

MORSTON ROAD, BLAKENEY: BUILDING IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

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The old core of Blakeney village is clearly contained within High Street and Westgate Street – except for an outlier a short way along Morston Road. This additional part of the village, generally known as Greencroft, has a surprisingly early origin. This article outlines the building history of the area up to 1900.

The Eighteenth Century

Manorial records from the Blakeney Rectory and Blakeney Calthorpe estates refer to cottages in Greengate – later Greencroft – from the late sixteenth century onwards. The area known as Greencroft stretches northwards from Morston Road to the bank along the edge of the saltmarsh, and westwards from Pye's Close to Temple Place. It corresponds essentially to the area defined by hedges on the Cranefield Map of 1769.

The map of Blakeney produced by William and Corba Cranefield shows four cottages close to Greencroft Road, a track leading north from Morston Road and then turning westwards to run parallel to the road (Fig. 1). The presence of a chimney, or chimneys, on each of the buildings shown on the map indicates that they are dwellings and not farm buildings. The same cottages are shown on Bryant's map of Norfolk dated 1826 but, oddly, not on Faden's map published in 1797. Chris Barringer, however, in his introduction to the re-publication of Faden's map in 1989, argues that Faden often used a diagrammatic representation of settlements, and sometimes omitted buildings.

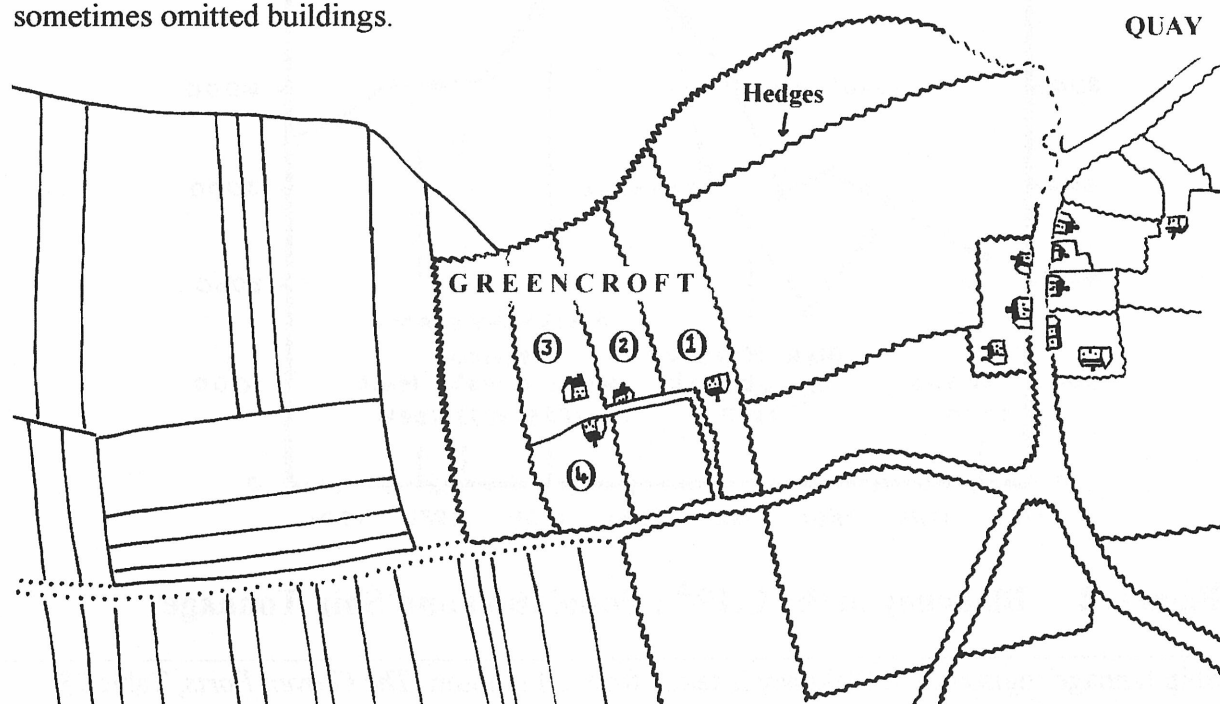


Figure 1 Cranefield's map, 1769 : Morston Road area

In looking at the manorial records and deposited deeds for the Greencroft area, John Wright has been able to trace the history of two of the cottages, marked 3 and 4 on the Cranefield map, from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries to the time of the Enclosure and beyond. Cottage 3 is mentioned in 1593 in the records of the Blakeney Rectory estate, and can be shown to correspond both to the cottage on Cranefield's map and to a cottage shown on Plot 88 on the Enclosure Map of 1824 (see Fig. 3). The cottage marked 4 was first mentioned in 1618, again in the Blakeney Rectory records, and corresponds to the cottage on Plot 90 of the Enclosure Map. The cottage labelled 1 probably, but not certainly, relates to that shown on Plot 84 of the Enclosure map.

The date of the remaining cottage (2) is not known. Its construction indicates that it may have been built in the late eighteenth century. The walls are of flint and brick, the pitch of the roof is steep and its position, with the gable end butting onto the lane, is consistent with this suggestion. There was certainly a spate of building at this time both in Westgate Street (also known as Pig Street) and along the Quay when the shipping trade was particularly buoyant. Examples include the King's Arms (1760), North Granary (c.1765), and Quay Cottage (1773 though containing at least one earlier feature).

The Cranefield map shows that the land to the north of Morston Road was a network of small strips, although they were not necessarily farmed individually. These strips were held mainly by Lord Calthorpe, as lord of the manor, Blakeney Rectory, Mr Woodier, and Robert and Mary Temple. The pieces of land on which the cottages (1-4) stood were held by Mr Woodier, Powdick, Stokes and Jackson respectively.

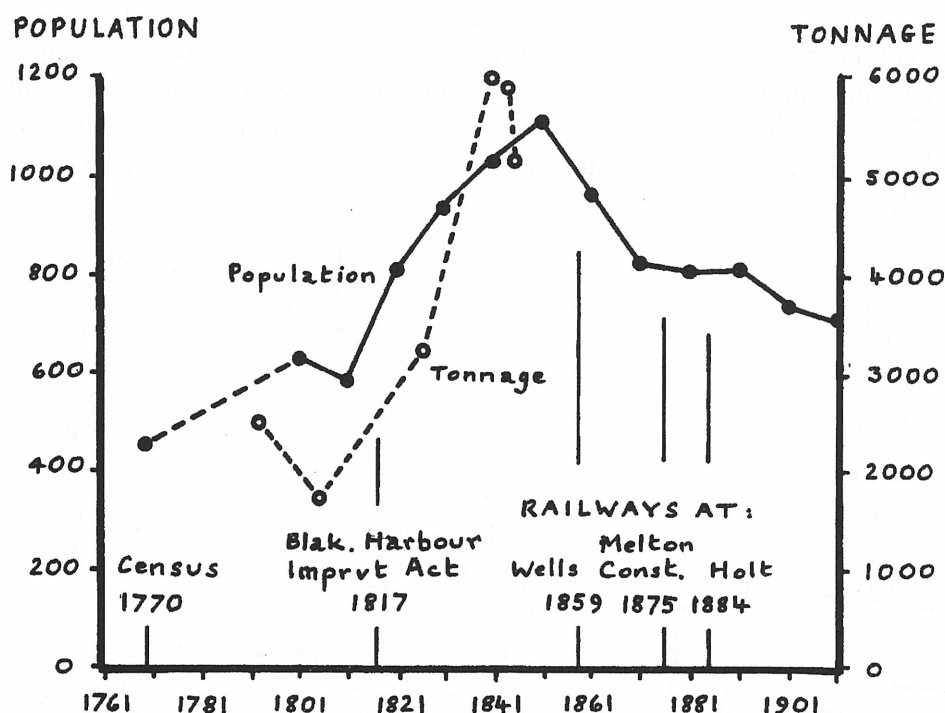


Figure 2 Blakeney in the C.19th : Population and Ship Tonnage

Ship tonnage registered at Blakeney is taken from J.J.Hooton, *The Glaven Ports*, Table 28. Between 1805 and 1845 the number of ships registered increased from 27 to 109 (115 in 1844) but their average size decreased steadily from 64 tons to 47 tons.

The Nineteenth Century

The early years of the nineteenth century were a quiet period in Blakeney. Agricultural profits, although boosted by the Napoleonic wars, were not high. The coastal shipping trade was stagnant. The war had closed some sea routes and rendered others dangerous, and the harbour and channel were silting up. But the ending of the war in 1815 and two local events acted as a stimulus for new building. These two events were the establishment of the Blakeney Harbour Company in 1817, and the Blakeney Inclosure Act very soon after.

The Blakeney Harbour Company dredged the harbour, improved sea and road access, and built new facilities at the Quay. These improvements stimulated business and the number of ships using the harbour grew steadily. The increase in trade led to increasing prosperity and to an immediate and steep rise in the population from less than 600 in 1811 to more than 1,100 in 1851. There was clearly a need for more houses.

The second important event was the passing of the Inclosure Act in 1820. Among other consequences the Act resulted in a large number of people (35 on the north side of Morston Road alone) receiving small allotments of land in lieu of their common and grazing rights. These plots lay within the village or close to roads on the outskirts of the village. They were too small to farm, although many were used as allotments until well into the twentieth century, but they were eminently suitable as building plots.

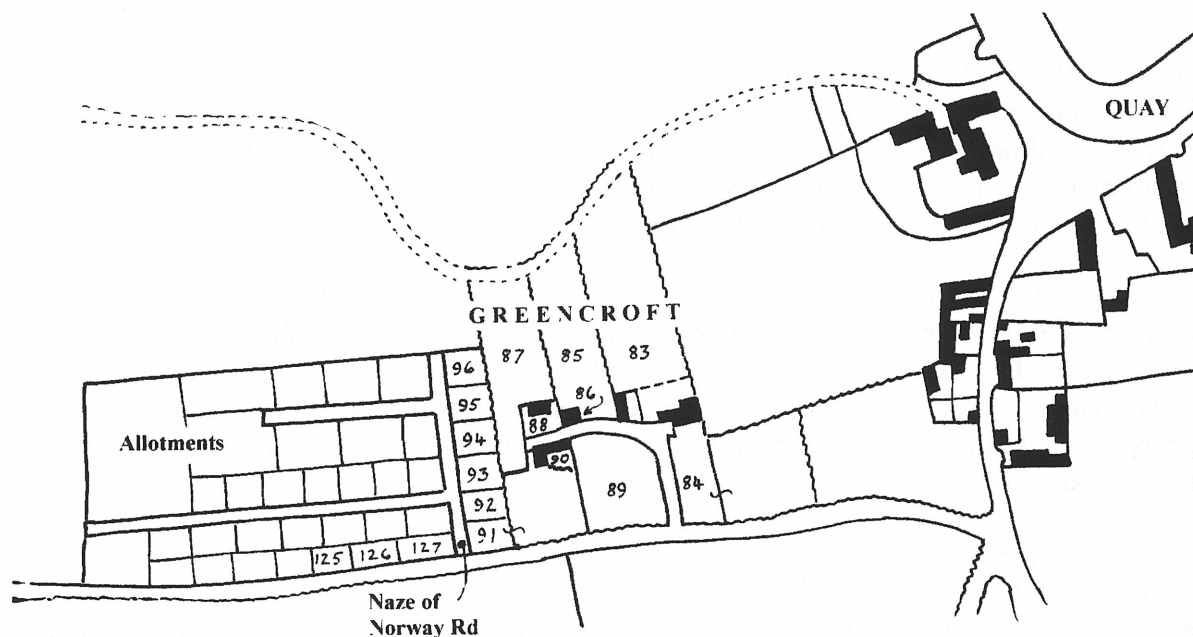


Figure 3 Enclosure Map 1824 Part of Morston Road area

So conditions were ideal for new building. There was suitable land, relative prosperity and a burgeoning population, and building began almost immediately after the Act was passed. Fourteen dwellings were built adjacent to Morston Road: a pair of cottages on land belonging to William Pond (Plots 125 and 126) and two terraces, each of six cottages, running north / south and facing each other on land owned by John Temple (Plots 91, 92 and 93).

The two cottages now forming a single dwelling (Vine Cottage) were built in the traditional materials, flint and brick, with steeply-pitched, thatched roofs. The brick kneelers can still be seen. Each cottage had four rooms, two up and two down, with windows overlooking the marsh and the road. The chimneys were set into the party wall between the cottages.

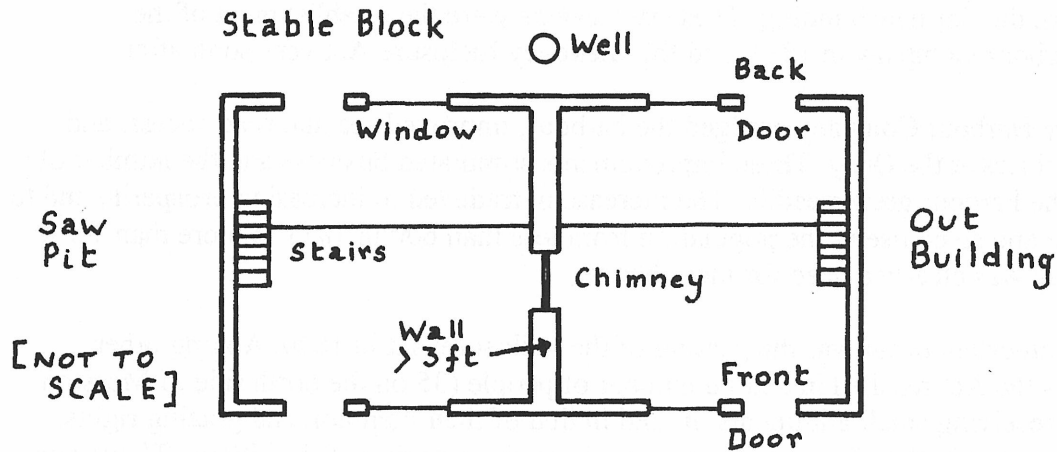


Figure 4 Sketchplan of two cottages as originally built

In 1824 William Pond had bought Plot 125 from John Pleasant Starling for a garden, and he built a number of outbuildings on the combined site. These included a stable and a long narrow building at right angles to the road. This was used by William Pond, a smith and ironmonger, as his smithy and ironmonger's shop. The shop opened onto Morston Road; the smithy was in the north end of the building.

In October 1825 William Pond sold the western cottage to John Balls, a carpenter from Holkham. Balls, being illiterate, made his mark on the document enabling him to borrow £100 to buy the property (the two cottages had been built for £100 the year before!). He dug a sawpit and converted the stable to a carpenter's shop. Both businesses appeared to have prospered; and the mortgage repayments were made promptly and regularly for many years throughout the century.

The cottages in Temple Place were built in a different, far more fashionable, style. The walls were faced with smooth, matched cobbles, and bricks were used only for quoins, windows and doors. The buildings were symmetrical and well proportioned, and care was taken, on a slightly sloping site, to maintain the symmetry. The floors of the cottages near the road were sunk below ground level to ensure the roofline was straight. The roofs were shallow, hipped and covered with red pantiles.

Each cottage had four rooms, two upstairs and two down, but interestingly in view of the external symmetry, each was slightly different from the others internally in the size of the rooms, position of the staircase, the presence of an entry lobby, etc. A single well served all twelve cottages.



Photo A The western terrace fronting Temple Place

In contrast to the cottages built by William Pond, the cottages in Temple Place were let. Dorothy Page and William Otway and his wife were among the first tenants. Others came from outside the village.

This was not the end of building along Morston Road in the first half of the nineteenth century. The harbour continued to flourish and the population to rise. The need for additional houses remained, and in the early 1840s four more cottages were built on land belonging to J. Temple, adjacent to Morston Road.

The first were two tiny cottages adjoining Temple Place, but facing onto the road. They each consisted of two rooms only, one up and one down. Each room had one window overlooking the road. A ladder staircase in one corner of the ground floor room led to the upper room. The fireplace was on the north-facing wall. There were no brick quoins on the walls abutting the the end cottages of Temple Place, but there were on the outer walls. The cottages were built in the gardens of the original buildings so had no land at all (Fig 5). Nevertheless, care seems to have been taken to maintain the symmetry of the buildings: windows and doors were at the same level as those of the cottages in Temple Place, the roofline was identical with that of the earlier buildings, and the brickwork around doors and windows was similar to that in Temple Place. Both cottages have been altered considerably since they were built, but recent renovations made it possible to see the underlying structure.

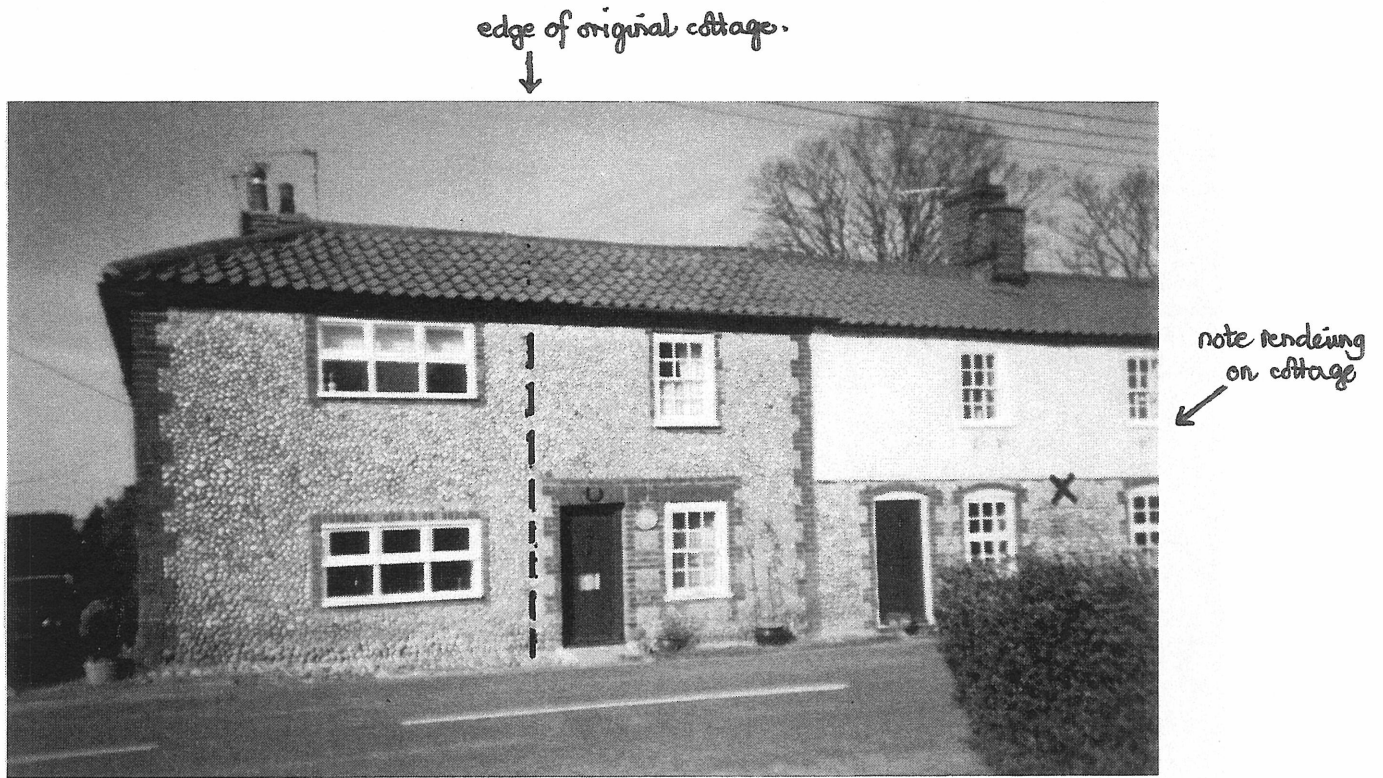


Photo B Eastern side of Temple Place: southern end with additions



Photo C Western side of Temple Place: southern end being renovated

Soon afterwards, two more cottages were built on the eastern side of Temple Place abutting onto the cottage which had just been completed. These cottages have been considerably altered; the upper floor has been rendered and it is almost impossible to make out their original appearance and proportions. But it would appear that both were tiny. – certainly they are only as wide north-to-south as the adjacent cottage. They, too, were built in the garden of the last cottage in Temple Place and have no land. They appear to have been erected by a different builder. The roofline is slightly lower and the brickwork around windows and doors differs considerably from that on the older buildings.

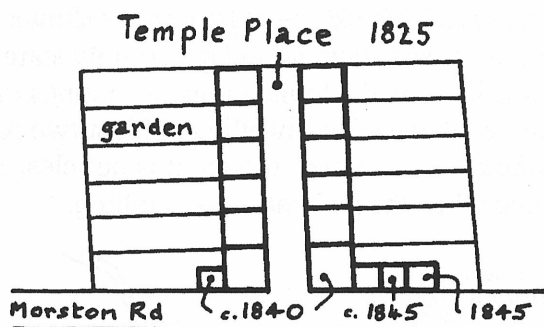


Figure 5 Temple Place (schematic): Three Building Phases

So by 1841 a total of 18 dwellings had been built adjacent to Morston Road and they, their outbuildings and gardens would have considerably altered the appearance of this area.

There was one other building in the area – shown clearly on the OS map of 1880 but not on the first OS map of 1838. This is the Mission Room for Mariners. It lay just west of the Naze of Norway Road, close to Temple Place. Although many local residents remember their parents or grandparents mentioning it, no factual information seems to exist; it was demolished in the early 1900s and a house built on the site.

It has been suggested that Vine Cottage, Temple Place and the cottages in Greencroft formed a self-sufficient community distinct from Blakeney. This is most improbable. The ironmonger, smithy and carpenter's businesses thrived so it appears they must have had more customers than those living nearby. Almost certainly the families in the cottages used the public houses in the village; the King's Arms was within easy walking distance. Many of the allotments behind Vine Cottage and close to Temple place were owned and worked by families in Blakeney.

During the 1880s there was a dispute between the licensee of the King's Arms and Lord Calthorpe, who claimed that the allotment cultivated by the landlord was on his land and he demanded back rent. The landlord brought witnesses to confirm that he had used the allotment, thinking that it was his own, for over 30 years. Judgement went in his favour and he bought the land from Lord Calthorpe for a nominal sum. The presence of the Mission Room, used by seamen from the harbour, must have contributed to traffic between the Morston Road homes and the heart of the village. The Morston Road properties must be considered as a westward extension of Blakeney, rather than as a separate entity.

From the 1850s the shipping trade began a slow and inexorable decline. This was due, in part, to the continued silting up of the harbour and channels, but to a greater extent to the arrival of railways in Norfolk. Freight could be carried more quickly, reliably and cheaply by rail than by small coastal vessels. The impact on the economy of Blakeney was great. The population fell from 1,100 in 1851 to just over 700 in 1901. The need for new homes for ship owners and workers in shipping and allied trades no longer existed, and no new houses were built adjacent to Morston Road for more than 40 years.

Yet during the 1880s there was another burst of building. In 1885 two new cottages were built along Greencroft Road. The lane was extended westward and one cottage was built close to this extension; the other appears to have replaced the older cottage shown on the Cranefield map (numbered 3). The deeds of the cottage standing today certainly state that it was built in 1885 but it might well be that it was built on the foundations or footings of an earlier building. Each of the new 'cottages' actually contained four dwellings of just two rooms. They were rented by local families, one of whom was a carrier, though it is not clear why there was a need for eight more homes at a time when the population was falling.

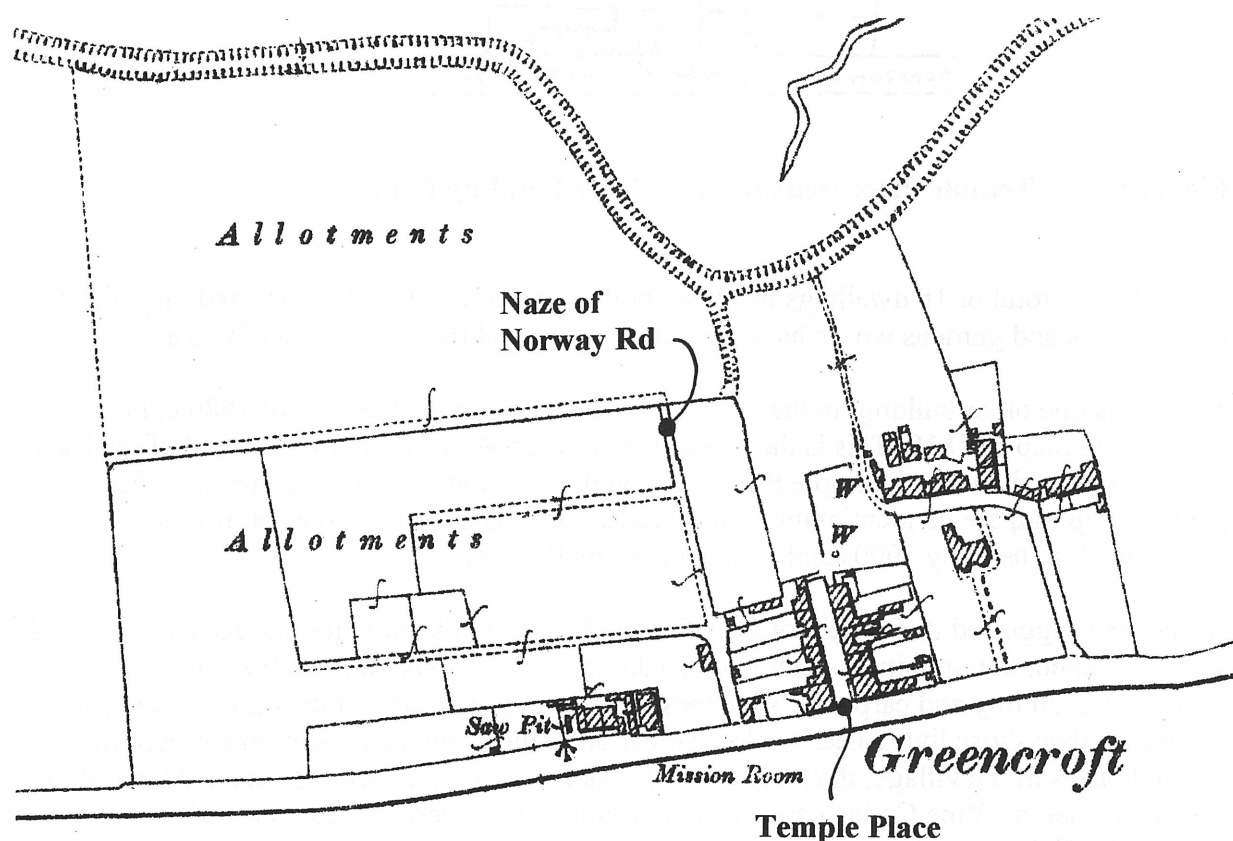


Figure 6 Greencroft and Temple Place, 1906

At the very end of the century one more house was built close to Morston Road. This was Greencroft House, a fine late-Victorian villa. It is totally different from any other house in the vicinity, being built of brick with gabled windows and having an imposing front door. It has a drive from Morston Road up to the door and a tradesman's entrance at the back from Greencroft Road.

The house was built by a local firm, Starlings, for Charles William Grout, master mariner. Captain Grout had been born in Salthouse and had become a very rich man. He acquired his wealth by carrying munitions and supplies along the Chinese coast and he determined to build himself a grand house in Blakeney. He commissioned the house and it was completed in 1896. A few years later, but possibly not till after 1900, he also built a cottage on the south side of Greencroft Road close to the grounds of Greencroft House for Ted Seales, a member of his crew. Captain Grout and Ted Seales were old friends, having had many adventures together, including being shipwrecked five times.

A piece of land close to Greencroft, the exact position unknown, also belonged to a master mariner, Robert Lincoln, sometime of 35 Boone Road, Shanghai, China, captain of the Benjamin Lincoln of Blakeney. This land was bought by Herbert Pye in about 1905 and later sold to a Mrs Murdock. At about this time (1896) the cottage shown on Cranefield's map to the south of Greencroft Road (marked 4) was demolished, presumably to make way for the garden of Greencroft House.

Summary

- ❑ There were four cottages to the north of Morston Road in the late eighteenth century, three of which had been built in a previous century.
- ❑ In 1825 a further 14 dwellings were built in response to a need to house a rapidly growing population.
- ❑ A further four smaller cottages were built around 1840.
- ❑ A 'Seamen's Mission' is shown on the OS map of 1880, but no details of its age or construction are known.
- ❑ A further eight small dwellings were erected in 1885 close to Greencroft Road.
- ❑ The last house built in the nineteenth century was Greencroft House, constructed for a wealthy master mariner, Charles William Grout.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to owners and occupiers who patiently answered my questions.

References

- | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | 1769 | Cranefield's map of Blakeney | NRO BL 49/1 (tracing of original) |
| | 1797 | Faden's map of Norfolk | Larks Press edition, 1989 |
| | 1826 | Bryant's map of Norfolk | |
| | 1824 | Enclosure map | |
| | 1880 & 1905 | OS maps | |
| 2 | | Evidence from the standing buildings. | |
| 3 | | Deeds of the various properties described. | |
| 4 | | J. J. Hooton, <i>The Glaven Ports</i> , Blakeney History Group, 1996. | |