



# Blakeney Area Historical Society Electronic Newsletter

January 2026

“Studying the History of Blakeney Haven and its Hinterland”



*The ketch Fiducia was built in 1857 at Scarborough and registered to that port in 1860. By 1909 the vessel was registered to the Port of Hull and the registered tonnage given as 25. Her Managing Owner was Clifford John Turner of Blakeney, the eldest son of Edward Clifford Turner of Blakeney. Ellis Capps Turner, another of Clifford Turner's sons, was her Managing Owner from 1913 until 1917.*

*The vessel was offered for sale at Great Yarmouth, according to an advert in the Yarmouth Independent for Saturday 22nd September 1922 when she was described thus: “Official number 22078, built in Scarborough 1859, length 58.3, breadth 18.2, depth 6.8, gross tons 37.54, nett 24.69, cargo capacity 60 tons on a draft of about 8 feet, requires no ballast when light.”*

*The name Fiducia was later bestowed on a non-descript bungalow in Church Lane, Cley, now the site of Wine Master Mark Lynton's establishment.*

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.

## January Lecture

**Tuesday 27th January 2026**

at 2:30pm at Cley Village Hall

### **Did the Hotblack family become too big for their boots?**

*Caroline Holland*

A descendant of John Hotblack, a Mayor of Norwich and a shoe manufacturer, she is trying to understand why and how so much of the family's history was buried.

She will take her audience on her research journey to illustrate how easy it is to delve into the past, build a family tree and find out more about your antecedents.

### **Sergeant William Voellner RAFVR, Rear Gunner Lancaster Bomber**

*Richard Jefferson*

Local historian Richard Jefferson has made it his mission to research the lives of the men of Cley listed on the war memorial in the church. At the January meeting of the Blakeney Area Historical Society (BAHS), he will focus on Sergeant William Voellner, an air gunner with the RAF Volunteer Reserve.

Before the start of the 1939-45 War Voellner was living with his parents in Cley. In 1944 Voellner was one of a crew on a night-time mission to bomb a factory in Germany and that the Lancaster bomber crash landed on its return to the UK. Richard will tell his audience more about Voellner's life, the mission he was on and what caused the tragic accident which killed all the crew.

Richard says: "I researched all the Cley men who died in the two World Wars and remembering them is very important to me: their sacrifice for our freedom."

## Coming Later...

**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*

# 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.

**January 17th**

### **Blickling Hall: How to Read a House**

*Victor Morgan (Senior Honorary Research Fellow, UEA)*

**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 here. Jakob would welcome any feedback or discussion and his email address is [warwickrewindeditor@gmail.com](mailto:warwickrewindeditor@gmail.com).

**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 24 at [tiny.cc/283x001](https://tiny.cc/283x001). Its next live online lecture takes place at 7.30 on Wednesday 14 January, when Christopher Bird will talk about 'First World War Pillboxes in Norfolk'. There's no charge and no need to book. No pharmacies were harmed in the preparation of this talk.

## Obituary

# Serica East

(20 Sept 1943 - 17 Oct 2025)



Serica was an enthusiastic and much valued member of the society who sadly died last October from an untimely accident. Although no longer resident in the area, Serica managed to attend the occasional meeting and actively researched family roots with annual visits to the History Centre. Furthermore, on a more practical level she prepared Excel files of the Lecture Programme for 2014 till 2024, updated earlier lists, indexed *Glaven Historian* articles to make searching for them on the web easier and lately assisted with updating the list of those from the Glaven Valley who were in the armed services and died in WW2; the information was used for the VE/VJ boards displayed at the 80th commemoration events.

Serica regularly contributed to BAHS Newsletters both printed and digital while her article in the *Glaven Historian* No 13 introduced us to her grandfather Alfred Magnus Catling,

better known as 'Curly'. She described his arrival in Cley, 1899, as a sixteen year old and his subsequent marriage to Susan Parker. She was the daughter of Henry Nichols Parker, butcher and grazier of Cley whilst his brother was Joshua Cook Parker, the noted Blakeney photographer, devout Methodist and shopkeeper. Her father, Magnus Catling, better known as 'Peter', a schoolmaster and historian, married Muriel Bean in 1937. He painstakingly collected together a wealth of information regarding Cley and the neighbouring villages. Although never published, several copies of his typescript "History of Blakeney and its Havens" (pre 1980) are still extant and continue to be used by current authors.

Whilst 'Curly' taught Serica to shoot it was her father who introduced her to a lifetime of sailing and the social history of her Cley inheritance. He was at one time commodore of the Blakeney Sailing Club while she became a Partner for the yacht broking business run by her late husband, David East. They lived in Woodbridge, Suffolk and were keen sailors. Serica was a long-term member of the local Sailing Club in Waldringfield and was out racing her Squib the weekend before she died at home. Ironically it was just at the end of last season that Serica made the decision to retire from competitive sailing.

More recently Serica was alerted to the fact that her three times great grandmother, Elizabeth Parker, had had three husbands and was the daughter of Samuel Mann, Custom House officer of Cley. This opened up a whole new avenue of research which she was actively pursuing. Serica is survived by her son Kyson who is now custodian of the extensive family archive assiduously assembled by his grandfather and mother. He has declared an intent to carry on when time allows.

*Pamela Peake*

*with additional information from Diana Cooke*

# Blakeney – the genesis of Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*

Following a review of Margaret Atwood’s recent memoir *Book of Lives*, a beady-eyed Committee member of BAHS noticed a letter in *The Guardian* (08.12.25). It suggested that a blue plaque might be put up on the cottage where Atwood worked whilst spending six months in Blakeney. Significantly, this was where she abandoned a novel she had been working on and turned her attention to an idea she thought “too weird” to develop – it went on to become *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

The *Book of Lives*, nearly 600 pages long, is an entertaining journey of memories, full of dry humour and wistful thinking. For me, it brings back distant memories of the time when Atwood, along with her husband, Graeme Gibson, and young daughter, Jess, rented our C17th holiday home in Blakeney during the winter of 1983-84. Whilst Margaret worked on her novel in a fisherman’s cottage up the High Street, Graeme composed his poetry in the conservatory and Jess went to Blakeney Primary School. People wonder



why they came to North Norfolk during the colder months of the year but they were used to cold weather back in Canada! Added to which Graeme was a serious ‘birder’ and loved the marshes. He also had a brother living in England, working as a film & TV director.

In an earlier book, *Curious Pursuits* (2005), Atwood describes our house, known as *The Friary*, as a Norfolk manse (traditionally the home of a non-conformist minister). Blakeney, however, never had a manse. Atwood goes on to say that the house was “said to be haunted by nuns in the parlour, a jolly cavalier in the dining room and a headless woman in the kitchen”. This was a variation on reports we had received, over the years, of a headless monk in the dining room, a nun running along the landing and a cavalier standing by the front door!

The *Book of Lives* goes one further and says that they “lived in a vicarage that had once been a 14th century leper hospital run by nuns”. I wondered if this referred to the C16th Old Rectory but the current owner assures me that it was never a leper hospital, nor was there ever a leper hospital at the C14th Carmelite Friary (near Blakeney Parish Church). During a recent restoration, however, one of the men – working upstairs when it was dark – saw a young girl in a red dress and she tapped him gently on the shoulder... in an area where dogs have been known to bristle.

In March 1984, when the family left Blakeney for Berlin, Margaret gave us a copy of her second book, *Surfacing*, because one of the characters is a ghost. Then, in 2003, she spoke at UEA but I missed her presentation because – ironically – I was in Berlin, but a friend told me she referred to *The Friary* during the talk. On my return, I wrote a belated letter of congratulations for winning the 2000 Booker prize. She kindly replied saying how they remembered their time at *The Friary* with great pleasure. She also confirmed that, whilst *The Handmaid’s Tale* was physically written in Berlin, its “cogs & wheels began turning in Blakeney – maybe it was those ghostly nuns in the parlour”...

# Cartes-de-Visite

A sample from the studio of James Stangroom, Cley

Richard Kelham



**Wikipedia describes the carte-de-visite as “usually an albumen print from a collodion negative on thin paper glued onto a thicker paper card. The size of a carte de visite is 54 mm (2.125 in) × 89 mm (3.5 in) (approximately the size of a business card). The reverse was generally printed with the logo of the photographer or the photography studio from which it came, as both protection of copyright and advertising.”**

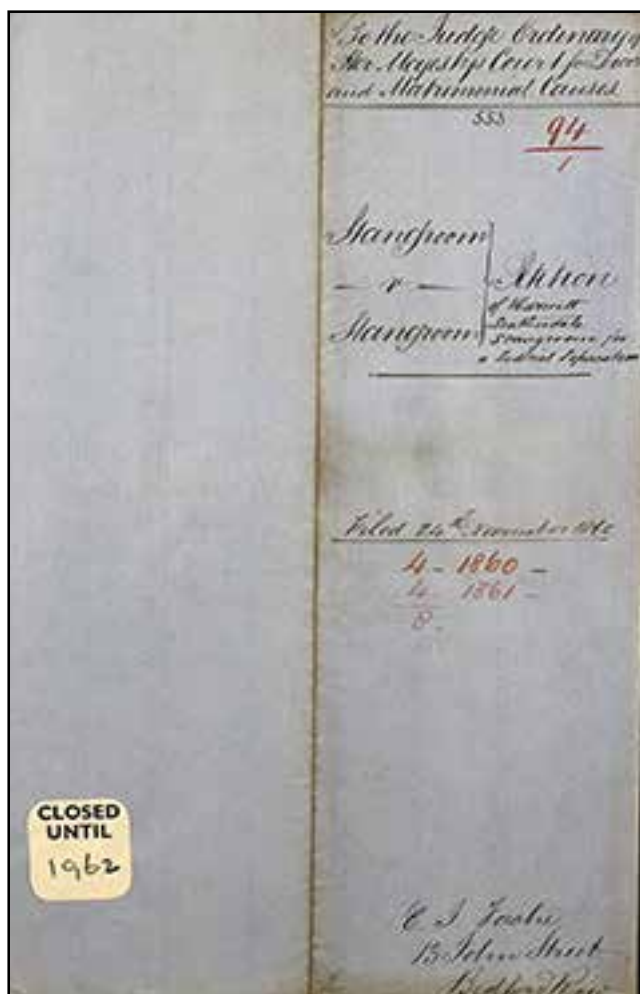
When Richard Daley sent me a copy of this *carte-de-visite* of an unknown sitter photographed by James Stangroom in Cley my interest was piqued not least by the idea that someone could make a living as a full-time photographer in a place as small as Cley (population in 1891: 712) even if you throw in Blakeney and Wiveton too. But there he was, in the 1881 census, with his occupation given as ‘photographer’. Admittedly he was living with his mother-in-law Hannah L Sands. By the time the 1896 *Kelly’s Directory* was compiled he claimed rather more strings to his bow: “Earthenware dealer, tailor, and photographer”. By that time the fashion for *cartes-de-visite* was on the wane.

The origin of the *carte* goes back to Disdéri’s patent of 1854 for a camera with multiple lenses (eight or ten at first, operated simultaneously or in sequence) exposing onto a single plate – originally wet collodion, later dry – the resulting images then contact printed onto albumen paper, at a fraction of the cost of a solo portrait. This was refined by the camera patented in 1860 by Hyacinthe Hermagis such that a craze for collecting and exchanging *cartes* took hold in all the major cities of the world, aided by the ability to buy copies of *cartes* of the rich and famous to add to one’s collection. But how did the craze spread to the Glaven Valley? [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carte\\_de\\_visite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carte_de_visite)

Digging deeper into the surprisingly eventful life of James Stangroom reveals little about

the photography, but quite a lot about the Stangroom family. James was born in Marylebone, London, in 1833. His father was Blakeney-born Jeremiah Stangroom, a tailor and sometime draper, his mother was Charlotte Sands likewise born in Blakeney. James followed his father in becoming a tailor, described in the 1851 census as a journeyman (his younger brother Frederick was then only an apprentice).

Though he was in Cley in 1851, on 23 July 1854 he was back in London, at St Pancras Church, marrying Harriett Leatherdale Sands, daughter of another tailor, Thomas Sands, also Blakeney born but then living at 75 Great Portland Street. As far as I can tell Thomas Sands and Charlotte's father John Sands were not closely related; there were quite a few 'John Sands' living in Norfolk at that time – including Charlotte's brother, and another who seems to have been a hardened criminal. To add to the nominative confusion, James and Harriett's first born was baptised Charlotte Hannah.



***The Petition of Harriett Leatherdale Stangroom to HM Court of Divorce and Matrimonial causes.***

mother died later the same year – aged 95. This left James to eke out his days living with his daughter Charlotte (recorded as Hannah as if that reduced the confusion), still working as a Grocer and Earthenware Dealer. He died in 1916, his daughter lived on until 1942, outliving her much younger brother Edwin. The fashion for *cartes-de-visite* had long since run its course, photography had been democratised by George Eastman and his Kodak Brownie camera, though anyone who has had a passport photo taken in the last 20 years or so probably found themselves facing a four-lens Polaroid camera – the modern descendant of Hermagis's camera of 1860. Do they still use them?

The connection to the Leatherdale family is interesting as Leatherdale Yard off Blakeney High Street is the location of a row of cottages, the first ever purchased by the nascent Blakeney Neighbour Housing Society. The Leatherdales were farmers at Thwaite, Norfolk.

The marriage seems to have run into problems as the next sighting is Harriett's application to the courts in November 1860 for a Judicial Separation on the grounds of desertion. The 1861 census shows that Harriett and her four-year-old daughter were back living with her parents. They were still there in 1871 though the family had moved to 54 Church Road, Hackney.

At this end, the 1871 census has the Stangroom family living in Short Stone Lane. The head of the family is the widowed Charlotte Stangroom (63) recorded as a China Dealer, James (38) is a Master Tailor, his brother Alfred (30) is a Draper assisted by his young wife Agnes (19).

Thomas Sands died in 1873 after which his widow brought her household back to Cley where they took up residence in New Road. Some sort of reconciliation must have occurred as the 1881 census of Hannah Sands' household has her, aged 71 and an annuitant, with James (46) described as a Photographer, Harriett (47) and their new son Edwin (4), plus the usual teenage skivvy. Old Charlotte died 10 January 1898.

Harriett died 31 May 1904, Her

# 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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