



BAHS Newsletter

Number 14

December 2002



Pam Peake and Eric Hotblack in the History Centre

The History Centre

Good news. The new year sees the fruition of much endeavour by the Society with the History Centre now fully operational and ready to meet the challenge on all fronts.

The Awards for All grant together with donations from members means that a wide range of resources and equipment are now in place. The library has virtually trebled in size overnight, Parish Registers and transcripts for all the surrounding villages have been purchased from the Norfolk Record Office as well as a complete set of census records from the PRO that range from 1841 through to 1901. The area covered is truly amazing and it should be possible to follow families, houses, trades and occupations both back in time and around the district from village to village.

New "state of the art" display boards have already been put to good use when the Society mounted an

exhibition at the recent East Coast Wildfowlers' Conference.

The time has come to celebrate these achievements and all members are cordially invited to attend

Official Opening of the History Centre
Sunday, March 9th 2003
at the Scout Hut, Blakeney
11am - 1pm

There will be a reception and exhibition in the Scout Hut together with a preview of the History Centre for members and invited guests at this time, which will be followed by an afternoon opening for the general public.

A programme of events is planned for the History Centre and these include:

- ◆ induction courses,
- ◆ introductory tours of the resources,
- ◆ a short course of three afternoons exploring census records starting with the 1901 Census on Wednesday afternoon, March 19th,
- ◆ conversations with invited guests,
- ◆ oral recordings,
- ◆ guided walks, and then later in the year,
- ◆ a series of twentieth century local history issues which are due to start in September

Further details of all these events can be obtained from the History Centre.

We are hoping to run a Tombola stall in the Scout hut as part of this event but desperately need donations of suitable prizes. Can any member willing to donate tombola prizes please bring them to the January or February meetings.

Editor: Richard Kelham, phone/fax: 01263 740186
e-mail: richard.kelham@dial.pipex.com

All text © BAHS and Contributors 2002

Nathaniel Bacon and Stiffkey Old Hall

Report on the talk given by Prof Hassell Smith

Nathaniel Bacon (?1546 - 1622) of Stiffkey Old Hall left voluminous records which are being studied at UEA and published by the Norfolk Record Society (4 volumes to date, up to 1602). The leader of this project, until his retirement from UEA, was Hassell Smith, who came to lecture to a full house of Members and friends on 29th October. He prefaced his talk by saying that he had joined the Society because he had been impressed by the Journals and felt he ought to know what local studies were taking place 'on his patch'. He had card-indexed the many people who featured in the Bacon household accounts but did not know where they all lived; he hoped that a meeting of interested parties could be arranged afterwards to see if information might be exchanged.

Stiffkey Old Hall had long been an architectural conundrum but Hassell thought he now had the solution. The present plan was odd in many ways, such as the presence of a mezzanine floor, the unusual position of the large rear bay window, access problems on the first floor, and a 'long gallery', quite short and poorly lit, up in the attic. The house did not seem to fit any of the standard Elizabethan plans (E or H shaped, for example).

Yet Hassell's studies had shown that there was much more symmetry to the original design than can now be seen. The site was conceived as a pattern of 'courtyards' incorporating not only gardens with terraces down to the river but the churchyard as well. A contemporary first floor plan (recently discovered) showed what had been envisaged for the house by Nathaniel's father, Sir Nicholas Bacon, dilettante house and garden designer as well as Lord Keeper to Elizabeth I.

So why was this unusual '8 turret' plan not built? Correspondence shows that Sir Nicholas, who may never have visited Stiffkey, was having to alter the plan to fit the actual site. Nathaniel seems to have started building before this process was complete - hence many enforced changes, including the relocation of the long gallery from the south side to the north attic. These problems were compounded by insufficient cash. The result was a 'Courtyard plan gone wrong' and an inconvenient house for the several families who lived there - it also had to function as an estate office and as a base for Nathaniel's work as a JP.

What makes a working community? The detailed accounts for the Stiffkey household - containing 25 to 40 people, depending on the number of agricultural servants at the time - included rewritten invoices often showing the origin and purpose of each purchase. The people named included the main servants who effectively ran the estate in Nathaniel's absence. All came from within the Hundreds of North Greenhoe and Holt,

including 4 from Morston. The many specialist craftsmen who came to do jobs mostly lived mostly in North Greenhoe, but Blakeney supplied 5, Wiveton 3, and Cley 1.

The Stiffkey estate had dealings with a neighbourhood larger than a town hinterland but smaller than the county, for which Hassell was using the term 'vicinage'. Why the apparent significance of the Hundred boundaries? Is their broad correspondence to the Stiffkey and Glaven river valleys relevant? Hassell envisaged the daily movement of people around the local villages as 'an ant-heap of communications'.

Marginal agricultural land also interested the lecturer. What was the economic and social value of the areas not used for arable and pasture? The marshes, for example, supported sheep which were then brought back to be folded for their dung on nearby fields - how were the hurdles supplied? On these marshes much wildfowling was done by the shepherds. From the heathland came furze for burning and for dry hedging, and two furze cutters were employed on the estate. Different types of nets were used for the many kinds of birds supplied to the Bacon household - how and where were they caught? No reference is made to samphire but sea holly was used for brewing and as an aphrodisiac - how exactly was it used?

Langham Pond, on the Binham boundary, was originally a monastic fishpond. In Bacon's time the pond was about 5 acres in extent, and an area of closes around it approached 50 acres. Here, peewits were encouraged to nest, and servants probably collected some of the eggs. In April/May labourers were hired to take hatched peewits to be fish-fed at the Hall where they no doubt took grubs from the soil - and would have had decorative value while being fattened for the pot. Flight nets were used in autumn and a boat was kept for fishing and for reed cutting. There was also a nursery for hedge plants. The whole area was very important both economically and for family recreation; it was double-hedged for security and had a full-time keeper, Mr Kemp from Langham - who doubled as a bouncer at the Hall.

John Peake thanked the speaker on behalf of Members and guests.

JW

Federation Diaries

Those members who would like a free Federation Diary - listing the meetings of all federated History and Archaeology societies in Norfolk - should send an SAE to the Secretary at 2 Wiveton Road, Blakeney, by the end of February. Alternatively you can pick one up at the March meeting and save the cost of the stamps!

BAHS AGM OK!

Report of the Management Committee
for the year ending 30 June 2002

Presented to the AGM held on 17 September 2002

1. Outgoing Committee

Co-Chairmen Richard Kelham and Pam Peake
Treasurer and Secretary
Anne Maw
Editor John Wright
Members Helen Brandt Monica White
Tom Worboys Peter Wordingham
Co-opted Member
John Peake

[John Wright stood down, the others were re-elected]

2. Review of Activities

The Management Committee has met eight times during the year 2001/02. John Peake and Peter Wordingham have put in much time and effort putting in a successful application for an Awards For All Lottery Grant of £4,486 to purchase equipment for the History Centre. The equipment will be purchased as soon as we have secure tenure of the new premises.

[see elsewhere in this issue for an update].

The Portakabin has been open two mornings a month, when a record was kept of those who visited. Pam Peake and John Wright have put in much time and labour sorting, indexing and filing the books, periodicals, scrap books, and other items.

Individual projects by Peter Carnell, Eric Hotblack, Pamela Peake, Monica White and John Wright are reported in the Glaven Historian No. 5.

3. Membership

At 30 June 2002 there were 131 paid-up members, including 43 new members, of whom 23 were spouses. There were just 4 who resigned. At the time of writing this report, there are 19 new members, of whom 8 are spouses. It is possible that when we have a better idea of the cost of maintaining the History Centre subscriptions will have to be increased.

4. Constitution

The move to the History Centre will necessitate some changes to the Constitution. The Committee feels that more informed consideration will be given when the move has been made.

[Some alterations were duly passed by the AGM, though it is expected that, in the light of experience gained operating the History Centre, further minor tweaks will be required. These will be covered at the Special General Meeting to be held immediately before the March 25th lecture]

The Race to the Coast

by Adrian Vaughan

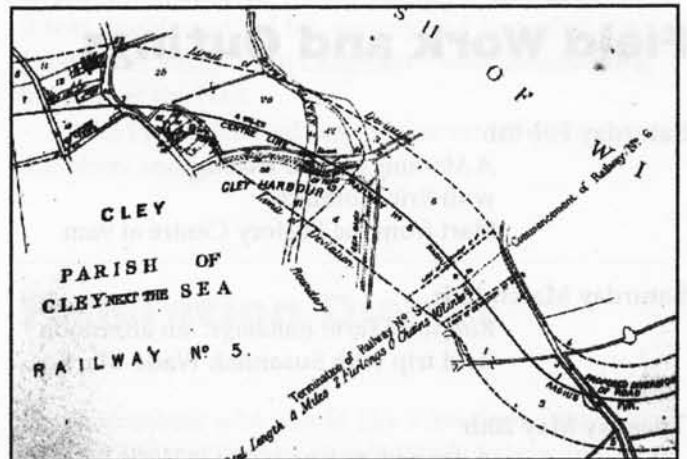
The AGM was followed by a classic display of Adrian Vaughan's railway knowledge, and his humour. There were several schemes to bring the railway to Blakeney, all of them abortive, but the one that came closest was the Lynn & Fakenham Railway.

Adrian described the L&FR as a public charity funded by the shareholders. The driving force behind the L&FR was the contractor Wilkinson & Jarvis who seemed to specialise in "blackmailing railways" – railways that would have to be bought by an established competitor. They presented two bills to Parliament in 1875, one for a Norwich-Blakeney line (thrown out) and the other the L&FR (passed). The project had the support of the local gentry – Townshend, Hastings, and others – anxious to further improve their estates at a time of agricultural depression.

The line was built cheaply and fairly quickly opening to Fakenham 16 Aug 1880. The Act allowed for connection to the incumbent GER at each end: the L&FR did use the existing station at Lynn for a while, for which they had to pay the GER £600 a year. There was never a connection at Fakenham; instead the contractor applied for further extensions to Norwich and to Blakeney via Holt.

As a prelude to building the Blakeney line the L&FR bought out the ten remaining shareholders of the Blakeney Harbour Co for £108 per share. This too required an Act of Parliament. Blakeney harbour was to be enlarged, with a long pier out to the Pit, and other works. They believed they could compete with Wells which of course had its own rail-served quay. Land was purchased at Blakeney and (famously) Cley.

Fortunately the Director most in favour of the Blakeney scheme died. The other Directors decided a site visit would be a good idea, duly arriving on a bleak December day. Imagine their horror! It took yet another Act to abandon the scheme, granted in 1888 by which time the L&FR had amalgamated with other local lines to form the Eastern & Midland, a system with 179 miles of cheaply-built railway and too few customers.



Among the images shown is this one showing the proposed route from Cley across the Glaven valley. It caused some disorientation at first owing to the fact that north is at the bottom!

Spring/Summer Programme 2003

There will be a modest charge of £1 for members attending the meetings whilst all non-members will be charged £2. There will be no additional charge for Refreshments.

Lectures

All meetings (unless otherwise stated) are held on Tuesdays in the Methodist Chapel, High Street, Blakeney, and start at 7.30pm.

- Jan 28th** *The Heydons of Baconsthorpe and Saxlingham*
by David Yaxley
followed by a sale of Larks Head books
- Feb 25th** *Venerable Trees of North Norfolk*
by John White
- Mar 25th** *Aspects of Salthouse*
by Gerald Cubitt, preceded by a short Special General Meeting
- Apr 29th** *Working With Stone – Medieval Masonry explored*
by Nina Bilbey
- May 27th** *A Look at Old Photographs*
by Dr Bob Ward
Bring your old photos for comments
- Saturday Jul 19th** Annual Summer Lecture
Blakeney Village Hall, 8pm
- The Sutton Hoo Burial Treasures*
by Margaret Forrester
- Sept 16th** Annual General Meeting
Lecture subject TBA

Field Work and Outings

- Saturday Feb 8th**
A Morning of Field Walking
with Eric Hotblack
Start from the History Centre at 9am
- Saturday March 15th**
Ringstead Farm Buildings. an afternoon field trip with Susannah Wade-Martins
- Tuesday May 20th**
A day with a stone mason in Wells
Morning tour followed by an afternoon workshop with Nina Bilbey

Places must be booked in advance for these events

Some Timely Thoughts on the BAHS Year...

As the festive season ends and the New Year starts, the Society is halfway through the programme for the current year and the committee is already thinking about the year ahead, namely 2003/4.

And for members, now is the time to ask whether you are enjoying the benefits of your membership and the events that have been arranged? More importantly have you any brilliant suggestions to make about new directions to take or things to do away with in the future? Perhaps you have some subjects that you would like included in the programme as well as courses, places to visit as a group, or speakers that you could recommend? Just let the committee hear about them.

Finally a teaser for everyone, a checklist of seemingly simple questions, that if answered honestly, could prove revealing as to how well the Society is doing. For instance have you:

- ◆ Enjoyed your meetings?
- ◆ Brought a friend along?
- ◆ Helped with the refreshments?
- ◆ Offered to thank a speaker?
- ◆ Volunteered help in some other way?
- ◆ Introduced yourself to a new member?
- ◆ Joined a course?
- ◆ Gone on an outing?
- ◆ Visited the History Centre?
- ◆ Told a neighbour or friend about it?
- ◆ Volunteered an hour or two there?
- ◆ Provided an exhibit for an exhibition?
- ◆ Ever volunteered as a steward?
- ◆ Loaned your Glaven Historian to a non-member?

Most of the above questions constitute minor actions on the part of an individual, but if acted upon by the majority of the members then they could make a tremendous contribution to the continued smooth running and success of the Society.