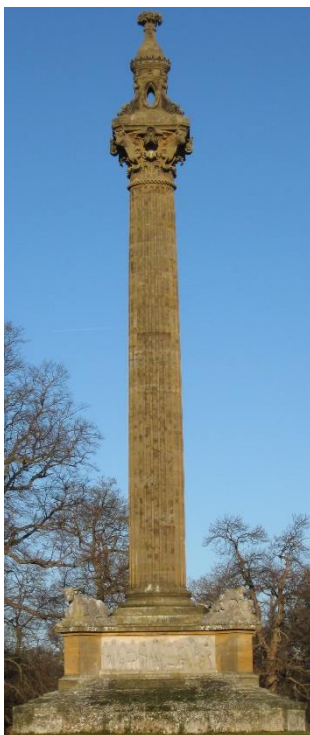


On his return to England he married Jane Dutton in 1774, while Lady Margaret died the following year. Thomas became a Whig MP, joining the Norfolk gentry; for a contested election in 1790 he employed Humphrey Repton to draw up a map (which was displayed) showing the key people in the Hundreds of north Norfolk and who they were likely to support.

Coke entered parliament in 1776 when the government was dealing with the rebellion in America and in 1778 King George III was seeking donations to help pay for the war. A meeting in the Maid's Head in Norwich produced £4500. But Thomas, with William Windham, then left to start a petition to end the war, which they believed had consumed far more resource than the government had claimed. The war ended in 1781 with American independence. Thomas' status entitled him to attend court in less formal clothes and he claimed (in 1821) that he had taken the petition for peace to the king in his boots - but the Hansard record does not support the claim that he was solely responsible for this.

1789 brought the French revolution which the Whigs supported at first; but war was declared in 1796 and when invasion threatened Thomas recruited local yeomanry. He continued to attend Parliament regularly, though retired aged 78. Jane died in 1830, aged only 42, leaving 3 daughters but no son.

Thomas is noted for his agricultural work (his father was interested in agricultural progress), displayed by another painting, this time of sheep shearing, with Thomas and a group of other gentry watching. Many aspects of his interests are carved on the Monument in the grounds



of Holkham Hall. This time also saw a lot of strip farming superceded by enclosures, though this was by no means the simple single process often imagined. To support activity in the more distant fields, barns were erected and a show piece farm was also built in the grounds, originally seen from and by the Hall. Houses were also built for tenants; Thomas' agent Francis Blaikie formalised farm leases of up to 21 years, incentivising tenants to invest and develop their holdings; some specified crop rotation. Alongside this, Thomas was interested in land improvement and animal breeding - another well known painting included a huge ox.

Holkham Hall celebrated 100 years of the Bill of Rights in 1788 with a party featuring the buff and blue colours of the Whig party (and of George Washington).

In 1822, Thomas married his 18 year old god daughter and they had 5 children together. He later became frail and blind and died in 1842; his coffin is still in the family vault in Tittleshall church.

## Churchwardens' Accounts

*These notes are from Paul Cattermole's discoveries (August 1979) in the early churchwardens' accounts; they were found in a box file which had been sent to the Revd Harry Tait in 1986 and have been typed up by Paul Cubitt.*

The History of the towers and bell at East Dereham is fascinating and is more accessible than that of most churches in Norfolk since a few pre-Reformation documents survive<sup>1</sup>. The earliest churchwardens' accounts (for a two year period beginning in 1419/20) record ringing by 'clerks' during Easter week, when an anniversary was kept for benefactors of the church; and a similar item occurs in accounts through to the Reformation. There were repairs to the 'great bell'. And a bawdrick\* for the 'middle bell' was repaired and its buckle corrected, suggesting there were three bells in the 1420s.

The next surviving account runs from 1460 to 1462, in which period a bell was recast in Norwich, and a new bell was bought; and there were also two 'tintinnabuli', small bells, in the church which needed new ironwork. The 'campanile'\* had a leaded spire which was repaired and windows which required reglazing; in the following accounts (one year from May 1462) there were repairs to a wall 'between the campanile and the chapel of St Mary', leaving no doubt that these entries refer to the central tower. In the accounts presented in August 1464, two towers are definitely mentioned: in addition to the 'campanile', where the 4th bell received attention (suggesting that there were as many as five bells, since the tenor would almost certainly be called the 'great bell'), there was the 'classicum'\* where repairs required the purchase of a 'great oak tree'.

The accounts returned in February 1467 refer to the traditional ringing 'for alle cristen Sowlys on Estern Tuesday' and on Holy Thursday as well as for procession on the feast of Corpus Christi 'as it hath been of old usage'; Lady Morley's funeral was also attended by ringing. The new bawdrick bought this year was for the fourth bell 'in the clocher'\*. While the ironwork of the smallest bells there also received attention.

The period 1478-1480 saw masonry repairs to the 'campanile' and a new weathervane and a new bell-frame was placed in the 'clocher', where specialist advice was sought from carpenters from Bradenham and Buckenham. In 1485-1489 a tinker was called upon to make a new bell to hang at the altar of St Thomas and Thomas Wright's provision of a stay for the third bell shows that full-circle ringing was being practised at this time. A year later a bell was recast by John Baly, who appears to have been working with Richard Brasyer in Norwich. The 'campanile' was in need of considerable masons' work in 1490-1491, when freestone was bought and new anchors were fitted and in the following year there was much traffic between Norwich and Dereham over a defective bell.

From the accounts it looks very much as though the principal bells were originally in the central tower and that works to the clock which, doubtless, struck the hours on a smaller ball might have been housed in a separate structure in the churchyard. This could well have been a weatherboarded clock-house, the 'classicum' which was repaired in 1460s<sup>2</sup>. The weights needed to work the clock would have been an embarrassment in a central tower and at Norwich Cathedral the striking clock was situated in the south transept to avoid just such a problem<sup>3</sup>. The Dereham accounts speak of considerable trouble with the central tower and the many efforts of masons to repair it, while the visit of the carpenters in c1478 to advise on a new bell-frame suggests the ringing bells were transferred from the central tower at about that time.

There was a bequest<sup>4</sup> to the 'reparation of the bellys in the clocher' in 1498, some two years before Richard Pynnes made his munificent bequest of £40 to put towards building a new 'clocher' in 1501: his money was to be available only if work was under way within ten



years of his death and was to be paid at a rate of £4 per year over a ten-year period. Although there are no extant accounts for the crucial period of building the great detached bell tower, there were many bequests to the 'new clocher' over the following years and it was described as 'now in building' in 1516. Bells were certainly being rung when money was left to repair cracked bells in 1516 and 1524, but the 'finyshing of the newe stepille' is not mentioned before 1524, when 20s and in timber was left. It seems most likely that the construction of the masonry tower went along beside the older 'classicum', where bells continued to be rung until their transfer when the new steeple was complete shortly after c. 1525.

John Peper's bequest 'to the edifieng of the steeple' in 1536 coincides with the work to the central tower recorded in the churchwardens' accounts for 1539 and it would seem that the upper stage of the central tower was then removed, the top finished with bricks and a new roof with a small cupola for the sanctus\* bell made<sup>5</sup>.

A painting on the rood-screen at Burlingham St Andrew shows St Withburga with her does and holding in her hand a model of a church labelled 'Derham'. The church is cruciform and has two stages of a central tower, complete with tall spire, cross and weathervane, projecting above the roof-line. Although care needs to be taken in treating this painting - done between 1525 and 1536 - too literally, it has to be said that the remaining stump of Dereham's central tower has the paired windows shown in the Burlingham painting<sup>6</sup>.



Thus the two towers remain. The stub of the central tower has fine traceries in what was probably the ringing chamber, now open to the church and forming a lantern above the crossing. On top of the lantern is a small cupola beneath which hangs a bell (diameter 16¼ inches) which has no markings other than three identical shields bearing a capital 'R' reversed. The form of the moulding wires suggests a pre-Reformation date and it is almost certainly the small bell hung in 1539, shortly after the central tower was roof

The detached bell-tower is a brick structure, faced with flint and limestone in traditional fashion and of massive proportions. Strength is the dominant feature, shown in the thick walls with massive diagonal buttresses and very small window openings, as well as in the surprising absence of a masonry stairway. The style of the sound-windows owes something to the slightly earlier tower at Swaffham, while the lack of a parapet is a distinct aesthetic disadvantage.

The 1552 inventory records two bells: one whose weight was 40cwt, and a sanctus of 56 lbs. It is clear that the bells, of which [there] were certainly five in 1536<sup>8</sup>, had been reduced to two before the Commissioners' visit; and it must have been galling for the Dereham churchwardens to dispose of bells so recently set up in a fine new tower in order to thwart their sale and the diversion of the considerable value of their metal into the Commissioners' coffers.

#### \* Glossary

*Bawdrick/baldrick* - a leather strap used to suspend the bell clapper within the bell

*Campanile* - a bell tower

*Clocher* - a detached bell tower

*Classicum* - a 'peal of bells'

*Sanctus* - the Latin word for Holy: a sanctus bell would ring each time the words 'Holy, holy, holy' (Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus) were used at the Mass

## Additional information from John L'Estrange, 'Church Bells of Norfolk' 1874

In the Visitation Inventory of 1716 'Item five bells lately run and a sixth "now at ye Bellfounders to be run, the weight I know not"'.  
In 1711 the bells were recast as a ring of 5 with a 6<sup>th</sup> bell added in 1717.

<p>The old 6 bells weighed as follows (in the old imperial measurements of cwt-quarters-pounds).</p> <table> <tr><td>1</td><td>4-0-4</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>4-3-5</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>6-0-22</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>7-0-13</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>9-2-26</td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td>14-0-21</td></tr> </table>	1	4-0-4	2	4-3-5	3	6-0-22	4	7-0-13	5	9-2-26	6	14-0-21	<p>In 1753 a new ring of 8 bells was supplied by Thomas Lester and Thomas Pack of London. The old ring of bells was recast and new metal added. The new bells of 1754:</p> <table> <tr><td>1</td><td>7-0-0</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>7-0-0</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>7-3-5</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>9-2-16</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>11-2-13</td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td>14-1-13</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>17-0-1</td></tr> <tr><td>8</td><td>23-2-17</td></tr> </table>	1	7-0-0	2	7-0-0	3	7-3-5	4	9-2-16	5	11-2-13	6	14-1-13	7	17-0-1	8	23-2-17
1	4-0-4																												
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4	9-2-16																												
5	11-2-13																												
6	14-1-13																												
7	17-0-1																												
8	23-2-17																												

In 1768 Lester and Pack replied to an enquiry from the church about increasing the ring to 10 bells by adding a 30cwt tenor bell and a treble bell, and recasting bells 2 and 6 to allow for the key change. Had this work been commissioned Dereham would have had the finest and heaviest ring of 10 in East Anglia at the time.

Of these bells only the 3rd and 6th remain, the others being recast at various times. The tenor bell was recast in 1957 when the bells were rehung in a new frame below the belfry windows.

The inscriptions and weights of the bells as now hung in the tower

1	THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1804	6-2-1	E <sub>b</sub>
2	WM MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1785	7-0-6	D
3	THOS. LESTER & T PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1753	7-1-17	C
4	THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FOUNDER 1834 JOHN GEORGE DAVID LONG CHURCHWARDENS	8-2-26	B <sub>b</sub>
5	THOS. MEARS FECIT 1804 RICHARD GODDARD & WILLIAM KNAPP CHURCHWARDENS	10-1-20	A <sub>b</sub>
6	THOS. LESTER & T PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1753	13-2-8	G
7	G MEARS & CO FOUNDERS LONDON LAUS DEO 1864	15-0-11	F
8	THOMAS LESTER & THOS PACK OF LONDON MADE US ALL	22-3-21	E <sub>b</sub>

There is an unused clock bell: Thomas Mears Founder London. The gift of C H Wollaston, Vicar 1839

### Notes

- 1 Intermittent churchwardens' accounts: 1419-1471, NRO, Philipps MSS 40973, Box 5; 1479-1498. NRO, PD182 D.
- 2 Latham gives the translation of classicus was 'a peal of bells' and of classatorium as 'steeple' or 'clapper'.
- 3 NRO, Norwich Cathedral Muniments, Sacrist's Rolls, passim.
- 4 See P Cattermole & S Cotton, 'Mediaeval parish church building in Norfolk' Norfolk Archaeology, XXXVIII part III for details of these bequests.
- 5 NRO, East Dereham, First Churchwardens' book 1539. In addition to the purchase of bricks from Hoe, and boards for the steeple, the following entries occur:
  - i To the same John Wenne in full payment for makyng the Steple Roof v li

- ii Paid to George Wenne for coverynge the meniture (turret) of the stepille the space of iij dayes for boord and wages ij s
  - iii To John Charrelde for hanging the little bell to nayles and boordynge v d
  - iv To John Cane for coolers (colours) to the steeple iij s
  - v For peyntynge the same v s
  - vi To John Callywode for glasyng the stepille and other places in the church in partie of payment xxxv s
- 6 See P Cattermole & S Cotton (note 4 above) for dates of the Burlingham Screen.
  - 7 See the Will of John Peper, NCC Wills, Godsalve 189: 6s 8d. to repairing the fifth bell.
  - 8 John Peper, by his will 1536 gave 6s 8d to the making of the fifth bell.

## Bishop Bonner's Cottages - guided tour 5 October 2024

Please see below for details and booking information - **booking is essential.**



Dereham Heritage Trust presents

# A Guided Tour of Bishop Bonner's Cottages, Dereham

with Dr Peter Wade-Martins

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October | 10.00 am

Join us for an exclusive tour of Dereham's oldest domestic building, and learn about the complex architecture and fascinating history of this 400 year old landmark.

Tickets £5 | Includes souvenir guidebook

Places are limited and **MUST** be booked in advance. To reserve your place, please email [contact@derehamheritagetrust.org.uk](mailto:contact@derehamheritagetrust.org.uk) or call 01362 694886.



Dereham Heritage Trust  
& Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum  
*Promoting Dereham's History & Heritage*

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## Annual Dinner

We have, as last year, arranged a dinner for members and guests at 19:00 on Wednesday 9 October at the Beeston Ploughshare (a community owned pub -

<https://beestonploughshare.com/>;

01328 598995). The address is

The Street, Beeston, King's Lynn

PE32 2NF. The menu available is

shown below. **We need a deposit of £10 per person (paid to DHT -**

**see below) to secure your booking. Deposits and menu choices are needed by**

**22 September.** The balance, plus the cost of drinks and any extras on the night, must

be paid directly to the Ploughshare on the night. (Your deposit is returnable only if the

booking is cancelled more than 7 days before the meal.) The meal price will be 2

courses for £22.50 or 3 courses for £27.50, including tea or coffee.



In summary, what we need is

- the names of all people coming and which meals they want (see list below - for example, Jane Bloggs S2, M5, D1)
- a note of any particular dietary requirements
- would you need a lift to get there and back? or could you offer that to another member?
- a deposit of £10 per person *Please make payment by cheque to Dereham Heritage Trust, sent to DHT, 26 Hillfields, Dereham NR19 1UE, or by bank transfer to Dereham Heritage Trust, sort code 30-99-50, account 29575362 with 'Dinner' plus your surname as reference - **please let Ken know the payment has been made.** All bookings and payments will be acknowledged.*

### Starters

S1 Stilton apple & walnut pate

S2 Our homemade soup

S3 Smoked salmon & prawn salad with dressing

S4 Baked camembert, warm bread & red onion chutney

### Mains

M1 Slow braised brisket of beef, horseradish mash, stem broccoli & red wine gravy

M2 Our homemade chicken, ham & leek pie in shortcrust, creamy mash & gravy

M3 Roast loin of pork, dauphinois potatoes, roasted parsnips, apple & cider gravy

M4 Salmon, leeks, cherry tomatoes, courgette linguine, white wine velouté

M5 Mixed vegetable bake, topped with panko & stilton, potatoes & stem broccoli

### Desserts

D1 Our homemade fruit cheesecake

D2 Jordan's chocolate brownie, chocolate sauce, vanilla ice cream

D3 Homemade profiteroles with hazelnut praline sauce

D4 Ice cream bowl – strawberry, chocolate & vanilla

## Next issue

We plan to produce a Newsletter every quarter, in March, June, September and December; the press date for the next issue is **15 November**. 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 <https://derehamheritagetrust.org.uk> is updated regularly so please have a look now and again.

## Membership matters

**If you are not currently a member, can we invite you to consider joining?** From September each year, we offer half price membership for the remainder of the subscription year (ie to the end of March), while new joiners paying full rate from January will have membership to 1 April in the following year. The membership form is at <https://derehamheritagetrust.org.uk/membership/> or you can request a copy from Ken Hawkins. Then either post your completed form with payment or scan and email it to [ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk). Your subscription can be paid by cash or cheque at a meeting, by posted cheque to Dereham Heritage Trust, 26 Hillfields, Dereham NR19 1UE or by bank transfer. The account details are: Dereham Heritage Trust, sort code 30-99-50, account 29575362; please add your surname as a reference.

*Planned meeting dates continue to be the second Wednesday of each month, at Trinity Methodist Church, 31 Trinity Close, Dereham NR19 2EP (off Theatre Street), starting at 19:30, and ending with light refreshments before close at 21:00. **Admission to talks is £2 for members of Dereham Heritage Trust and £4 for non members.** Visitors are always welcome, with the fee payable on the door, refreshments included.*

11 September	<b>A New Warship: The Gloucester, the Western Design, and the Cromwellian Navy</b> Dr Ben Redding
9 October	<b>Dinner at the Beeston Ploughshare</b> Bookings are required for this by 22 September Please see above for details
13 November	<b>When the Medics Came to Norwich:</b> stories and scandals from the 42nd Annual Congress of the BMA in 1874 Phyllida Scrivens
11 December	<b>A Christmas celebration</b> Chanter's Jigge
8 January 2025	<b>RAF Sculthorpe Heritage Centre</b> Ian Brown
12 February	<b>Newhaven Court:</b> Love, tragedy, heroism, intrigue Helen Murray
12 March	<b>Annual General Meeting</b> followed by local films of 1930s Dereham Robena Brown