



# Blakeney Area Historical Society Electronic Newsletter

February 2026

“Studying the History of Blakeney Haven and its Hinterland”



*The interior of Starr's shop on Cley High Street with Freda herself on the left, Charlie Francis in the centre wearing his characteristic brown overall, and another helper (Mrs High?) on the right. The business, described in Kelly's Directory as a "Grocer & Draper", had been purchased from the Starling family by Freda's father George in 1906. After George died Freda and her elder sister Ivy carried on the business, ably assisted by Charlie until Freda retired in 1973. The photo is believed to have been taken on the last day of business. Freda retired to a house she had had built at the end of the garden and lived into her nineties – her mind still sharp, though her knees had let her down. The shop fittings shown are still there, still in use.*

The BAHS are on Facebook [tiny.cc/yfo3001](https://tiny.cc/yfo3001)  
Follow the BAHS on X (Twitter) [x.com/HistoryBAHS](https://x.com/HistoryBAHS)  
and Instagram [historybahs](https://www.instagram.com/historybahs) or visit our website at  
[www.bahs.uk](http://www.bahs.uk)



# BAHS Events:

## BAHS Lecture Programme

Lectures are held at Cley Village Hall (NR25 7RJ for those who rely on Satnavs) on the last Tuesday of the month. We have decided to revert to evening sessions for September, October, March and April, while retaining afternoon meetings for the darkest part of the year November, January and February. This is to make allowance for the fact that some of our members are still working and may not be able to make afternoon sessions.

Evening lectures start at 19:30, afternoons at 14:30 (that's 7.30pm and 2.30pm for us oldies).

The full programme will be published on the website [www.bahs.uk](http://www.bahs.uk) with a monthly preview in this Newsletter.

## February Lecture

**Tuesday 24th February 2026**

at 2:30pm at Cley Village Hall

### **Am I not a woman and a sister? The Norfolk Women Abolitionists**

*Alison Dow*

The Abolition Campaign to end slavery in the British Empire is said to have been the world's first successful human rights campaign.

Norfolk women including the radical Elizabeth Fry, Amelia Opie and Harriet Martineau played a vital role in the campaign although they themselves lacked even the right to vote. The determined women campaigners employed and developed strategies despite much opposition even from Wilberforce himself. They then used these strategies in the suffrage campaign which was to follow – another great human rights struggle.

The first petition to Parliament asking for votes for women was presented to the House of Commons on 3 August 1832. The Abolition of Slavery Act was passed on 1 Aug 1833.

Dr Dow will bring alive the story of these woman and introduce some new names – many of whom have been for too long unrecognized.



## Coming Later...

**Tuesday 31st March 2026**

at 7:30pm at Cley Village Hall

### **George Skipper in Cromer**

*Paul Dickson*

# Other Events

## Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group

Meetings are held in the Thomas Paine Centre, UEA, which is on the right towards the end of Chancellor's Drive from the Security Lodge. It is signed as such over the side entrance but the main entrance is styled 'Norwich Business School'. There is a convenient bus stop very close to the Thomas Paine Centre/Norwich Business School block. The West Car Park is right beside and is open on a pay-by-phone basis at weekends – payment to be made via the **Ringo** app (cash not accepted).

The entrance to it is on the right off Chancellor's Drive, just after the bus shelters (ignore the 'staff only' sign). It is marked p3 on campus maps.

**February 28th**

**Hall Marks: The Long Shadows of Norfolk's Lost Country Houses**

*Jonathan Draper (Partnership and Development Manager, Norfolk Record Office)*

**March 28th**

**Watton: A Market Town Through Time**

*Andy Reid (Freelance Researcher; Retired Teacher, LEA Adviser & Schools Inspector)*

**April 18th**

AGM followed by lecture

**Caistor Roman Town**

*Will Bowden (Professor of Roman Archaeology, University of Nottingham)*

## Other Groups

**NNAS lectures:** The Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society's new lecture season begins on Saturday 20th September. For details, click on 'upcoming lectures' at <https://ln.run/BVuny>

**The lost settlement of Guton** (within the present-day Norfolk parish of Brandiston) is the subject of a short video by Norfolk history student Jakob Reid, to be found at [tiny.cc/gogx001](https://tiny.cc/gogx001). Jakob would welcome any feedback or discussion and his email address is [warwickrewindeditor@gmail.com](mailto:warwickrewindeditor@gmail.com).

**The Visual Record of Norwich's Medieval Parish Churches** is a free talk to be given by Claire Haynes at the Norfolk Heritage Centre (upstairs in The Forum, Norwich) at 1.00 on Tuesday 24 February, exploring a variety of paintings, drawings and prints and what they tell us about the history of Norwich and its churches. Book at [tiny.cc/fpey001](https://tiny.cc/fpey001) to attend in person or here to watch online.

**Pits, Pots and People: Evidence for Beaker Activity at Sizewell C** is a free online talk for Cotswold Archaeology at 7.00 on Wednesday 25 February. Register at [tiny.cc/ifey001](https://tiny.cc/ifey001).

**NHBG lectures :** Should you become snowbound, the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group makes some of its lectures available online and you will find a selection of twenty four at [tiny.cc/283x001](https://tiny.cc/283x001).

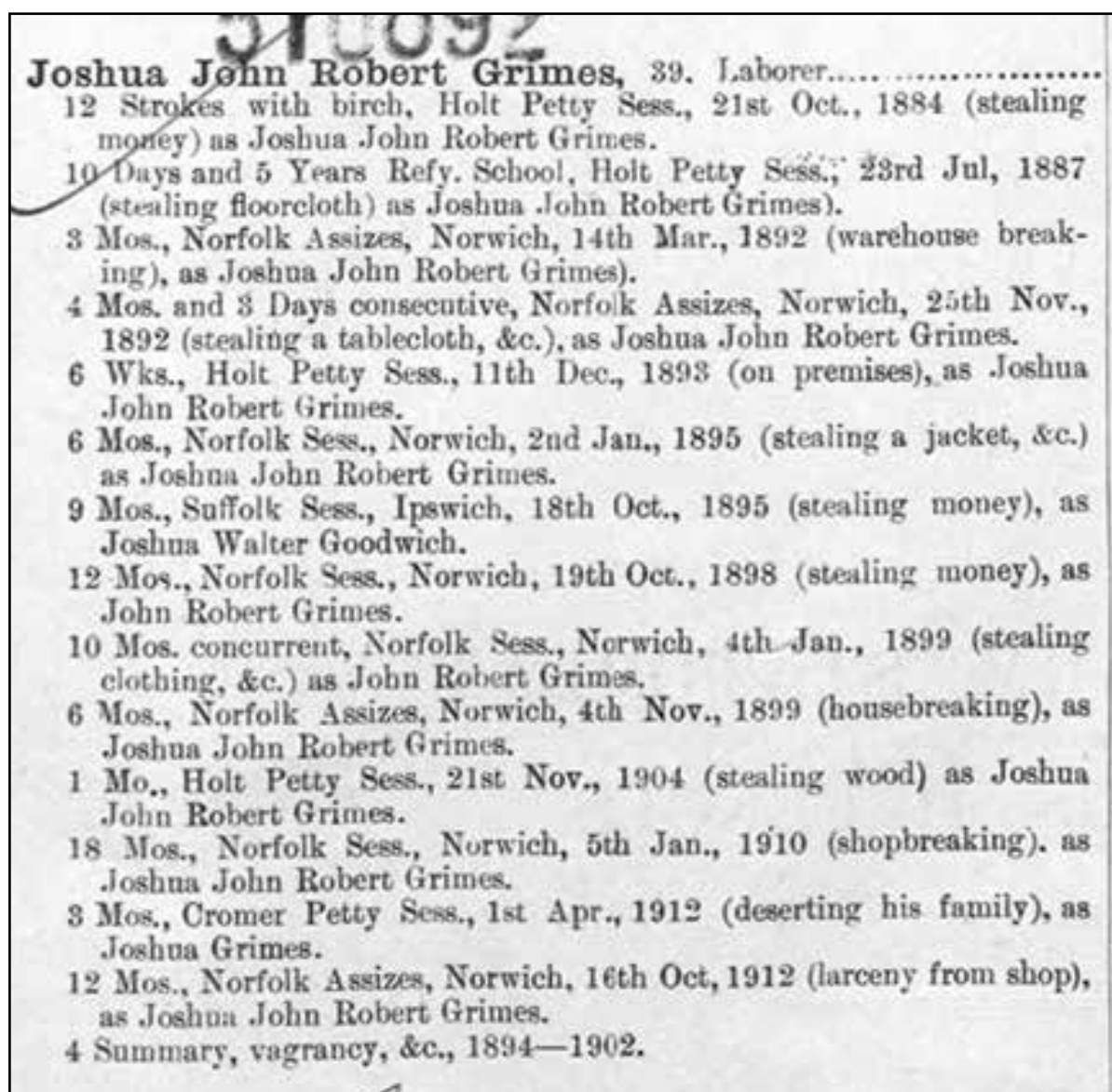
# One-Man Crime Wave in Cley

Richard Kelham

In her original slim volume of memories entitled *A Village Shop*, Freda Starr mentioned a local character of whom she was terrified, and who she would not even name even though he was long dead. She referred to him as *J*, on one occasion as *JG*, claiming that she was too frightened of him even to venture into their own warehouse at night for fear of bumping into him.

The man in question was Joshua John Robert Grimes, born 21 May 1874 in Cley and died in 1959, aged 84. Through much of his adult life he had been an habitual, and spectacularly hapless, criminal – indeed he had been apprehended on those very premises during the Starling's time: when found on the premises he feigned death and was carried outside while the Doctor was summoned. The Doctor gently eased his penknife under one of Grimes's finger nails at which point he suddenly sprang back to life. In later years his principal target seems to have been the premises of Ernest Alfred Stangroom, auctioneer and valuer, and draper who lived in London House and traded via what is now the Crabpot bookshop.

Freda says he burgled the place three times, which may well be an underestimate. Freda adds that had courted the Stangroom's maid which allowed him to learn the layout of the place, and to make friends with the family dog. He later married the girl and they had a baby



Joshua John Robert Grimes, 39. Laborer.....	
12 Strokes with birch,	Holt Petty Sess., 21st Oct., 1884 (stealing money) as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
10 Days and 5 Years Refy. School,	Holt Petty Sess., 23rd Jul, 1887 (stealing floorcloth) as Joshua John Robert Grimes).
3 Mos., Norfolk Assizes, Norwich,	14th Mar., 1892 (warehouse breaking), as Joshua John Robert Grimes).
4 Mos. and 3 Days consecutive,	Norfolk Assizes, Norwich, 25th Nov., 1892 (stealing a tablecloth, &c.), as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
6 Wks., Holt Petty Sess.,	11th Dec., 1893 (on premises), as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
6 Mos., Norfolk Sess., Norwich,	2nd Jan., 1895 (stealing a jacket, &c.) as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
9 Mos., Suffolk Sess., Ipswich,	18th Oct., 1895 (stealing money), as Joshua Walter Goodwich.
12 Mos., Norfolk Sess., Norwich,	19th Oct., 1898 (stealing money), as John Robert Grimes.
10 Mos. concurrent, Norfolk Sess.,	Norwich, 4th Jan., 1899 (stealing clothing, &c.) as John Robert Grimes.
6 Mos., Norfolk Assizes, Norwich,	4th Nov., 1899 (housebreaking), as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
1 Mo., Holt Petty Sess.,	21st Nov., 1904 (stealing wood) as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
18 Mos., Norfolk Sess., Norwich,	5th Jan., 1910 (shopbreaking). as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
3 Mos., Cromer Petty Sess.,	1st Apr., 1912 (deserting his family), as Joshua Grimes.
12 Mos., Norfolk Assizes, Norwich,	16th Oct, 1912 (larceny from shop), as Joshua John Robert Grimes.
4 Summary, vagrancy, &c.,	1894—1902.

*Joshua Grimes's previous convictions as at 1913. Released from his last 12 months stretch on the 16 Aug 1913, he was soon re-arrested on 7 November 1913 and later sentenced to three years Penal Servitude. He had spent 15 years of his life behind bars.*

son. Freda fails to add that they in fact had two sons and a daughter, and in the 1911 census were all living in a two-up, two-down cottage in Plattin's Yard with his parents James Robert Grimes (64) described as a shellfish merchant and his wife Esther Ann Grimes (58), a wash woman. Joshua had married Florance Parker – Stangroom's erstwhile maid presumably though she was not in their employ in 1901– in 1905, though confusingly his name was recorded as John Robert Grimes (one of his several aliases).

Thanks to court records we have a description of this, er, master criminal: he had a fair complexion, red hair and green eyes, and was exactly 5ft 0in tall. This pint-sized perpetrator eventually moved to Morston, no doubt to the relief of all in Cley, though Freda insists that he was by then “running straight”.

**At Holt, on Monday, before Mr. J. G. Oddy, Joshua John Robert Grimes, labourer, Cley-next-the-Sea, was charged with breaking and entering the shop of Ernest Alfred Stangroom there, on November 2nd and other dates, and stealing therefrom various articles of clothing, drapery, groceries, tobacco etc., amounting to the sum of £35. Superintendent Flint last Friday obtained a search warrant, and on searching the accused's house found the articles enumerated in the charge. Accused was arrested on Sunday morning at Waxham by Police-constable Cooper, and brought to Stalham Police-station, from whence he was brought to Holt, where he was remanded in custody until Monday.**

*Report in the Norfolk Chronicle for Saturday 13 November 1909 of one of Grimes's previous escapades. According to the list on the previous page he later received 18 months when he appeared at the Norfolk Sessions in January.*

Grimes's ostensible occupation was varied: as a teenager in the 1891 census he was an Ag Lab; in the various court documents he is a general labourer, a stoker, a sailmaker, a fisherman, and even a tailor! I'm surprised he found the time. The 1939 register shows him living alone in Morston and described as a retired fisherman. In the 1921 census he is a shell fisherman, a widower living once more with his parents at an address simply, and unhelpfully, given as “Loke, Street, Cley”. There is a note added to the census return in another's hand which states that “this man has three children that have been adopted by the Erpingham Guardians upon Judicial Order”. Presumably they were taken into care

upon the death of their mother – except that the Ancestry.com records (not an unimpeachable source) imply that Florence Mary Grimes, née Parker, lived until the ripe old age of 87 at her death in 1971. To sort this out will require a visit to the NRO for a hunt through the Erpingham Guardians' records. Was Grimes really a widower, or had his wife fled the marital quagmire?

Plattin's Yard is, I believe, the yard behind Mariner's Hard, latterly the home of Jennifer Murray and long before that of H N Pashley, the taxidermist. The four cottages, two of which are now holiday accommodation, are much smarter than in Grimes's days.

nt.	When Received into Custody.	Particulars of Offence or Offences as charged in the Indictment.	Before whom tried and date.	Verdict of the Jury.	Particulars of Previous Convictions charged in the Indictment and proved in Court.	Sentence or Order of the Court.
	6	7	8	9	10	11
ov.	1913. 7th Nov.	Feloniously and burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of Ernest Alfred Stangroom, and stealing therein 7 handkerchiefs, 1 pair of stockings, divers buttons, and other of his goods, at Cley-next-the-Sea, on the 3rd November, 1913	Bray, J. 28th Jan., 1914	Pleaded Guilty and to a previous conviction	Norfolk County Assizes, 16th Oct., 1912	3 Years Penal Servitude

*The relevant page from Grimes's 1913 arraignment. the description of the items stolen is so unutterably banal that one wonders just what compulsion led him to his life of petty crime.*

# The Brackley Family and the Old Rectory

Richard Kelham

On hearing that the Old Rectory at Blakeney might be about to be put up for sale, Mrs Frida Brackley contacted the owner, the Rev David Lee-Elliott, asking to be given first refusal. This was granted and, following a successful inspection by their architect Darcey Braddell, Mrs Brackley completed the purchase in June 1934. The Rev Lee-Elliott, when completing the sale, threw in much of his furniture, and his gardener. The process had involved communications between Switzerland, London and Brittany and will no doubt have kept the local telegraph people busy. The decision to buy was based on Frida's realisation that for her growing family their Mayfair flat "just covered that age between prams and prep school". Her husband, Herbert "Brackles" Brackley, travelled all over the world surveying routes for Imperial Airways. As well as the London base, the family required a permanent home in the country where, as Frida put it, the children could have "a certain background of stability if ever they were to take roots in a country, make acquaintance with the ordinary realities of life and have some harmony in upbringing with the prevailing foundations on which our public school system in this country is based".

Why Blakeney? Frida and her husband were both devout Anglo-Catholics, so proximity to the recently-revived Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was a powerful draw. So, for Herbert Brackley, were the opportunities for tennis, golf, shooting and sailing.

The decision to buy the house was taken following a couple of visits, years apart, for "tea at the Rectory". The first visit had been some years earlier when Frida accompanied a group of some forty mothers on an outing organised by Sister Anne Mary, mother superior of the Anglian convent of All Hallows, Ditchingham, and described as an "amazing and wonderful woman, and my daughter's godmother". The second visit was an excursion from West Runton, once again for tea, when Brackles himself had a chance to see the house, which had served as Blakeney's rectory until 1924. The third had been a solo visit by Frida for lunch and a comprehensive viewing in the autumn of 1933, when the thought of ownership seems to have taken root. Once in possession, and with Braddell the architect installed, the winter of 1934-5 was devoted to "adjusting the house", gently re-ordering and redecorating to the family's requirements. Adjustments included adding an Art Moderne-influenced bedroom, three stylishly tiled bathrooms, and an open loggia to the late medieval house.

Herbert Brackley, DSO, DSC, a charismatic and highly-decorated Great War airman, was recalled to military service in 1939. He served first as a squadron leader within RAF Coastal Command, then as Senior Air Staff Officer within the newly-formed RAF Transport Command. During the war, with Frida resident in Blakeney, the tithe barn at the Old Rectory was often used for dances for airmen and local residents.

Tragically, Air Commodore Brackley died in 1948, drowned while swimming off the beach in Rio de Janeiro, aged 54. He is buried in Blakeney churchyard.

All this is recounted in eye-watering detail in "*Brackles, MEMOIRS of a PIONEER of CIVIL AVIATION*" compiled by Frida H Brackley, which runs to almost 800 pages and was privately published in 1952. The brief account of their acquisition of the Old Rectory is followed by six pages of encomia for all the people, sorry "outstanding personalities", who have touched their lives. This is dominated by Blakeney folk whose names will be familiar to you all; the parade is led by Polly Gooch, and her brother Arthur, their gardener. Frida also mentioned "Sammy Long who took us for our first trip to the Point, Will Watch (Long) who showed us how to race ... [and] that genial personality Herbert Pye ... the popular garage proprietor. Mrs Nichols and Mrs Adcock and her family, were highly trained indoor workers; old Mrs Breeze [sic] was our first temporary cook, then Miriam Rudd who helped our cooks." There followed a long list of people: Sam Breeze [sic], George Dickinson, Curry Smith and George Russell; Johnnie Wordingham, "our faithful postman" Wilfred Parker, and "that wonderful old character" Jacob Holliday, Jim Lambert, Herbert Grimes, Mrs Massingham, George Radcliffe, Susan Betts "our land girl", Dick Chapman, Primrose



*Interior view of the Old Rectory under Lee-Elliott's ownership.*

Shepherd, Joyce Read, George Wells and Aubrey Lubbock – “all Norfolk types of varying shades and qualities”.

Lastly there is a paragraph devoted to Miss [Irene] Johnstone [sic], known as Johnnie, who was the owner of the Sugar Plum sweet shop which produced “the most delicious” sweets. She was also a cultured and gifted lady with a sense of drama that was put to good use as a leading light of the Blakeney Players. After the war, she came to help the Brackleys with running the garden and secretarial work. She it was who had to deal with all the arrangements following on from Air Commodore Brackley's sudden death, and the flood of mail so great that the “genial Postmaster Mr Hayward had to put on two extra assistants”, until Frida returned from London.

Frida died in 1963 at the Old Rectory, at the age of only 64 years, of a painful and debilitating neurological condition. She was survived by her three children, David, John and Mary (Cantwell). David inherited the Old Rectory and the tithe barn, while John inherited some of the land to the north of the Old Rectory, which was later sold off. The Old Rectory remained in the Brackley family until circa 2005, when David Brackley conveyed the Old Rectory to a friend, who then sold it to a property company. When the new owners realised that their plan to convert the Old Rectory into a boutique hotel, café and site for new housing was not going to gain permission, they put it back on the market. It was purchased by the present owners in 2011.

When the waspish but perceptive art critic Brian Sewell, in his incarnation as an employee of Christie's, visited the Brackleys in the early 1960s to help repair the increasingly obvious gaps in the family finances through the sale of a few paintings, he puzzled over what could possibly have impelled Mrs Brackley to take on such a ghastly house, before concluding that her devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham provided the only possible explanation!

# Norfolk Record Office

## **The Norfolk Archaeological Trust: Past Present and Future exhibition**

**Tuesday 6th February – Friday 31st May. During The Archive Centre opening hours of 9.30am-5pm.**

Exhibition showcasing a century of Norfolk Archaeological Trust's (NAT) work to secure, maintain and protect the county's archaeological sites. The exhibition features original documents from NAT's archives and other collections held at the NRO, archaeological artefacts which were found at NAT sites, from the Norfolk Museum Service collection, as well as copies of photographs from the Norfolk Historic Environment Record. Alongside this will be interpretations that illuminate the stories of the people and places involved.

Visitors will embark on a historical journey, exploring the remarkable achievements of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust over its first 100 years. The exhibition not only highlights past accomplishments but also sheds light on the crucial ongoing role NAT plays in preserving Norfolk's rich heritage. As NAT looks toward the future, the exhibition also emphasises the ongoing need for support to ensure its continued success.

It's a real collaborative effort with NAT volunteers providing research for the different themes, and the Norwich Young Archaeologists' club curating a part of the exhibition. This is a unique opportunity to delve into the past, appreciate the present, and support the future of archaeological preservation.

This event is part of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust: Its Centenary and Beyond Project (NAT 100 for short) which is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project is helping Norfolk Archaeological Trust, in partnership with Norfolk Record Office (NRO), to celebrate its first hundred years and improve its resilience for the future. Find out more about NAT's centenary project.

No booking required.

## **Updated opening hours**

Tuesday-Thursday 9.30am - 5pm

Friday 10am - 4pm - for advance bookings to view manuscripts only.

## **Visiting on Fridays**

Please email [norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk) to book a place and order your documents. You may order four documents for the day. All documents must be ordered by 12 noon on the preceding Wednesday.

Due to limited staff availability on Fridays, you can only view pre-ordered documents. There will be no document collections during the day.

To view microfilms on Fridays, please go to the Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Millennium Library, Norwich, which holds copies of most NRO microfilms.

The new Friday arrangements will run for a six-month trial period.

This Newsletter was sent to you as a member of the BAHS.

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