



Blakeney Area Historical Society Electronic Newsletter

March 2025

“Studying the History of Blakeney Haven and its Hinterland”



An elevated view of Cley High Street – I suspect the photographer shinned up the telegraph pole rather than standing on the steps of the Cley Institute. The entrance to Heseltine's garage is on the left, between the Maisons Bienvenues and The Gables, on the site of what is now Quay House. Date late '20s - early '30s. After the war there were three garages in Cley!

The BAHS are on Facebook tiny.cc/yfo3001
Follow the BAHS on X (Twitter) x.com/HistoryBAHS
and Instagram [historybahs](https://www.instagram.com/historybahs) for all the news and
to keep up to date.



Blakeney Area Historical Society Meetings

Tuesday 25th March 2025 at 2:30pm at
Cley Village Hall, NR25 7RJ

Exploring Norfolk's Deep History Coast

Dr John Davies

Tuesday 29th April 2025 at 2:30pm at
Cley Village Hall, NR25 7RJ

The Real Margery Kempe

Susan Maddock

Have You Heard About Blakeney?

The popular booklet, originally written by Peter Brooks and published by Poppyland, is now available in a new edition with the text substantially revised by our own Jonathan Hooton. Please ensure the copyright on the inside cover is 2025; the reprint in 2024 used the new cover but the old text. It can be purchased direct from Poppyland Publishing. The ISBN is 978-1-869831-50-9 and it costs £4.95 direct from the publishers at [tiny.cc/r7v8001](https://www.poppyland.co.uk/cc/r7v8001)



Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group

Meetings take place in the Thomas Paine Lecture Theatre at the UEA at 2.30 pm
There is a hearing loop in the lecture theatre. Refreshments will be available afterwards.
Non-members are welcome to try one or two lectures before joining. Directions are below.

March 15

Breckland's Earth Heritage

Tim Holt Wilson (Freelance Geologist)

The Thomas Paine Centre 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-and-display basis at weekends (£1.00 flat fee). The entrance to it is on the right off Chancellor's Drive, just after the bus shelters (ignore the 'staff only' sign).

The Thomas Paine Centre is marked 52 on the maps around the site. The West Car Park is marked as P3.

A downloadable version of the campus map is available on request.

Norfolk Records Office

Norwich: Culture, Community and Church, 1500-1750



Norwich: Culture, Community and Church, 1500-1750 is the subject of an event being staged by the **Norfolk Record Office** on **Friday 9 May** and costing £25.00 (plus an optional £10.00 for lunch). For details and to attend in person, go to tiny.cc/35v8001 or to view online go to tiny.cc/u5v98001

Norwich has a wonderfully rich and diverse history which provides a seemingly inexhaustible supply of stories for historians to tell. On this study day, six leading historians will share their perspectives and research on various aspects of this history.

Carole Rawcliffe, Reid Barbour, and Clare Haynes focus on three quite different individuals – Augustine Steward, Thomas Browne, and Francis Blomefield – whereas Joel Halcomb takes a broad view of the development of non-conformism in early modern Norwich. Rebecca Pinner searches for the mythic origins of Norwich through the figure of Gurgunt, whilst Andy Wood presents two new documents on that most famous of chapters in the history of Norwich, Kett's Rebellion.

The names and themes may seem familiar, but each presenter will offer new research and new perspectives on them to help us deepen our understanding of the history of this wonderful city.

Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NorAH) supporters can attend for free. Become a **NorAH** supporter today for only £25 and receive your promotional code for this event. Please enter the promotion code on booking. There are also four free tickets available to **NAHRG** members of which there are several in the BAHS.

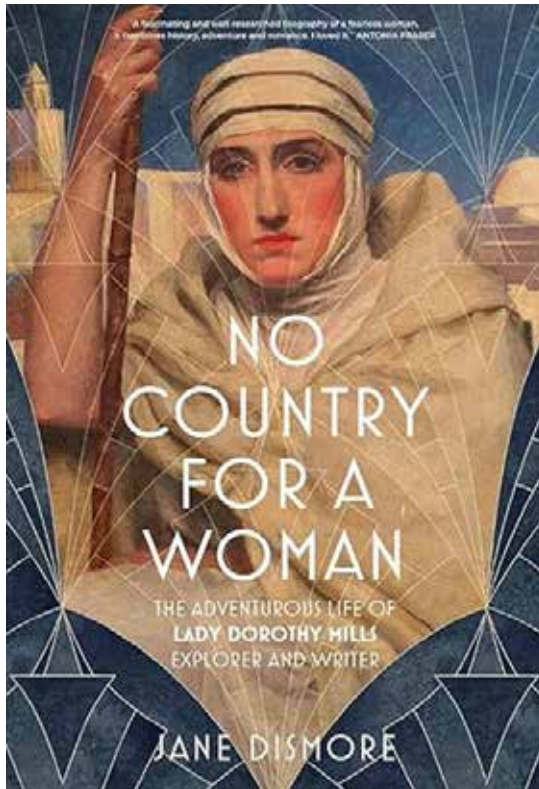
Lunch is available for an additional fee of £10, or you can bring your own lunch.

Online attendees will receive the Zoom link shortly before conference.

This is a hybrid event, with a small in-person audience at The Archive Centre and an online audience.

If you are no longer able to attend please cancel your ticket so that the place can be reallocated to someone on our waiting list.

Holt Bookshop Event



No Country For A Woman: The Adventurous Life Of Lady Dorothy Mills

by Jane Dismore

Book launch - this is a free event but please book your place at the bookshop or sales@holtbookshop.co.uk if you would like to come.

The Holt Bookshop

Friday 21st March

6pm for 6.30pm

The first book about the life of the best-known female explorer of the 1920s-1930s, who achieved many 'firsts' in a male-dominated field. Lady Dorothy 'Dolly' Mills was a petite figure with a big personality, born in 1889 into the political and literary Walpole family in Norfolk. When she married a clever but poor army captain, her father disinherited her. Defying her background and the expectations of her sex, she became a renowned explorer in West Africa - she was the first English woman in Timbuktu - and beyond, travelling deep into Venezuela and Central Asia where only men had gone before.

Dolly wrote acclaimed travel books illuminating remote places and peoples and describing history in the making. By the 1930s she was the best-known female explorer of the day, appearing on platforms and in books with prominent men. She was elected an early female Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, and on her death in 1959 left a bequest for women explorers. A feminist with unorthodox views which cost her her marriage, Dolly also wrote bold novels and incisive features for women.

Honorary Membership

The Committee have agreed to grant Richard Daley and his wife Hilary Honorary Membership of the BAHS in recognition of their major, and on-going, contribution to the development and smooth running of the Society. During his fifteen years as a committee member Richard has been Treasurer, Membership Secretary, website designer, and the technical support whizz who enabled our lecturers to be heard - and seen when we ran hybrid meetings in the aftermath of Covid. He also started the electronic Newsletter and so much more.

Thank you both!

James Fox, Master Mariner



James Fox was born in Letheringsett and baptised at St Andrew's church on 6 March 1831. His father John, a brewer's drayman, and his mother Mary Cook went on to provide him with six brothers and three sisters. A lot of mouths to feed on a labourer's wages, so it's not surprising that he ran away to sea. He next appeared in the records when he married Sarah Ann Harrison, daughter of a Cley mariner, in St Thomas' Church, Stepney.

The 1861 census records them living in Rotherhithe where James (29) is the head of the household, and they are joined by a pair of visitors Ann Harrison (50) – presumably Sarah Ann's mother – and John Harrison (25), another mariner, and brother-in-law. He gained his Master Mariner's certificate on 25 August 1862. He worked for the Shaw Savill line before moving to the New Zealand Shipping Co in 1873 where he was given command of the ship *Scimitar* (later called the *Rangitiki*), one of their fast sailing ships, in which he made a record run from Plymouth to Port Chalmers in 71 days. The vessel had been built in Hull in 1863, and had a registered tonnage of 1168 tons. Later commands were the *Orari* (Jarrow 1875, 936tons), *Piako*, SS *Wairoa* (Auckland 1884), and the *Turakina* (Overnewton 1868, 1189 tons) – information from the *Mercantile Navy List*.

In 1898 he retired to Cley with Sarah Ann, naming their cottage 'Maori Pah' – a pah being a fortified camp in the Maori language. The house was later renamed 'Droxford'. He died on the 3 January 1906, aged 75, though Sarah Ann survived him for a number of years and was recorded living there in the 1911 census in the company of Maud Weston (14), a domestic servant.

The Chequered History Of Methodism In Blakeney

Taken from a document written by Joshua C. Parker, of Blakeney (1860-1934), in 1912, the Centenary Year of the Methodist Chapel, and copied verbatim. An ardent methodist for 50 years, in later life he was the Methodist chapel organist.

When Methodism was first introduced into Blakeney, services used to be held in various cottages, but chiefly in the house of Mrs Thomas Bond. During that time, an independent gentleman by the name of Blyford became converted under the influence of one of its members who visited him during an illness, and also became a member. He, in connection with the Society held a Sunday School during the summer months in the summer house of his garden. After a time, the membership grew and the congregation became so large that it was thought advisable to build the present Chapel, which was in 1812. The site was procured being part of the garden belonging to the cottages now standing in front. The necessary funds were subscribed mostly by the members of the Society, each lending what they could afford, taking the interest until the principal could be paid. The blessing of God attended its efforts and it continued to prosper. In 1816 a sad loss was sustained to the Society by the drowning of some of its members in the Cley Channel. They were returning from some of the revival services which were being held at Cley. It was a dark night, the 17th of February. At that time the people had to cross in a boat, the tide was in, the keel of the boat caught in a rope that was fastened to another, turned over and precipitated the company of 10 persons into the water, five of them were drowned. A memorial service was held annually in commemoration of the event, called the Watch Night service, and continued until about 1867 or 8. One of the drowned was a young man named Thomas Whisker, the member under whose influence Mr Blyford was converted. He held him in such high esteem and was so grieved by the event that he made the request that when he died, he should be buried at the young man's feet. Anyone going to the churchyard will notice it by the tombstones, also the event of the accident is recorded as well.

Revival Services were held here from time to time, and many added to the flock. One was the wife of the Minister under whom the late Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted. She was a native of Blakeney, and attended this Chapel, and was converted during one of these meetings. After a time, the congregation became so large that it became an absolute necessity to enlarge the Chapel. This was in 1846. It was decided to raise the roof to its present height, as the building was only half as high as it is now, with a plain mean looking pulpit, of which traces are still to be seen on the north wall, and square family pews, some sitting face, some sideways and perhaps some sitting back to the preacher, the entrance door being in the middle of the west wall. The lighting at night was by means of cotton candles put in tall iron candlesticks, some with hooks attached to hang the snuffers on. When a hymn was about to be sung it was generally forestalled by cries from various parts of the building "Snuff the candle, Brother (or Sister)" who was sitting nearest. Often it was snuffed out, then "Give us a light, Brother so and so." Some who were not adept in the art of snuffing candles would sometimes knock the candle over, and woe be to the ladies' dresses if any were sitting near.

When the Chapel was altered and raised (the north side wall when being raised had to be entirely built from the inside as the owner and occupier of the garden adjoining would not suffer anyone or anything to come on his boundary, vowing vengeance against anyone that did,) the tiles were taken off and the present wood frame, which is the original one, was lifted to its position and shored up with props. It being considered rather a delicate affair, fear took hold of some, lest a strong wind should spring up and blow the whole over. Some of the members met together and prayed that the Lord would not send any wind until the roof was lodged in its proper place. In answer to those prayers scarcely a breath of wind came the whole time, and they were glad. At that time, a gallery was put in, fixed on the south wall. The new pews were made smaller with nice little doors, very straight backs and rather narrow seats, but made to hold very comfortably three persons, and all let very well until a later period when the ladies' fashions altered a bit and the notable crinolines were much worn. They got so big that it

became almost impossible for three ladies to sit in one pew. The Chapel had to suffer for that fashion because after that the people vowed that the pews were only large enough to sit two and would not hire them if they could not have them on these conditions. Afterwards it was only on special occasions that three would cram into a seat. One rather amusing incident happened one Sunday during that time. A rather fastidious spinster was leaving after the service and in coming out of the pew her crinoline became entangled in the hinges of the pew door. She got stuck fast and had to remain so until some kind friend went to her aid and liberated her. There being two side aisles of two feet wide, it was generally known when a lady went in and out of the chapel by her crinoline scraping against the sides. A familiar sound at one time was to hear the ladies come in with their Sunday going clogs on, clip-clopping on the brick floor.

After the Chapel had been altered, the old iron candlesticks were replaced with fine brass ones and lit up with composite candles which were a great improvement, no snuffers then being required.

Things continued to prosper until the great eruption of 1849 came, which played havoc in this chapel as well as many others. During the strife, friends parted, causing much sorrow. One member who had lent money on the chapel and was so exasperated at the affair said to another "I will suffer my flesh to be taken off my bones before I will lose my money." The other remarked "God can take your money without taking your flesh." Sad to relate, that many years after, the same member said to the other member's widow. "Ah I would not do what God wanted me to, now He will take all from me." He did lose it all and died in the Union.

The majority of the people took the Reform side of the question, therefore they were expelled from the Society, the Wesleyan body claiming the chapel as their own private property independent of all the money that various members and friends had lent and expended upon the place. Although some rebelled, they found it to be only too true and had to submit. A Mr Waddy, one of the Wesleyan officials, tauntingly told the people at one of the meetings that were being held at the time in some town, "The chapels are ours but the debts are yours. For that remark he was styled "Flippant Waddy." The people were not to be daunted by the way things were going. They banded together and hired the Club Room at the Ship Inn to hold their services, and these continued for three years. Only about six persons attended the Chapel during the time. About the end of that time, Captain Smither, a former member who had removed to London and associated himself with the Wesleyans there, went to the headquarters and asked them to sell the Chapel to the Reformers as it had really become no use to them. They gave way and it was bought again. As none of the former Trustees were eligible to buy it, it was bought in the name of Mr (James) Parker who held it as private property until the new commission was established, "The United Methodist Free Church." Then it was entered on the Reference Deed of that commission, and it stands so today. Sometime before the 1849 split, the Sunday School was started again by Mrs Parker and Mrs Smither, as it had been discontinued for a time. A good school was raised and continued to flourish. Some few years after Mrs Smither removed with her husband to London. When the Reformers got back into the Chapel, Mrs Parker took up the work again and continued it until 1879, having to relinquish her work on account of Mr Parker's illness and death. No one at the time seemed willing to take the responsibility of carrying it on. During that time great difficulty was experienced in obtaining suitable and new hymns and tunes for the Sunday School Anniversary. Young people used to be sought after, who had been away from home, or a stranger who had come into the village, to know whether they knew a new hymn or tune, as it had been a general thing to have some of the same hymns over and over again. As the times moved on and advancement was being made in that direction, Mrs Parker felt it necessary and was prompted to have her two boys taught music so that the difficulty might be got over. Accordingly, they were taught and in 1869, when the older was thought proficient enough, he at the age of 11, conducted the Anniversary through using the small harmonium that they were taught upon. Two years later, the second son (the present organist) at the age of 11 was made by his mother to play one of the tunes at the Sunday School Anniversary. The title of it was "Oh Touch Those Chords

Again.” He played it with fear and trembling, vowing in his heart that when he was a man, he would never touch those chords again. About 1871, it was thought desirable to introduce the Instrumental Music for a continuance, so Mrs Nichols, the grandmother of the two boys, bought a harmonium specially for the purpose, and her two grandsons, Henry Parker and William Nichols were the two first players, each taking every alternate hymn. Before that the singing had been led for many years by Brother Harmer who seemed a bit put out by the new order of things. As he did not care to be wholly set on one side, he said to Mrs Nichols, “ I suppose I shall not be wanted now.” She replied, “Oh yes, Brother Harmer, we shall – there may be a tune they cannot play.”

Some of the older portion of the congregation thought it was a wonderful thing that a whole verse should be given out and sung through. Many at that day could not read and could not remember all the words and thought they would not be able to take any part in the singing. Before that, never more than two lines were given out, they were sung, the next two lines were given out and they were sung, so finishing the hymn and tune up. A hymn of six verses with six or eight lines in a verse was scarcely ever got through. Brother Harmer’s vocal powers were very strong and rather harsh, but of good pitch, so that once started one could easily sing to it. His attitude when singing was rather remarkable. He would stand fairly straight up. He was rather tall in stature, with his head a little on one side. His hymn book was generally held with both hands fixed in front of him, but it did not matter how high or low the hymn went, Brother Harmer scarcely ever moved his position without it was that his eye caught some urchin who was just having a lark, then his hymnbook would come sweeping down on the delinquent’s head, with the exclamation “You boys!” oft times nearly upsetting the hymn altogether, the congregation striving to keep serious and continue their devotions.

Things kept moving on. In 1872, Henry Parker left home, his brother (the present organist) had then to take his place, continuing with his cousin, Willie Nichols to play the tunes alternately, hating Sundays more than any day of the week. One Sunday he was grumbling to his mother because they never sung any new tunes, always the old ones which seemed threadbare. She said, “How should we, you never play any.” He made up his mind that he would play two that Sunday. His first tune that afternoon happened to be C. M. metre. Now is my chance, thought he. Accordingly, he started but nobody sung. After the verse the Preacher said, “Come friends, you don’t sing.” Brother Harmer seemed on the alert that day and called out “We don’t know the tune,” possibly thinking he had scored a point, then.....

The above was written longhand with many corrections and additions on eight sheets of foolscap. Unfortunately the ninth and any subsequent sheets are missing, so we shall never know if Brother Harmer scored his point, or read of the addition of the Sunday School Room in 1903, or of the acquisition of a pipe organ, second hand from a college in Cambridge. The organ is now a rare model.

And so, the boy who hated Sunday more than any day of the week, grew up to be organist and pillar of the chapel for more than half a century. Thank you, Joshua Parker.