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Editorial

Welcome to a bumper issue of the *Glaven Historian* 18. In this issue John Wright has written an extended review of Naomi Field (ed.), *A vanishing landscape: archaeological investigations at Blakeney Eye* (Archaeopress, 2021), the full publication of the excavations that took place at Blakeney Eye on the site of what is thought to have been a medieval chapel near the entrance to the harbour. We then have two articles by Margaret Bird. The first is on the coming of the Methodists to Cley and its surrounding area and the great rivalry between the Methodists of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion and the better-organised Wesleyans. Her second article discusses various nautical aspects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as they affected Norfolk: privateers, the press gang and the local sea fencibles. These articles both arise from the extensive research she undertook for her monumental four-volume work on *Mary Hardy and her World*, a trove of information about life in this area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, published in 2020 (https://www.burnham-press.co.uk/mary-hardys-world).

Then there are two articles come from another old friend of the Society, Jonathan Hooton: the first on the disastrous summer storm of 1833, when no fewer than 17 vessels were wrecked or damaged off our coast, while the second is on an abortive proposal to build a pier harbour at Blakeney in 1835. The next two articles focus on local people of note. John Wright has written a note about Robert Brereton of Blakeney, assistant to I K Brunel, the great Victorian engineer, and two other members of this distinguished engineering family, while Richard Jefferson tells the story of two unsung 19th century maritime heroes from Cley, Howard Brett of Cley Rocket Company and William Hibbert of the Coast Guard. Finally, Eric Hotblack has written a note on a piece of sandstone found during field-walking at Field Dalling which may be a relic of seismic surveys looking for oil in the 1960s.

The next issue of the *Glaven Historian* is planned for 2024. Contributions are very welcome: please contact the joint editor, Roger Bland (publications@bahs.uk).

Roger Bland
Richard Kelham
May 2022

A Vanishing Landscape: Archaeological Investigations at Blakeney Eye. A review of the final report

John Wright

Synopsis

Sixteen years after the excavations on Blakeney Eye the final report describing the finds and outlining the history of the site has been published. This review aims both to summarize and to comment on the content of the report. Most reviews of non-fiction books are written by people qualified to make a critical appraisal of the conclusions being put forward. The author of this review is not an archaeologist but is familiar with the site long known as the 'Chapel' on the Eye and took part in the surveys undertaken there by the Blakeney Area Historical Society before excavations began. The review suggests that some of the conclusions arising from the finds and stratigraphy described in the report are not the only possible ones.

Introduction

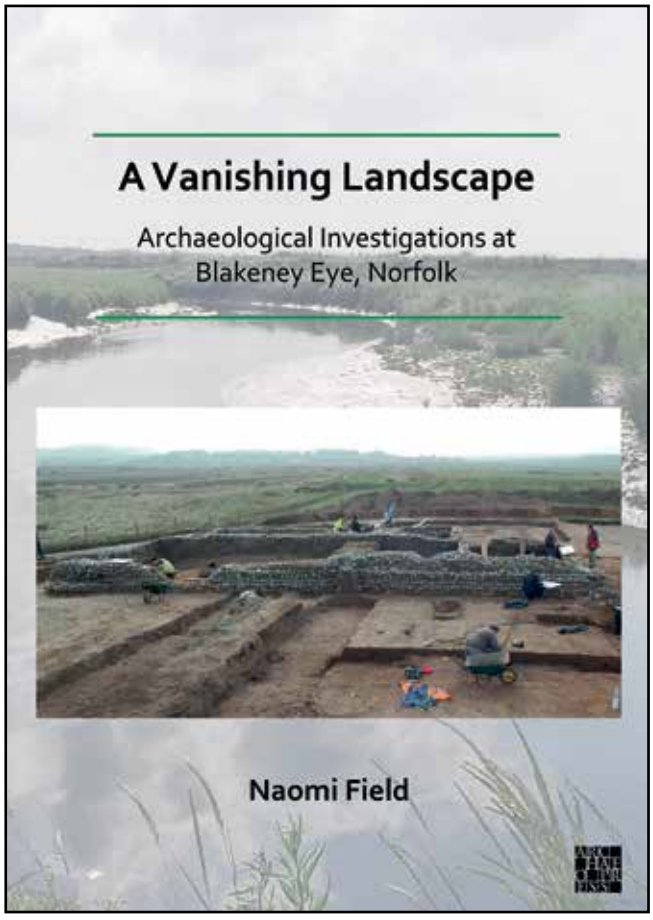


***Fig. 1. Naomi Field*, A Vanishing Landscape.**

Blakeney Eye is a small island of sand and gravel with a thin soil cover rising from the former salt marsh that separates the village of Blakeney from the sea. For many years the remnants of a building long known as 'Blakeney Chapel' could be seen there in the form of lines of flints protruding from the turf.

Between 1999 and 2005 the Eye was the subject of various studies concluding with the complete excavation of the building. In 1998 English Heritage gave permission for the Blakeney Area Historical Society (BAHS) to undertake non-invasive surveys there. Between January and May 1999 members of the Society surveyed the area around the Chapel using a theodolite to produce a contour map, a resistivity meter to produce a 'moisture map', and a magnetometer to map magnetic variations. In addition, a large number of molehills were examined to see what moles had brought to the surface – the only form of excavation permitted by the Chapel's status as an Ancient Monument. At the same time, records in the Norfolk Record Office were searched for documents relating to the site.

The results of these surveys were written up in the *Glaven Historian* 2 for 1999 (Wright 1999; Carnell 1999). Peter Carnell's article described the results of the Society's fieldwork. The principal conclusion was that the highest part of the Eye contained no buildings other than the one with two cells outlined in the turf. These appeared to represent two different constructions: the northern one being larger and more substantial than the southern one built on to it. The northern cell appeared to have a doorway on the seaward side and another on the southern side, but the resistivity survey did not show evidence of its (presumed) western wall. It did hint at an internal dividing wall in the southern cell where brick fragments appeared at the surface.

Almost 1,000 molehills in the area around the building were examined to see what artefacts they contained. They produced only three pieces of pottery, of post-medieval date, but a substantial amount of building material in the form of mortar, small stones with mortar attached, and slate. This material was concentrated close to the building, and also within the larger cell. Of particular interest was the concentration of slate fragments immediately outside the south-eastern corner of the smaller cell, as if roofing slate had been stacked there for removal. Mortar was liberally distributed but stones with mortar were found mostly where the western wall of the northern cell was expected to be.

The magnetometer survey produced a straight line

of anomalies running across the western end of the building which was interpreted as the location of wartime metal fencing. It would have been part of a fence on the coastal bank around the Eye and formed a section which ran across the high ground thereby cutting off the low north-eastern corner of the Eye.

The BAHS surveys found no evidence of early occupation and no documents in the Norfolk Record Office to confirm or deny the identification of the building as a chapel. For convenience, this review retains the term 'Chapel' while acknowledging that this traditional description of the building may have no justification.

The Eye Project

Very soon after the BAHS surveys were concluded a decision was made by the Environment Agency to dig out a new channel for the River Glaven before the existing one became choked with shingle rolling in from the beach. This would leave the Chapel on the seaward side of the new course of the river and therefore subject to erosion and eventual disappearance. Erosion is a process more obvious along the cliffs of the coastline of north-east Norfolk but it is equally effective in pushing landwards the shingle ridge between Weybourne and Blakeney. The eventual loss of the Eye persuaded the Environment Agency to fund surveys of the whole of the Eye and the excavation of the Chapel, the work to be carried out before the imminent construction of the new channel made the site very difficult to reach (Fig. 2).

The project had three main phases: an assessment of the archaeological potential of the Eye, the examination of any significant findings, and then the excavation of the building and its immediate surrounds. The initial work, undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU), began in December 2002 with geophysical surveys and continued into January 2003 with a series of boreholes. There followed an 'evaluation' in the form of 51 trenches over the whole area of the Eye, with 6 more on the Chapel site. Relatively little archaeological material was found away from the Chapel, just enough to warrant the more detailed excavation in 2004 of a small area, termed 'Area 1'. This produced struck flints and Neolithic pottery, as well as a horse skeleton of indeterminate date.

The excavation of 'Area 2', the Chapel building, was carried out between September 2004 and March 2005 by Lindsey Archaeological Services. The finds were substantial, with flint tools, pottery, sheep and cattle bones, fish bones, seeds, charcoal, slag, building material and a variety of metal objects. All needed detailed examination in order to obtain from them as much information as possible.

The excavations were described in unpublished reports for the two contracting organizations and summaries were written for the *Glaven Historian*. Chris Birks described the trench-based evaluation of the Eye in No. 7 (Birks 2004) and Richard Lee wrote about the excavation of the Chapel building in No. 9 (Lee 2006). Conclusions about the Chapel site were tentative, partly because continual activity over a long period had made the deposits difficult to interpret, and also because detailed analysis of the finds, including radiocarbon dating, had yet to be undertaken.

Now, 16 years later, the detailed studies of the finds are complete and the final report describing the excavations, entitled *A Vanishing Landscape: Archaeological Investigations at Blakeney Eye*, has been published by Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. (Fig. 1). The principal

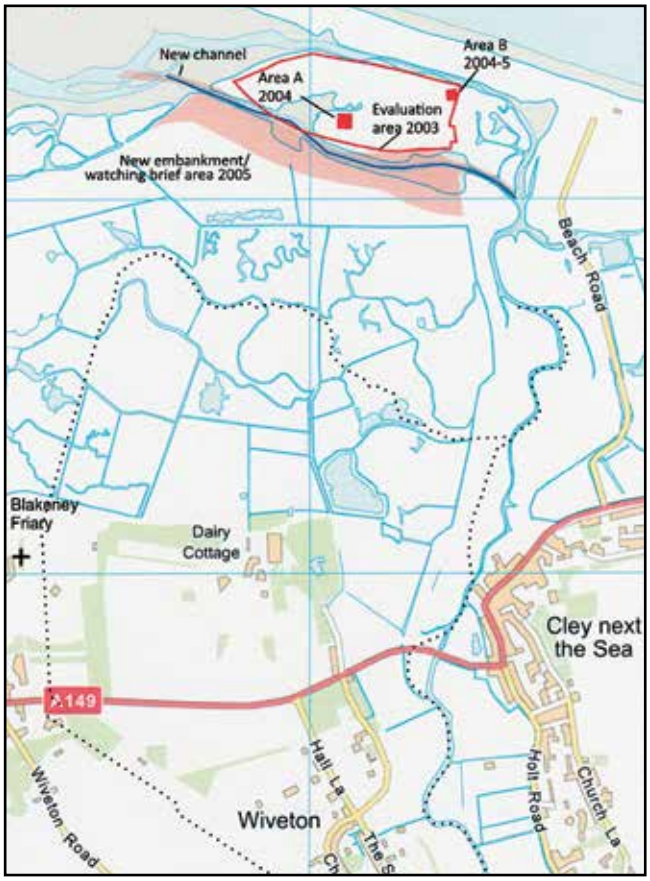
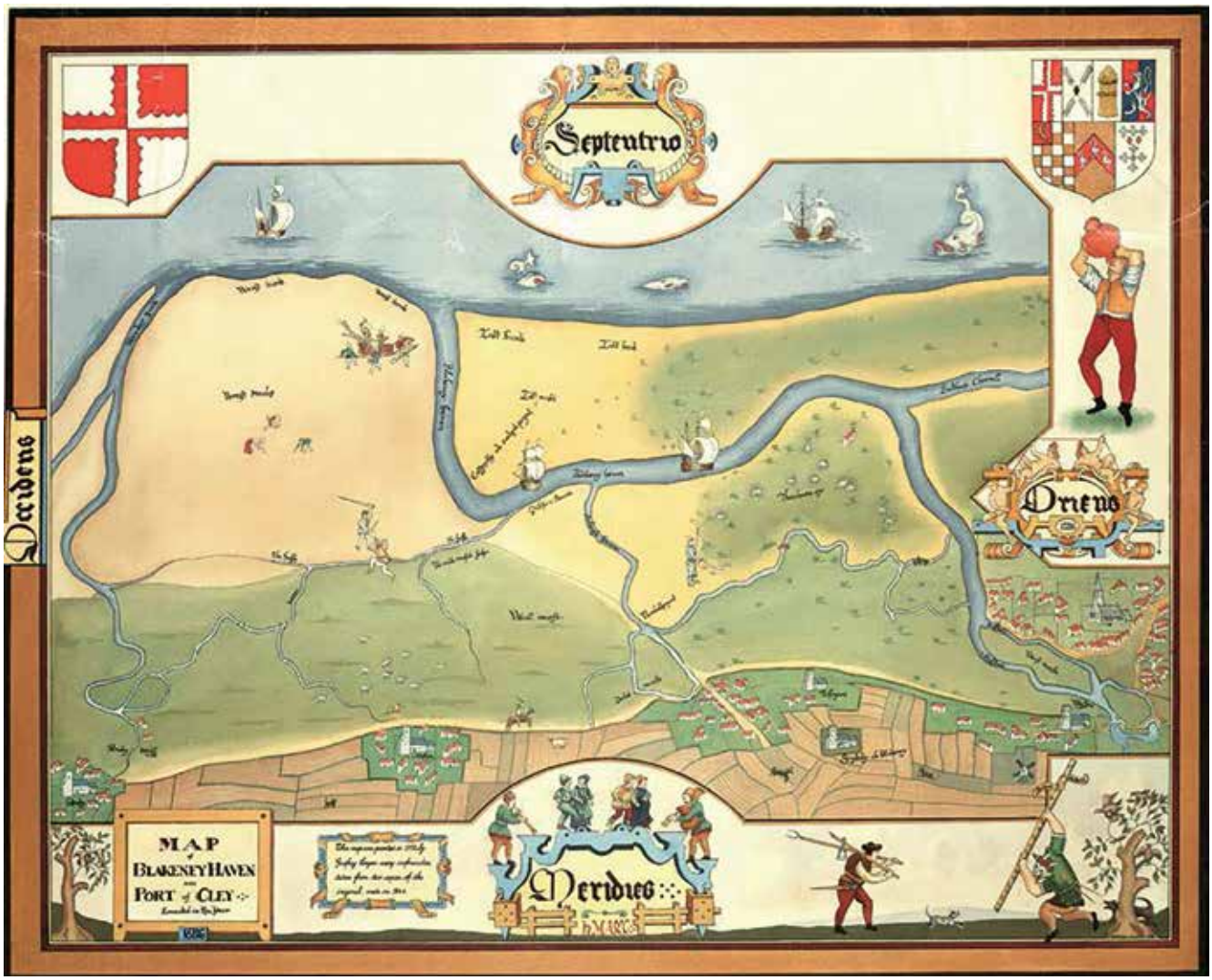


Fig. 2. Blakeney Eye. Location of evaluation and excavation trenches 2003-2005 (Vanishing Landscape, fig. 1.3)

author is Naomi Field, the former Director of Lindsey Archaeological Services, and sixteen specialists provide technical reports on the finds. Much of the book consists of these contributions which include sections presenting an interpretation of the evidence. It also sets the Eye in its physical and geological context, acknowledges the studies undertaken by BAHS, and describes the documentary evidence for the site.

Many rescue excavations take place when archaeological remains, previously unknown, are found in advance of construction projects. In this case, the excavators had the advantage of local knowledge about the site in the form of a few documents and the survey results produced by BAHS. *A Vanishing Landscape* acknowledges that the work of the Blakeney Historical Society provided an exceptional background resource for the subsequent excavations. The results of the Society's non-intrusive surveys were to be superseded by the findings from the excavation but the report does use some of the documentary evidence provided by BAHS (although in saying that the survey work was designed to complement the documentary research the report has reversed the Society's process).

Even before the book is opened the photograph on the cover gives an immediate impression of the building that the excavation uncovered (Fig. 1). The view looks over the surviving walls, with people providing a scale, and across the former salt marsh, now drained, towards the 'mainland' in the distance. At first glance the title does not quite fit the scene: rather than vanishing, the building appears to be emerging from the mists of time – a tension which reappears in the conclusions.



Fig, 3. The 1586 map of Blakeney Harbour *(courtesy Godfrey Sayers)*

Historical Background

The first two chapters of *A Vanishing Landscape* provide an introduction to the locality before subsequent chapters describe the work undertaken and the finds recovered. The first chapter outlines the maritime history of the area while the second chapter covers the topography of the Eye and its geological origins.

Most accounts of the maritime trade of this area cover all the settlements served by the River Glaven, with Wiveton, Cley and then Blakeney each taking precedence as continued siltation of the estuary and larger ships forced commercial activities downstream. This trend has continued with Morston now the centre for boating in the harbour.

In Chapter 1 the comments on maritime history concentrate on the port of Cley, perhaps because the Glaven flows from Cley down past the Eye and would have given easy access to it, Blakeney being served by a separate creek further down the estuary (Hooton 1996 and 2020). The text recounts that the earliest reference to Cley as a port is in 1285 with a jury verdict declaring that the ports of Blakeney and Cley belonged to the lords of the manor and that their jurisdiction stretched from Morston to Kelling. Appended was a list of the fees that most ships had to pay for trading or for spreading out their fishing nets.

The port at Cley was probably at its most prosperous in the 1300s when the chief exports were corn and wool to the Low Counties, and salt fish. In the Tudor period there were strong trade links with Iceland as boats went to fish for cod and ling during the spring and summer. A survey in 1565 listed nine Iceland ships at Cley and four at Blakeney. Overseas trade declined during the 1600s to be replaced by coastal trade, chiefly corn to Newcastle and coal in return. This, too, fell away after the railways were established and shipments to and from Blakeney ended around 1918.

In the medieval period the export of salt fish was particularly important and the chapter addresses the question of whether salt was produced locally – one piece of land in Cley village has long been known as the salt-pans. During NAU's survey of coastal features in 2004 [The Norfolk Rapid Coastal Zone Archaeological Survey] there was speculation that some mounds near the Eye could be from old salt workings. The new report considers this to be unlikely because much salt was being imported and because local production would not have been possible, Blakeney Eye being a 'freshwater marsh'. This assertion seems to deny the possibility of salt water being led in and is also a piece of loose wording as all the eyes are glacial deposits of sand and gravel.

The chapter refers to the scant documentary evidence about the building that once stood on the Eye. It introduces the reference in 1343 to a 'hermit and chap-

lain' at Cley who asked permission to seek for alms. There was no indication of any hermitage but the possibility of an association with the Chapel is taken up later in the report.

The earliest map of the harbour was made in 1586 by 'an unknown cartographer', a statement which misses the suggestion by Jonathan Hooton in his book *The Glaven Ports* (1996) that the map was by John Darby. This was confirmed by an article in the *Glaven Historian* 9 (Frostick 2006). The map portrays the whole of the harbour and the five villages from Stiffkey to Cley. Blakeney Eye is labelled Thornham's Eye and on it a building is illustrated but not named (Fig. 3).

The earliest documentary reference to the building is in a deed of 1595/6 which (in Blomefield's text of 1808) describes the building as 'an old house called the decayed chapel of Cley with a piece of ground ..... called Thornham's Eye wherein the chapel stood'. Further details confirm the ground as Blakeney Eye, the reference to Cley being a recognition that Blakeney Eye actually lies in Cley parish. (This is acknowledged in the report but is not apparent in Fig. 1.3 where some parish boundaries are omitted or inaccurate.) A similar description, 'an oulde house or chappell', appears in a deed of 1621. The map by Cranefield (1769) shows a building on the Eye labelled 'Eye House', stippled as if to indicate a ruin. Faden's map (1797) names the building as the 'Chapel ruins', while Palmer's map of 1835 refers to 'old walls'. Thereafter 'Blakeney Chapel' reappears as a name on the OS map of 1887.

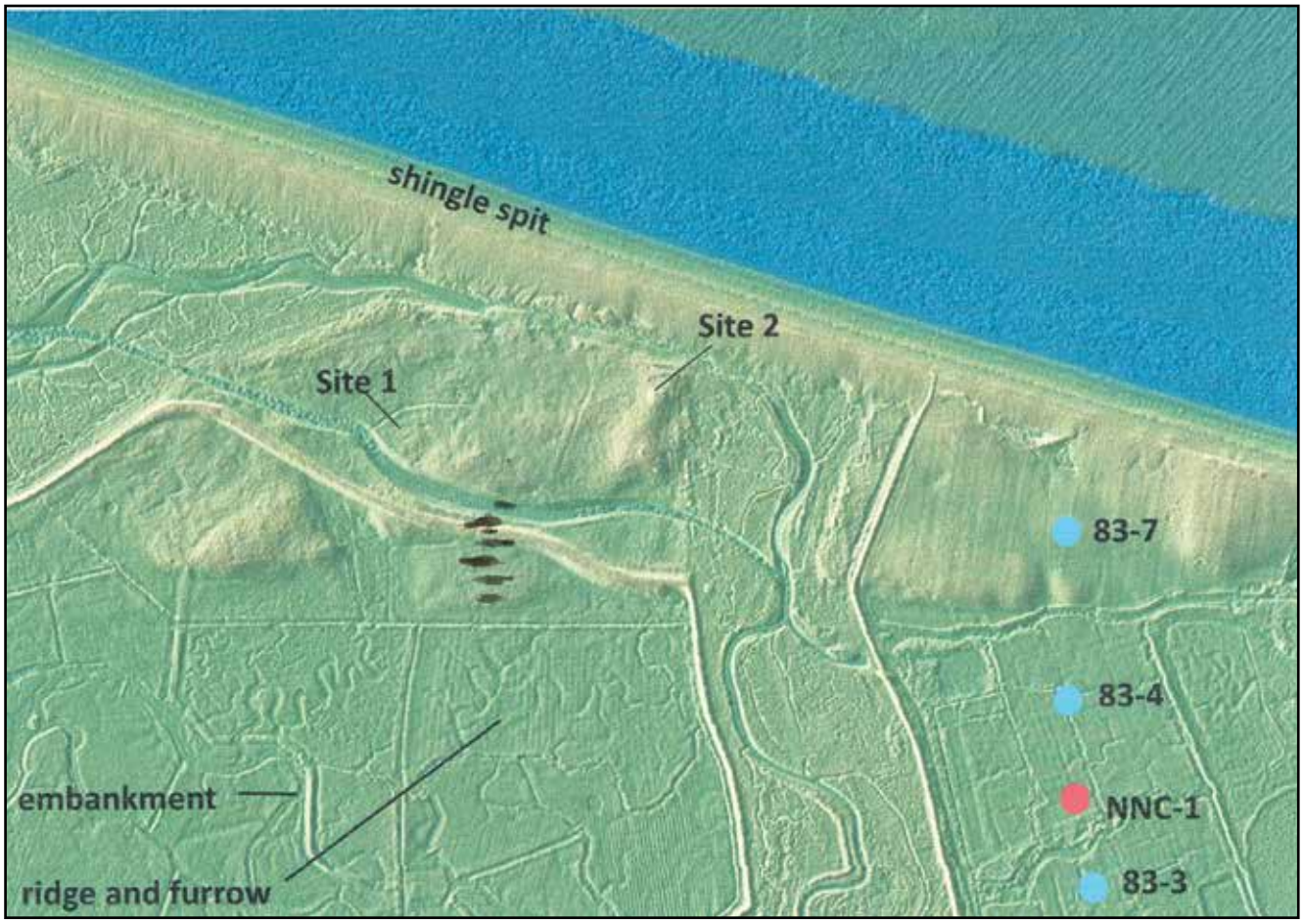


Fig. 4. High definition Lidar plot of Blakeney and Cley Eyes (Vanishing Landscape fig. 2.2)

Topography

An account of the physical evolution of the area appears in Chapter 2. It opens with reference to a ridge of land extending east-west between the coastal marshes and the sea, the higher parts of which are known as 'eyes'. This ridge, composed of glacial sands and gravels overlying the chalk bedrock, extends from Blakeney Eye eastwards to Cley Eye and on to the north of Salthouse where it is lost to marine erosion. Between this ridge and the land lies a deep trough cut into the chalk extending right along the north Norfolk coast and now filled with marsh deposits. The supposition is that the River Glaven originally flowed into this trough and then either to the east or the west to reach the sea. At some point it 'must have been forced northward and cut the channel between Blakeney and Cley Eyes' although the chapter does not suggest how this might have occurred.

During the post-glacial period there has been constant erosion of the cliffs of north-east Norfolk and a continual landward movement of the shingle beach that fronts the marshland coast west of Weybourne. This process will have reduced the size of the Eye which once extended much further north than it does today. The westward growth of the beach as a shingle spit then obstructed the outflow of the Glaven and pushed it westward causing yet more erosion on the northern side of the Eye. The river was also pushed southward by the inward movement of the beach where 'in turn it eroded the southern edge of the Eye' (although this process is difficult to visualise with the river running to the north of it.)

Boreholes have provided some evidence about topographical changes since the ending of the Ice Age. In the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods, either side of 4,000 BC, the area between the ridge and the mainland

was a tidal flat with some low-level salt marsh. By the Middle Bronze Age continued deposition had produced high-level salt marsh, later converted to fresh marsh and agricultural use by means of successive embankments.

At the eastern end of the Eye, where the Chapel lies, hand auguring showed a sequence of sand and silt, overlying the glacial sands and gravels, on which a soil developed during the prehistoric period. A borehole on the north-western edge of the Eye showed a salt marsh surface dating to the 11th-12th centuries with two phases of dune formation above, the first providing a soil for the medieval occupation of the Eye, the second occurring perhaps during the period of storms recognised in the excavation.

Sandwiched in the topographical description is some speculation about the process of enclosing the salt marsh for agricultural use. The LIDAR survey (Fig. 2.2) shows several fields of 'apparent ridge and furrow' either overlying former creeks or cut by later ones. The ridges are all straight and are of two different widths. The text supposes that the wider ones are early while the narrow ones indicate more recent cultivation. The ridges are bounded by an embankment linking to the Eye an area forming two large fields. The western field has signs of subsequent tidal incursions, but the eastern field appears to have had an extended period of cultivation probably in the medieval period and therefore contemporary with occupation of the Eye in the 13th and 14th centuries. The flooding of the western field might have occurred during the storm events of Phases 5-6 which broke through the north wall of the later building on the Eye, events that are described in Chapter 3.

The embankment around the two fields is not shown on the 1586 map nor are any other embankments, either because of the small scale of the map or because they were not relevant to its purpose. The text notes that much of the land between the Eye and the mainland is shown as 'partly reclaimed', a view which seems to accord with the 'grass' symbol being shown there as well as on the Eye – in contrast to the 'mud' symbol on the salt marshes west of Blakeney.

In discussing the possible sequence of embanking, the Chapter notes the uncertainties but concludes that the two enclosed fields pre-date Henry Calthorpe's 1636 bank enclosing the whole marsh south of the Eye. The text refers to a separate bank built in 1636 across the Glaven at Cley 'presumably in an attempt to protect the villages'. As a result of local opposition it was taken down very soon afterwards and Calthorpe then appears to have begun enclosing 'that part of the Blakeney Eye which lay in Cley parish'. This description is somewhat misleading. Jonathan Hooton's book (*The Glaven Ports*) explains that the bank at Cley was built in 1637 as a means of converting the tidal valley upstream to fresh marsh. It was removed almost immediately and Calthorpe then set about building a bank around the whole of the marshland between the Eye and the mainland. It is not clear when this long bank was completed but Hooton suggests around 1650 or soon after. Parts of the area had already been enclosed. In a deed of 1625/6 James Calthorpe allows Wiveton residents to have 'common of pasture and feed for their sheep' on the south-eastern section of the marshes, in Wiveton parish, where 'sundrie bancks and marshe walles' had lately been put up by Christopher his father. The 'part of Blakeney Eye which lay in Cley parish' coincides with the area already enclosed by the embankment around the two fields containing the ridge and furrow.

The main creeks shown on the 1586 map are still present in today's landscape. This map, together with later ones, provides evidence to show that ground has been lost to the sea at an average rate of roughly one metre per year. It is suggested that the land lying north of the present Eye between the river and the sea may have been part of the ridge rather than a wide beach. This view supposes that the distance between the Eye and the sea is too wide to be a beach, and may also align with the 'grass' symbol being used there as well as on the Eye. On the other hand, the symbol also denotes the high-level salt marsh south of the Eye. If the area to the north of the Eye were also salt marsh it would accord with Hooton's fig. 57, already cited as a reference in the Chapter. These qualifications may not be accurate either but they point to the possibility of an alternative view to that presented in the published report.

The initial survey

Chapter 3 describes in some detail all the fieldwork that was carried out: the initial evaluation of the whole area, the small excavation in the middle of the Eye, and the excavation of the Chapel on the eastern extremity.

The Environment Agency, through their agent Halcrow, commissioned the then Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) to undertake an initial evaluation of the Eye consisting of geophysical surveys, a series of boreholes and trial trenching. The geophysical work, carried out in 2002 by Stratascan, comprised magnetometer and electromagnetic surveys of the whole 10 hectares, except possibly on the lowest parts of the Eye where conditions were too damp (the relevant sentence is unfinished).

In 2003 the NAU followed this initial work with 51 (50 plus one unnumbered) machine-dug trenches, each 50m long and 1.8m wide, set out in a herringbone pattern to give an even coverage across the Eye and representing the excavation of some 5% of the whole area. Some of the geophysical results had suggested the presence of archaeological features but subsequent examination showed most of them to be of natural origin. A few contained medieval or earlier items and two (in trenches 19 and 20) had Neolithic finds which prompted a more detailed excavation in that vicinity (termed 'Area 1').

In addition to the trenches across the Eye, another six were positioned around, across and inside the Chapel which was to be fully excavated as 'Area 2'. In one of these trenches, just to the north of the building, metal detecting found a gold bracteate (a pendant). These rare objects are of Saxon origin and so the find was assumed to date the soil layer in which it lay. The report does not contain a separate section describing the position and extent of these six trenches or the finds they produced. Instead the information gained is incorporated in the account of the main excavation.

The initial aim of the project had been defined as 'to find out more about the enigmatic building and its setting'. As a result of the evaluation the main aims of further work were:

- to discover whether any features could be associated with the bracteate;
- to determine the date of a ditch found beneath the building;
- to investigate the possible timber structure found in the evaluation;
- to determine the relationship between the two cells of the building.

The evaluation trenches are not described here and so

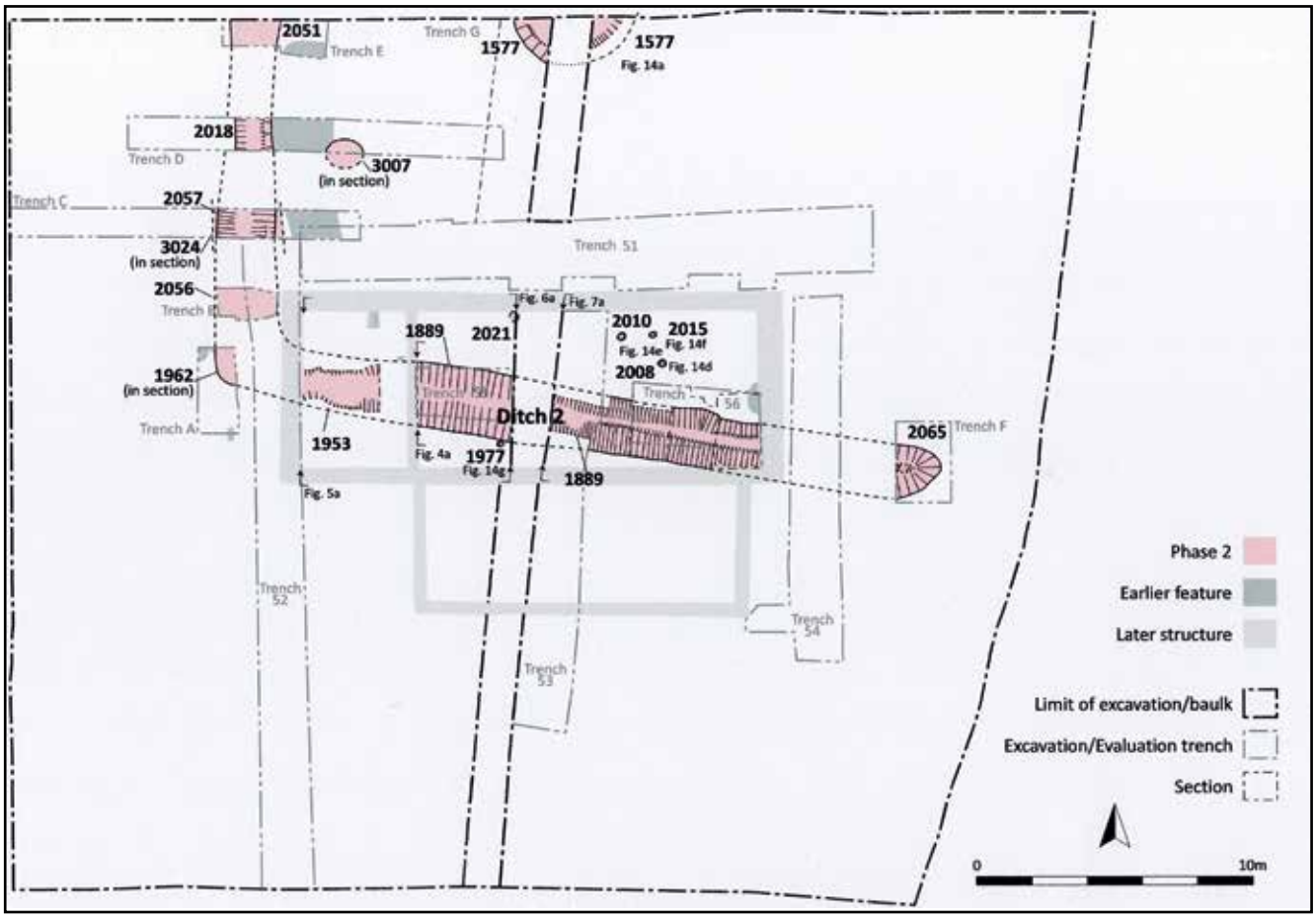


Fig. 5. Phase 2 features (Vanishing Landscape fig. 3.12)

the identification of a ditch and possible timber building comes later in the report. It is not unusual to see additional aims made necessary as work proceeds and at the Eye one more was added:

• to investigate the industrial features of the larger cell.

The reader interested in the structural history and use of the Chapel building might have expected to see those defined as the principal aims of the excavation but the nature and chronology of occupation on the Eye is nevertheless the dominant theme in the interpretation of the finds.

The excavation of area 1: the Neolithic finds

In 2004 a small area half-way along the Eye was opened up to look in detail at some features seen in evaluation trenches 19 and 20. The text description of the area as 40 square metres should be disregarded as the plan makes clear that it was approximately 40 metres square – very much larger. (Later text places this area 100m south-west of the Chapel but an accompanying plan shows the distance to be 280m.) In the excavated area were many assorted depressions, some interpreted as natural features. The rest were classed as 27 pits, with a diameter greater than an arbitrary 0.5m, and 16 post-holes that were smaller. Some of the pits contained a few worked flints but the only significant finds were 84 flints and 77 pieces of Neolithic pottery from one charcoal-rich pit which had been found in trench 20. The pottery came from at least four different vessels and the charcoal was interpreted as charred domestic refuse.

In the south-eastern corner of the excavation was an arc of four small pits and one post-hole which had intrigued visitors because it formed about one third of a circle. These features are shown on the plan but were not considered to be of any archaeological significance. Visitors were also able to see the skull, fore limbs and some other parts of a horse skeleton. The animal had been buried, rather than left to decay, but there was no dating evidence and at 15 hands it was probably too big to be Neolithic. A later chapter suggests that it is likely to be relatively recent.

The excavation of area 2: the Chapel site

The Area 2 excavation extended over the Chapel building and up to a 10m perimeter around it. The maximum dimensions were 39m x 31m with the building in the centre taking up about 15 per cent of the area. A JCB removed the backfill of the six evaluation trenches (51-56) and the turf and topsoil of the perimeter, the topsoil inside the building being removed by hand. Limitations on time and funding prevented the excavation of the whole area down to the natural deposits although seven small trenches (A-G) were dug down to that level to investigate known or possible features. Metal detecting was carried out within the excavation and on the spoil heap. For descriptive purposes the northern, larger cell was termed Structure 1 and the southern, smaller one Structure 2.

The location of all the trenches is shown in Fig. 4. Three of the evaluation trenches (54, 51, 52) were placed alongside the east, north and west walls of Structure 1, trench 53 was cut north-south across the middle of the building, while 55 and 56 were short lengths inside Structure 1. The additional trenches

taken down through all the soil layers were outside the north-western corner of the building apart from one positioned well to the east. Except where it had already been removed by evaluation trench 51, a narrow north-south baulk across the site was left unexcavated for possible future reference. Fig 3.12 shows (in grey) the traces of Ditch 1 from Phase 1 as well as (in pink) Ditch 2 from Phase 2. The outline of the later building is also shown.

The account of the excavation and the deductions that were made are prefaced by a significant qualification. Many small features contained no datable finds; conversely, other features and soil deposits contained finds of widely different dates and some pieces of the same pot were found in many different places. In this exposed spot storms had contributed to varying degrees of erosion over the site in the form of weathering, flooding and wind blow, and to the mixing of deposits. The depth of archaeological deposits reached nearly one metre inside the building but was less and variable outside. Identifying the sequence and chronology of events was therefore difficult.

The initial interpretation of the site had been set out by Richard Lee, the director of the main excavation, in his article in the *Glaven Historian* 9. He had envisaged three main stages of development:

- In Phase I a ditched enclosure, possibly of the 11th-12th centuries.
- In Phase II the building and use of 'Structure 1' during the 14th-15th centuries.
- In Phase III the building and use of 'Structure 2' with the re-use of 1 during the 16th-17th centuries.

The suggested dating was based largely on the pottery finds.

He noted that Structure 1 had been built without foundation trenches although the base courses now had 'the consistency of reinforced concrete'. The remaining flintwork showed that much time and money had been spent on what appears to have been a high-status building. After it had fallen into disuse, perhaps by 1600, three storm events had left deposits around and inside the building. These were followed by the building of Structure 2, of much poorer quality and probably re-using some materials from Structure 1, although the western end of that cell was redeveloped at the same time.

Lee's report had also noted that set into the modern street frontage in Cley is a medieval stone arch whose measurements were such 'that it would fit very neatly into the west entrance of Structure 1' although he did not take the implication any further. The Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER No. 31028) lists the arch as 14th / 15th century in date but does not suggest any provenance.

Lee had found that interpreting the complex deposits had been made more difficult by the evaluation trenches having removed material from within and immediately around the Chapel to the extent that some archaeological relationships had been lost before the full excavation began. This is echoed in the new report where, in commenting on the lack of records for a particular feature, the author implies some exasperation on the part of the later excavators. The reviewer can make no comment on the efficacy of the earlier work except to express some surprise that so many 'evaluation' trenches were needed around and across a building whose remains could be seen and which was about to be excavated.

A Vanishing Landscape does not refer directly to the initial interpretation but says that the phasing of events identified during the excavation was modified as a result of more detailed analysis. The new report describes a sequence of eight main phases, with some sub-phases. Some are given an approximate date range, and together they extend from the prehistoric through to the 19th century (Table 1).

Phase	Description	Approx. Date
1a	early ground surface overlying natural	Prehistoric?
1b	Boundary ditch 1 and associated features	Prehistoric?
2a	Ground surface(s) 2	Prehistoric
2b	Boundary ditch 2 and associated features	Late prehistoric
3a	Domestic activity pre ditch	13th-14th c.
3b	Boundary ditch 3 1636	
3c	Later than ditch but pre-building	
4a	construction of Structure 1	Later 16th c.
4b	use of Structure 1 large ovens	
4c	Later use of Structure 1	
5a	Natural event 1	17th c.
5b	Activity after Natural Event 1	
5c	Natural Event 2	
5d	Activity after Natural Event 2	
6	Natural Event 3	
7	Alterations to Structure 1	17th century
	Construction of Structure 2	Late 17th c.
8	Collapse and disuse of the Buildings	18th-19th c.

Table 1. Site phasing (Vanishing Landscape table 3.3)

The earliest activity on the site **(Phase 1)** is represented by some pits or post-holes and a large ditch seen only in the north-west quadrant of the site because elsewhere the excavations did not reach down to that ground surface. More worked flints (430) were found in this area than the total from all other areas of the Eye. The ditch contained no finds but one of the pits contained charcoal and flints, some of which could be fitted together, and this feature could be Neolithic in date.

Sealing all these dug features was a silty sand extending across much of the site. The finds from this **Phase 2** horizon were wide-ranging in date suggesting a source in later layers subsequently eroded. The spectacular find was a gold bracteate of the late 5th or early 6th century from the base of evaluation trench 51. At first this surface was thought to be of Saxon date but with most finds being worked flints and no medieval finds in the cut features it was later considered to be Neolithic. The features cut into it included pits, post-holes and a large enclosure ditch running east-west under the northern cell and possibly turning northwards just beyond the west wall.

This ditch and associated features were dated tentatively to the late prehistoric period and were followed by a hiatus in activity of over 1,000 years, there being only a few finds of Roman date with no associated features. The bracteate, and a fragment of glass bowl some 200 years later in date, may be casual losses but some Saxo-Norman pottery sherds could suggest the occasional occupation of the site during this long period.

In **Phase 3a**, following the hiatus, the site was re-occupied during the 13th and 14th centuries according to datable pottery and other material. In evaluation trench 54, outside the east wall of the building, post-holes had been assessed as possible evidence for a timber building, but although the later excavation found pits, post-holes and gullies as well as much domestic refuse and artefacts, there was not enough evidence to substantiate a building.

The finds and features of this level were sealed by a medieval soil horizon **(Phase 3b)** containing some datable pottery, including Grimston ware jugs, and also some coins spanning the 13th and 14th centuries (but actually the 14th century and later according to Chapter 8). Into this deposit was cut a third ditch running east-west under the northern cell, as had the previous one, with many finds including pottery sherds from at least 37 vessels ranging from the 14th to the 17th centuries.

The report describes numerous finds and features from this Phase, including two hearths in the north-east corner of Structure 1 with evidence of burning on the adjacent north and east walls. Some hammer-scale, tiny flakes of iron oxide, was present but not enough to indicate the presence of a smithy.

Introducing **Phase 4a**, the erection of Structure 1, the report describes a large area of pits and post-holes in the north-west corner of the site which may have extended beyond the limit of the excavation. The presence of mortar suggested that they were contemporary with the construction of the first building, possibly as a mortar mixing area. The precise position of the building in the stratigraphic sequence could not be determined because of the lack of foundation cuts, the subsequent erosion of deposits, and probably also the clearance of deposits from inside the building after storm damage.

Structure 1 was a single-cell building 18m by 6m, surviving to a maximum height of 1.3m (under the turf) and with walls 0.6m thick. The walls were of roughly-coursed flint cobbles, some knapped to give a flush finish to the walls, on a flint foundation of four courses. Internally there was evidence of flint pieces inserted into the mortar between the cobbles, a technique often used in preparation for plastering. The internal corners were of blocks of dressed limestone which may have been re-used from some other building. The impression given was of a well-built structure, 'perhaps of some local importance'. There was an entrance 1.4m wide in the north wall, and another in the western wall which was subsequently blocked. The surviving walls were not high enough to show any evidence of windows and there was no sign of stairs to a second storey.

Deposits within the building have been affected by erosion and it was difficult to assess the activities which may have taken place there **(Phase 4b)**. Inside the west end was a sandy deposit containing medieval pottery including parts of cooking pots of 14th-17th century date from which fragments were found in both earlier and later deposits. In the south-west corner were the remains of a brick-lined hearth or oven. The six surviving bricks were of 14th-15th century but the oven appeared to be contemporary with a mortar surface which included pieces of pottery of the late 15th-16th century.

Within the building a mortar surface extended nearly 3m from the west wall to finish in a straight eastern edge which may have abutted a partition wall subsequently removed. A Flemish floor tile of the 14th -15th century was found here suggesting that the mortar may have been the bedding for a tiled floor.

Finds elsewhere included more 14th-17th century pottery and brick, animal bones, ironwork and also hearths. In the north-west corner the back-fill from two pits contained a large number of finds, including 11th-14th century pottery and worked flints, suggesting that the material had been collected from elsewhere. Among the other finds from this Phase was a possible floor surface in the central area from which a mid-15th century halfpenny had been recorded during the evaluation, together with a mix of pottery, the latest vessels being of 15th-16th century type.

A number of weather 'events' in this exposed location had a serious impact on the building, eventually resulting in internal alterations, the construction of an extension on the southern side and ultimately the destruction of the site. Three storm events were identified within the lifetime of Structure 1 but many other such events probably took place that have left no trace because of subsequent erosion. Even so, it would appear that 'the timescale between the building of Structure 1 and its eventual demise was very short'. Those familiar with the Eye will know that storms over the past century have not covered it with sand and shingle but the 1586 map shows that Blakeney Point was then much shorter, so giving the Eye less protection.

Two of these storm events recorded outside the building are described as **Phase 5** while a later storm (Phase 6) penetrated the interior. Deposits from the first (Phase 5a) were fairly limited. They were identified in evaluation trenches 51 and 54 (on the north-east and east sides of Structure 1) and also around the north-west side during the later excavation. They were not seen inside the building; either the door kept deposits out or else they were cleared away.

After some occupation activity **(Phase 5b)** a second storm event producing wind blown yellow sand **(Phase 5c)** was recorded on all four sides of Structure 1, including the area covered later by the southern cell. The report describes a large number of pits, post-holes and finds, and also several mortar surfaces outside and close to the west end of the building **(Phase 5d)**.

Coarse sands containing gravel found all around Structure 1 were interpreted as the result of a third flooding event **(Phase 6)**. Unlike previous storms the deposits of 'natural event 3' contained much domestic material, including 126 sherds from 78 vessels mostly of medieval date but with six vessels from the 16th-17th centuries. Other finds included animal bones, shells, slag, hammer-scale and a hearth bottom. This flood pushed deposits through the north entrance of the building but they did not extend into the western part of the cell, as if prevented by a partition wall. The presence of this deposit with all its domestic waste suggests that the building went out of use temporarily as a result. The flood appeared to have caused substantial damage and though the sequence of events is unclear it seems to have prompted alterations to Structure 1 and the building of the abutting southern cell, Structure 2 **(Phase 7)**.

Inside Structure 1 a new partition wall was erected creating a small room to the west and a larger one to the east, with no doorway between them. The eastern side of this wall lay on the top of the flood material and incorporated within it were sherds of a type of jug not made before 1625. Contemporary with the construction of this partition wall was a closely-packed floor of cobbles, some re-used, over most of the western room.

Built at the same time against the inside of the southern wall was an oven with a mixture of late medieval and 16th-17th century bricks. A new, and narrow, entrance to the western room was made in the southern wall and the door in the west wall was blocked with flint cobbles. Both this and the partition wall were of poorer quality than the rest of Structure 1 and similar to the standard of Structure 2, perhaps indicating that they were all built at the same time.

Structure 2 was 15.5m by 4.5m with flint walls and brick quoins set in a foundation trench dug through the deposits of 'natural event 3'. The door was in the middle of the south wall and there was no access into Structure 1. In the centre of the cell was a double fireplace with hearths back to back implying two rooms although there was no sign of any partition. A mortar floor surface extended over much of the new building.

The report says that the sequence of events entailed in the collapse of the whole building **(Phase 8)** is not known although many individual deposits are described. Nearly 4,000 fragments of pantiles were recovered from the eastern room of Structure 1. There were also 20 pieces of slate, perhaps from a patching of the pantile roof. The western room of Structure 1 did not have a substantial layer of collapsed roof tiles over its floor, so the roof may have been taken down or perhaps it collapsed into the eastern room. The debris extending out through the southern door contained some pieces of pantile suggesting this had been the roofing material. The earliest layer of collapsed material contained fragments of 17th century clay pipes, the deposit being sealed by further episodes of wall collapse.

A thick layer of roofing debris was found inside Structure 2 around the fireplaces, including many pieces of pantile and another 20 pieces of slate. Outside the west wall of Structure 2 was further building debris containing assorted domestic material. To the north and east the collapsed debris laid directly over the storm deposit but only in small quantities, perhaps having been diminished by later storm events. Further material to the east and south-east contained a mix of debris, including 626 fragments of slate, a total far exceeding the number found within the buildings.

The loss of the roof marked the end of occupation on the site. The mix of rubble and topsoil overlaying the main collapse indicates the removal of roof timbers and other re-useable materials over an extended period of time.

The environmental remains

Chapter 4 describing the environmental remains is the longest in the report although many pages consist of tabulated data. Soil samples were collected from a range of features including pits, post-holes, hearths and floors, from a variety of deposits including flood gravels and windblown sands, and from all phases of occupation. The remains were obtained by wet sieving and the use of a magnet to obtain hammer-scale. The primary intention was to obtain evidence for diet and agricultural products and to document their changes over time. A great variety of seeds was recovered as well as mammal, bird and fish bones, and also fragments of pottery, building materials and other artefacts.

The chapter comments briefly on the artefacts before describing the animal and plant remains in detail. In particular, the concentrations of hammer-scale indicate that iron smithing was being undertaken in Phase 3 before the building of the Chapel thereby supporting evidence for an earlier unrecognised building on the site – or perhaps it was associated with the actual construction of the Chapel. Phase 3 also had the highest concentration of animal bones and cereal grains, as well as the pottery fragments, suggesting a full range of domestic rubbish from an intensive period of occupation.

Charred plant remains were found in 62 of the 79 processed samples and were identified using a microscope with x40 magnification. Cereal debris was found in 90 per cent of the samples and this amounted to almost three quarters of the total material, the rest being from other cultivated food and wild plants. In the medieval samples barley was the most common cereal followed by oats, then wheat and a little rye. This order is typical of the medieval period, but as the richest samples all came from Phases 3a – 3c it was not possible to say whether these proportions changed over time on the site. In the remaining material seeds of peas and beans were particularly common and seeds from a variety of wild plants were also present.

Bones from many species of fish were retrieved from the sieved samples including sturgeon, roker, cod, ling, bass, mackerel, halibut and plaice. The largest numbers of bones came from samples of 13th-14th century date, herring being the most common, followed by plaice and other flatfish. Bones from fish caught in northern waters, such as ling and torsk, were present but in small numbers and fish from deeper water were represented by a halibut and at least two cod.

Fish bones were also recovered by hand from the excavation process but these were biased in favour of the larger species as their bones were more visible to the eye. Again, the largest number of bones came from the medieval deposits. The hand collection included bones from ling, cod and sturgeon. The range of species indicates an active inshore fishery, and access to cod from long lining in deeper water, with more northerly species likely to have been brought in from ports such as Lynn by professional fishermen. Not mentioned, but providing some support for this assessment, is the document from 1596 in which Christopher Heydon demised Thornham's Eye to James Calthorpe while retaining the rights 'for the landinge washinge dryinge packinge … of fish codd or linge … or pitchinge of boothes' during August and September (Wright 1999).

Samples from the late medieval period produced relatively few fish bones. In the final Phases 6 – 8, with the post-medieval erection of Structure 2 and the re-occupation of Structure 1, the bones were mainly from herring and flatfish. The shellfish remains commonly included oyster, followed in frequency by cockles and then winkles and mussels.

Over 2,600 animal bones from the excavation are described as 'hand-collected' to distinguish them from the sieved samples, although 17 per cent of these were excluded from the analysis because of disturbance of the topsoil from the evaluation trenching. The remainder, mostly in good condition, were analysed in some detail by species, by age as represented by bone structure, and by reference to three grouped periods: medieval (Phase 3), a late medieval transition period represented by the building of Structure 1 (Phases 4 and 5), and later events following storms (Phases 6 to 8).

One table suggests a major change in the pastoral economy of the site between the medieval and the post-medieval occupation. In the 13th and 14th centuries cattle bones dominate with sheep a little less

frequent, and chickens and domestic geese were also present. By Phase 6 sheep have become dominant and more so by Phases 7 and 8, when chickens and geese are rare. By Phase 8 the Eye is primarily a sheep grazing area, as indicated by 'sheep walk' written on the 1769 map.

For the medieval period it is reasonable to assume that the bones have come from animals reared on a mixed economy farm but in later periods carcasses and food waste may have been from animals brought to the site. If so, the change in emphasis from cattle to sheep may not fully reflect farming activity on the Eye.

Chapter 4 ends with a long discussion using material already presented in previous chapters and a further evaluation of the environmental remains in an attempt to say more about the changing nature of occupation on the Eye.

The environmental finds suggest that in the medieval period the site was a mixed farm growing barley, peas and beans and probably oats, and rearing cattle and sheep with pigs, chickens and geese. It was a 'potentially self-sufficient land unit' consisting of grazing land on the Eye itself and both grazing and arable fields on an area of enclosed marshland adjoining the Eye to the south. The text asserts that the enclosure clearly pre-dates Calthorpe's bank constructed in 1636 – although this statement needs to be revisited in view of the comments made in the 'Topography' section above. Phase 3 deposits from the 13th and 14th centuries include more charred grains, animal bones and hammer-scale, and a greater amount of domestic rubbish than was found in the later phases, even though no building was identified.

With the construction of the first building 'in the late 16th century' (Phase 4) the concentration of domestic rubbish falls; it was probably being dumped beyond the limits of the excavation. Only marine shells and charred grain occur in any significant quantity, although building debris is abundant. The environmental elements remain the same as in earlier deposits but in different proportions which does seem to indicate changing land use. The proportion of sheep to cattle increases and herring is by far the most common fish: cod and inshore flatfish are almost absent.

The Phase 4 remains include sheep skeletons from inside the west end of the building suggesting that this part had already fallen out of use, although this seems to be contradicted by archaeological evidence suggesting continued occupation. Perhaps the abandonment was temporary, or maybe the phasing is inaccurate – it was difficult to establish from the stratigraphy. Similarly, the conclusion that the salt-marsh enclosure and the associated ridge and furrow should be assigned to Phase 3 may also be awry: the text suggests that they could be contemporary with the building in Phases 4 and 5.

Two flood events assigned to Phase 5 during the 17th century spread deposits around much of the building, but there is evidence to suggest that it continued to be used. Again, building debris dominates the finds, although shells, especially oyster, reach their highest concentration on the site. The proportion of sheep to cattle continues to increase.

At this point the chapter discusses what can be deduced from the 1586 map which shows Thornham's Eye covered with rabbits and with a figure seeming to be a ferreter. The finds on the Eye did include rabbit bones, many fairly recent, but it would be 'a big step' on that evidence to describe the Eye as a rabbit warren with a warrener's cottage (a suggestion made later in the report). The text notes that while the Eye is covered with rabbits the marsh at Morston is being grazed by sheep but whether these differences can be accepted as 'truly representative of any land use in the late 16th and early 17th century at the site seems particularly unlikely'. John Darby, the mapmaker, might have disagreed. There is nothing unusual about salt marsh being used to graze sheep: it was so in the tidal valley of the Glaven in the mid 1500s, and at Stiffkey up until the end of the 1930s.

Phase 7 represents a period of alteration to the building and the construction of an extension to the south in the late 17th century. In this phase were significant numbers of iron and copper alloy finds and hammer-scale indicating iron smithing. No evidence suggested the use of the building: 'any one of a farmer, warrener, shepherd, fisherman, customs officer ....' might have lived there. A relative absence of chicken and goose bones suggests that the building was no longer a farm as fowl would almost certainly be present. The environmental finds suggest a change from a medieval farmstead with arable fields to a later pastoral farm or a non-farming role. The chapter concludes that the nature of the occupation on the Eye is an 'irresolvable problem' without documentary evidence.

The Prehistoric remains

Chapter 5 describes the prehistoric remains from the site, mostly worked flints with some Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pottery. Some 664 pieces of struck flint were distributed mostly in medieval layers but representing significant activity in the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods, perhaps from seasonal occupation. Some late Neolithic and Bronze Age flint work may be present and some flakes may derive from flint dressing for walls in the medieval period. A group of flints, containing one third of the blades found on the site, came from one pit and suggests Neolithic flint knapping there. Some of the flints have been drawn for the report. All the 91 pieces of prehistoric pottery were found in the excavation of Area 1 and came from at least 5 Neolithic bowls (or four in Chapter 3). One sherd was from a Bronze Age beaker dating from around 2300 BC.

The pottery

The pottery described in considerable detail in Chapter 6 represents a significant group of material from the 12th to the 19th centuries (Table 2). It has been analysed by type of fabric, by type of vessel (a few pieces are drawn), by period of manufacture and by area of origin.

Roman pottery was represented by only three fragments, showing that the Eye was not then part of the settlement pattern. Post-Roman pottery amounted to 1,360 sherds, weighing 17kg, from both the evaluation trenches and the main excavation. These came from at least 565 vessels and from 50 different wares, each with a production span of between 50 and 400 years, so not easily dated.

The chapter notes where the pottery was found and in which phases of occupation. Because of the disturbance on the site most pottery could not be associated with particular features and medieval and late medieval pottery was found in all eight phases. Table 2 (6.9 in the report) shows this distribution and a reduced version is shown below. (The total of 642, after correcting an error in the Table, is larger than the 565 vessels

Site Phase	Medieval 1150-1530	Late medieval & transitional 1350-1600	Post medieval 1530-1800	Totals
1 + 2	11	6	0	17
3	114	104	5	223
4	11	36	1	48
5	34	44	1	79
6	10	64	4	78
7	7	24	35	66
8	33	57	41	131
Totals	220	335	87	642

Table 2. Pottery arranged by ceramic period by site phase (vessel count) (simplified from Vanishing Landscape table 6.9)

identified because parts of some pots were found in deposits of more than one phase.) The Table excludes 18 vessels of Roman, Saxon, Norman or early medieval date, and three modern ones, post 1800.

The largest group of vessels came from Phase 3, before the construction of Structure 1, but the site is so disturbed that almost half the vessels that can be dated to the period 1150-1530 were found in phases attributed to the 17th century or later. The pottery alone cannot therefore be used to date the building and the text ventures only that it does not contradict documentary evidence of construction before the late 16th century. The presence of a type of jug first made in 1625 shows that the alteration of Structure 1 took place after that date.

Local pottery is a small proportion of the total in all phases with most of it, especially in the medieval period, being Grimston ware from west Norfolk (not from the Grimston in Yorkshire, as appears in one paragraph). The later medieval period is dominated by continental imports, a reflection of proximity to the port of Cley rather than an indication of high status.

The building remains

The excavation produced over 10,000 pieces of ceramic building material (brick and tile) weighing in at 1,393 kg (27 cwt) of which 417 pieces were retained for analysis. Of these, 265 were whole bricks or fragments which could be divided into 10 groups and 23 types in 15 different fabrics. In Chapter 7 the groups and types are not defined (and do not correspond to dating) but the fabrics are described in some detail. Two of the groups (A and G) were probably from Flanders, the others being from more local sources. The earliest bricks were made from estuarine deposits in the 14th-15th centuries. Some had evidence of burning from use in a hearth or oven, possibly from the Phase 4b occupation of Structure 1 in the later 16th century although there is no suggestion here that they might have been re-used from an earlier building.

Pantiles are Flemish in origin and were introduced into England from the 16th to the 18th centuries. They came into the Glaven ports from the Netherlands and then from Humberside until the early 1700s when they began to be made in Norfolk. The tiles found on the Eye are mostly of 18th and 19th century date although some 16th-century tiles may be present. The quantity found in Phase 8 suggests that pantiles roofed much of the building. If some pantiles are from the 19th century they would have had a short life on the roof before its disuse and collapse.

Some flat roof tiles appear to be earlier than the pantiles. They had a variety of fabrics and date from the 13th century into the 'early post-medieval period'.

Only ten pieces of floor tile were found, in three different fabrics. Seven glazed ones were Flemish and are likely to date from the 14th or 15th centuries. One piece from the Phase 4b mortar surface in the west end of Structure 1 'may indicate original flooring'. The three unglazed pieces are from the late 17th century at the earliest.

Of 43 mortar samples collected 13 were suitable for chemical analysis. They were of two broad types: a coarse one for structural use and a finer one that would have been suitable for plastering. They were described as being 'almost certainly medieval' in date. This conclusion does not seem to sit easily with the supposed building of the Structure 1 in the late 16th century – but when does the medieval period end? According to Table 6.9 it ends in 1530 although to judge from random sources there seems to be no standard definition of chronological periods. Some historians use 'early modern' to denote the Tudor period (from 1485) while Historic England suggests 1540 (the Dissolution of the Monasteries) as a suitable end to the medieval period. For those living at the time historical periods do not change abruptly from one to the next so perhaps some fluidity in definition is to be expected.

Dressed blocks of limestone (19 in all) were present in the two cells, some built into the corners of the building, one in the cross wall in Structure 1 and others in the fireplace of Structure 2. One piece had decoration which may have been from a blind arcade or window, while others had mouldings which date from the 14th century onwards. This stonework has been re-used and would have come from a building of high status.

The metal and other finds

Chapter 8 describing the metal finds opens with a reference to the rare bracteate found near the Chapel. The description is limited to three sentences but anyone wishing to know more can read about it in the article in the *Glaven Historian* 7 (Birks 2004, 18-20) and more detailed accounts are published elsewhere (Behr 2010). The bracteate is 41mm (1½ in) in diameter and is made of gold (Fig. 6). It is of a type mostly found in some Anglo-Saxon burials in Kent, but has an animal motif similar to that found on a bronze disc from Billingford, just north of Dereham. Five gold bracteates have since been found in Binham, probably part of a hoard unique

Fig. 6. The bracteate (Vanishing Landscape fig. 8.1)

in Britain (Behr, Pestell and Hines 2014).

The nine early coins are briefly described although the paragraph of text does not agree with the list which follows it. From the list, six were from particular contexts and three from the spoil-heap. The only Roman coin, a Valentinianic issue (AD 364 – 378), was from a ground surface which might, or might not, have been Roman in date. Five coins of Edward I and Edward II (four stratified, one from a spoil-heap) were found, all dating from 1300-1310. These coins were probably lost soon after manufacture which 'strongly suggests that the four contexts should be dated to the very early 14th century', although other chapter authors are wary of dating stratigraphy in this way because of the extensive disturbance on site. Of the remaining three coins the latest was a Charles I farthing of 1625-1634.

The evaluation trenches produced 110 other metal finds, mostly post-medieval and modern. A further 532, nearly all made of iron, came from the main excavation. The material was not fully examined until 2016 by which time the iron items had deteriorated to the point where radiography was rarely worthwhile. These numbers are those 'examined' suggesting that they were samples of those found, confirmed by the retention of 10 per cent of the 1,000 nails found – although the text then refers to 356 timber nails of various types. Nails used for construction included some particularly suitable for slate roofing. Some clench bolts might have been used in boat building but those found on the site may have come from boat timbers incorporated into the building.

Other metal objects included parts of household items, horse equipment, fish hooks, parts of tools including shears, and an ear scoop which is paralleled in a 14th century deposit in London.

A report on the slag was prepared in 2005, most pieces being complete and in fresh condition suggesting they came from primary deposits. Most were from two separate periods: Phase 3 before the construction of Structure 1, and Phase 4 during its use. Hammer-scale is present in almost all phases but in small quantities and not usually associated with the slag. The presence of both shows that ironworking took place but there was no evidence of a smithy. There may have been one beyond the excavation area or perhaps an itinerant smith attended for the construction or repair of the building.

The remaining finds, listed in Chapter 9, are some pieces of glass and fragments of clay tobacco pipes. The pieces of medieval glass included only one 'worthy of note': a rim from an early medieval bowl of a type made in Sweden and very rarely found in Britain. Two have been found in the middle Saxon monastery in Lyminge in Kent. Other fragments included plain window glass from the 15th to early 17th centuries. The pipe stems are mostly of 17th century type but all were found in the Phase 8 collapse deposits and were probably brought to the site after the collapse (odd though this may seem to the reader).

Conclusions

In a long summary of the project Chapter 10 expands a little on the conclusions reached in the chapters describing the stratigraphy encountered and the finds discovered and analysed. A disclaimer made frequently in the report and again here is that the normal rules of stratigraphy could not be applied on the Eye where deposits and features apparently of medieval or post-medieval date contained prehistoric material – and vice versa. Furthermore, the written records are often 'tangential' to the material evidence from the site, an expression which seems to imply that their validity should not be assumed.

After some use of the Eye during the early Neolithic period, as shown by pottery sherds and worked flints, there was a long gap in occupation until after a period of dune formation between the 11th and 13th centuries and subsequent soil stability. Occupation then produced (in Phase 3) the richest assemblage of artefacts and environmental evidence. The best preserved features from this time lay beneath the later building which prevented their erosion.

The chapter then turns to the materials derived from the building which despite thick walls, could not withstand extreme weather conditions and probably lasted less than 200 years.

Roofing material from a variety of sources suggests multiple repairs and patches. Slate found in 1999 (by BAHS) was identified then as being 'similar to' Delabole slate from Cornwall, a quarry which operated from at least the 15th century. Yet roofing slate earlier than the arrival of Welsh slate in the 19th century has not been identified in Norfolk or Suffolk, although some pieces have been found in Colchester. Transport by sea could have brought them to Norfolk but their presence on the Eye does not automatically confer high status as they could have been re-used. No further analysis of the slate is reported.

Stone quoins in a flint building became increasingly common in Norfolk from the 16th century and their use in the 'rather modest' building on the Eye falls into this pattern and provides some corroboration of the date of the building. Though many bricks were discarded before analysis, the retained sample contained a great variety of types and fabrics. The earliest are from the 14th-15th centuries and the latest from the 16th-18th, the great majority of them re-used, reducing their value for dating purposes but still supporting the more closely-dated groups of pottery.

The five (or seven) fragments of 14th-15th century tile from a floor in the building erected in the lat-

er 16th century have been re-used. Such a floor must have been taken up and removed, which appears to have happened to a later floor as well. Environmental remains suggest the use of plant material, straw or sedge, strewn on the floor at some time. The stonework, perhaps 14th century in date, from the fireplace would have belonged to a high-status building.

The evidence for an earlier building is ephemeral with just a few pits and post-holes preserved mainly beneath the later building and its extension. However, the presence of re-used materials in both cells (brick, tiles, slate and stone), as well as mortar in many Phase 3 deposits, 'raises the possibility that there was a more substantial precursor than hitherto suspected'. For example, a mortar surface in the western part of Structure 1 beneath the cobbled floor might have been the base for a tiled floor or an actual floor surface. It was assumed to be from Phase 4 (the later building) but its relationship to the walls was 'never fully established' and it could have belonged to an earlier building.

Features from Phase 3 produced pottery from at least 230 vessels, half of them of 13th-14th century date and the rest of late 14th-15th century date, apart from a few Saxo-Norman and post-medieval vessels. This period of occupation produced the largest sample of fish bones from species caught inshore and also ling and torsk from more northerly waters, although actual evidence for fishing was sparse. Faunal remains suggest a changing economic strategy with cattle dominant in Phase 3 and then sheep becoming more common after the building of Structure 1 in Phase 4.

The Chapter makes clear that the ridge and furrow cultivation on reclaimed marshland south of the Eye was not part of the investigation and could have been contemporary with either or both of the medieval and post-medieval activity on the Eye. Yet the lack of any study of the ridge and furrow has not prevented the assumption in Chapter 4 that it must have been an essential component of the agricultural regime practised by the medieval farmstead on the Eye, providing land for cereal crops and legumes.

Ridge and furrow has been the subject of much discussion over many years. The typical reversed S shape of medieval ridges which survive in other parts of England seems to have been caused by the turning movements of teams of oxen pulling a plough. They were later replaced by horses producing straight ridges. It is not certain that the features described as ridge and furrow in Fig. 2.2 are the only such ones on Blakeney Freshes – and no mention of them appears in Norfolk's Historic Environment Record.

Pits containing seven partial sheep carcases in the building were recorded as contemporary with Structure 1 because they were dug through two white mortar surfaces. These extended eastwards from the west wall of Structure 1 stopping with a straight edge thought to mark a partition wall subsequently removed. The report conjectures that this floor might possibly have belonged to an earlier timber building whose east wall was marked by the straight edge. There was no evidence of this floor to the west or north of Structure 1, these external areas being heavily eroded. The presence of sheep carcases in the pits implies a period of abandonment of the site, although an alternative interpretation is that these pits belong to the Phase 3 activity – they were the only Phase 4 features with rich environmental deposits akin to the Phase 3 material.

The length of time between the abandonment of the medieval timber structures and the construction of the flint building is not known, but the gap could be due solely to the known climatic deterioration (in Lincolnshire the worst storm of the 16th century was in 1570) and the pottery gives some indication of the timespan. Most vessels found in the earliest phases are of 13th-15th century date, before the construction of Structure 1 'perhaps in the later 16th century'. The jug dating from a little after 1625 sealed in a partition wall suggests that 'the last use of the building continued into the second quarter of the century'. The only conclusive evidence of occupation beyond the first quarter of the 17th century is a small drinking vessel of the mid-18th century found in the collapse.

Early maps identify the existing ruins as a Chapel but the physical evidence points to a secular use. The building cannot have had any connection with Blakeney Friary because it was erected after the Dissolution (in 1538), and there is no documentary evidence to link the building to a church. The report claims that in 1595/6 Sir Christopher Heydon sold to James Calthorpe Thornham's Eye with an old house called the 'decayed Chapel' standing on it. A possibility is that the Chapel appellation was an old tradition stemming from a building there before the one erected in the late 16th century, but this is unlikely in view of all the evidence for a farmstead there during the medieval period.

The report makes much of a reference to Robert of Barton Bendish, a hermit in Cley, who in 1343 was given protection for two years to collect alms as he had no income unless 'relieved by the faithful'. Robert the hermit was also a chaplain and so would have been in charge of a chapel.

The report implies that this was necessarily so but in essence chaplains were priests without a benefice who served private families and organisations. The popular view of a hermit is of someone living in solitary isolation but 'anchorite' is a better description of such a person. In the Celtic Church especially, hermits were people committed to public service as guides or ferrymen, providing frugal hospitality and shelter to travellers. This description is an enticing one to apply to someone living, perhaps alone, on the Eye during the late medieval period, and if he was known to be a chaplain his house might have come to be known as a chapel.

The calendar of Patent Rolls containing the reference to Robert is carefully worded and appears to mean that he has protection for 'going to divers parts of the realms to seek for alms'. This absence from Cley does not preclude a connection with the Eye and the report allows the possibility that a hermit could have lived in a building, separate from the farmstead, which then provided the building materials that were re-used in the construction of the later building. It even offers the possibility that the building on the 1586 map is this ruined 'Chapel' rather than the building erected later, which would align with the description of the building in 1595/6 as 'decayed'. The corollary is that the excavated building would have been erected after 1596, implying that the decayed building on the 1586 map is somewhere else – although it was not found in the evaluation trenches. The possible conclusions being drawn from such a small number of documents serves to emphasize the paucity of firm conclusions derived from the excavation.

In 1561 Christopher Heydon was given 'free warren' in his demesne lands which would have included Cley. The 1586 map shows rabbits on the Eye which would

have been a secure place for them – rabbits were then not ubiquitous in the wild nor a food for poor people. The report suggests that the presence of a warren would have encouraged the building of a warrener's lodge, as was often done elsewhere. A possible example has been found on Scolt Head, on the basis of some hand-made bricks, and a lodge on Thetford Warren with 12th century architectural fragments still survives. Sheep are shown on the 1586 map but only on an area of marshland, not on the Eye where sheep bones are frequent and rabbit bones rare.

The report concludes that the occupants of the Eye 'appear to have led a spartan life'. Only six medieval coins, five dated 1300-10, were found on the site, a small number but a contrast to the almost total absence of later coins. Tool fragments were few and personal possessions scant, mostly buckles. Documentary evidence, providing the traditional label of 'chapel', cannot be dismissed entirely. The reference to a hermit living in Cley may account for the religious association but the existing ruins, with domestic features and robust construction, fit better with a warrener's lodge, perhaps after the land was sold to Calthorpe in 1596.

Final thoughts

A Vanishing Landscape is an attractive soft-cover A4 book containing 236 pages with 86 coloured photographs and numerous graphs, plans and drawings. The progress of the excavation and the features discovered (pits and post-holes) are illustrated by 76 plates while other photographs are of maps and three of the finds: the bracteate, the ear scoop and an Edward I penny. The extensive collection of pottery sherds is represented by one page of drawings in the style used for archaeological reports but without photographs. Plans showing the features of each phase of development on the site are clearly drawn and there are many outline diagrams showing the elements of the stratigraphy – individual soil layers and intrusive features. There are also drawings of some of the worked flints.

The report has no footnotes or index but it does have a substantial list of references. Relevant articles in the *Glaven Historian* are included, except for the two excavation summaries written by the directors Chris Birks (Birks 2004) and Richard Lee (Lee 2006) although their reports for the two parent organizations are listed. This may seem curious but it could be because later analysis changed some of the initial conclusions. The bibliography lists a tithe map for Blakeney but anyone looking for it will find that it was never prepared.

The main strength of the book is in the detailed descriptions of the physical finds from the chapel area. If some of this is heavy going for the general reader then some pages can be skipped without disadvantage. Each specialist chapter tries to match finds with the various phases of development but the extensive disturbance on the site has moved items, including datable sherds of pottery, away from where they were originally deposited. The report emphases the difficulty that this has posed for assessing the development of the site and the life cycle of the building. The reader may therefore wonder whether the phasing suggested in the report is the only interpretation that is possible.

In Chapter 3 some subsidiary aims were established for the excavation work to come. Relevant conclusions can be found within the text and some are clear: no features were associated with the bracteate (it was a stray find), and no date could be assigned to the ditch beneath the building. During the evaluation four post-holes had been sufficient to suggest a possible timber structure immediately to the east of the Chapel building. The later work found more associated pits and a considerable quantity of domestic refuse but no building could be identified. On the other hand, the relationship between the two cells of the building was established to the extent that the southern cell was later and of poorer quality than the northern one.

The excavation of the larger cell produced evidence of a hearth which the evaluation trenching had not reached and further investigation became an additional aim. Lee's preliminary report had described a hearth in the extreme north-west of Structure 1 which had been built either before or during the construction of the building. It contained slag and had probably been used for smithing. Samples of the charcoal from the hearth and from other patches of charcoal in the same horizon had been taken for radiocarbon dating. The later report adds more detail about the two connected pits in which burning had taken place; the slag was part of the infill, rather than a primary deposit, and so it was probably not a smithing hearth. The infill also contained the partial remains of seven sheep carcasses which suggests that the building was abandoned for a while – although the final chapter floats the possibility that the floors may have belonged to an earlier timber building, in which case the pits could pre-date Structure 1. The charcoal samples had been dated to 1450-1640, too wide a range to provide useful dating evidence.

The primary aim of the excavation had been to determine the sequence of occupation on the Eye and to discover as much as possible about the construction and use of the Chapel building. Environmental evidence and pottery sherds established the presence of a farmstead with a mixed agricultural economy in which cattle were more important that sheep. Although this could not be dated precisely the excavators were confident that this use dominated the 13th and 14th centuries. Not found in the main excavation or the evaluation trenches was any evidence of a farm building. There is a general assumption in the text that such a building would have been of timber although the final chapter notes that the quantity of re-used material in the Chapel building and mortar in preceding deposits raised the possibility of a more substantial precursor.

The several descriptions of Structure 1 are largely consistent. The preliminary report had emphasized the high quality of the construction. The base courses of flint had compacted 'to the consistency of reinforced concrete' forming a framework which compensated for the lack of foundations, a process seen in other local buildings using lime mortar. Flints had been sorted into three size groups with the largest at the base. This attention to detail, the glazed floor tiles, some early pantiles and pottery types often associated with important buildings, denoted a high status for a building in this exposed location. A Vanishing Landscape largely confirms this description, referring to 'a

substantial flint building' with 'thick walls and robust construction', although in a particular context calls it 'rather modest' and also dismisses the expensive pottery as being attributable to the trading connections of Cley rather than the status of the Chapel occupants.

The dating of Structure 1 is a vexed question. The preliminary report (2006) had ventured a construction date in the 14th or 15th centuries but the new report maintains that it must have been built some time in the 16th century. The 'later 16th century' is the term used several times by which the reader might, perhaps, infer a date after 1575. Chapter 3 concludes that the pottery does not refute the map evidence of construction pre-dating the late 16th century – which is not the same as providing confirmation. Chapter 10 floats the possibility that having bought the Eye from Christopher Heydon in 1596, James Calthorpe saw potential profit in using it as a rabbit warren which 'perhaps might have been the catalyst for the construction of a new building in order to consolidate his investment'. This supposition is weakened by assuming the transaction to be a sale when it was actually a lease for 11 years thereby giving little incentive for the erection of a substantial building. Heydon did sell all his manors in 1600, not to Calthorpe but to a member of the Hobart family. When James Hobart sold the manors of Cley and Blakeney in 1621 he excluded Thornham's Eye from the sale, showing that it did have some particular value. Perhaps it was, or would soon be, a warren serviced by a new southern cell built up against the old, storm-ravaged, northern cell.

The suggestion of the whole building as a warrener's lodge built after 1596 does not square with the presence of a building on the 1586 map or its description as an 'old house' in the 1596 deed. (The map shows all buildings in the same style and so gives no indication of size, age or condition.) Chapter 10 includes a chronology for the area in which pottery evidence suggests the building of Structure 1 in the late 15th / early 16th century. This may well be an interim view later discarded (together with the reference to a Phase 10) but it is a reminder that an early date had once been proposed and it contributes to the uncertainty about dating which the report is unable to dispel. One might even wonder how much evidence from the excavation would fall into place if the phasing were to be 'back-dated' to accommodate the building of Structure 1 in less stormy times well before the late 1500s.

If the difficulty of assigning a construction date based on evidence from the excavation is disappointing then so too is the uncertainty about the use of the building. The final conclusion of the report is as follows: 'The existing ruins with their unequivocal domestic features and robust construction better fit with the function of a warrener's lodge than a chapel'. Physical evidence for the use of the building as a chapel was understandably elusive but folk memory can last a long time and the report does suggest that the name could have survived from earlier days when a chapel in some form did exist – even if it were not the present building. But perhaps it was: the stratigraphy of the site does not appear to demonstrate conclusively that the building must have been erected in the later 16th century, and the form of construction does not seem to rule out a date in the previous century. If it functioned as a chapel then, perhaps it fell out of favour after the dissolution of the friary in 1538. While this is just speculation it is not clear that the excavation findings rule it out.

Despite these reservations the report should be welcomed. It is an account of the almost total excavation of the enigmatic building on the Eye and it presents a detailed and authoritative description of the finds. Despite minor inconsistencies, incomplete proof reading and repetition in the various discussion sections, the book is well presented with numerous photographs, plans and drawings. It is a pity that no firm answers could be provided for the date and use of the building but the site was not able to deliver them. For this reason the building portrayed on the cover which seems to be emerging from the past remains a tantalising element in a vanished landscape.

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[1] For an account of what is known about the Friary at Blakeney see Wright 2020

‘Spreading the heavenly contagion’: The coming of the Methodists to the Cley area 1757–1815

Margaret Bird

Synopsis
Methodists arrived as early as 1757 in north Norfolk. These were not the Wesleyans, but their active competitors—the Calvinistic Methodists of Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion. The bitter divide between George Whitefield and John Wesley, the fathers of English Methodism, was played out on the ground across different parts of the country. Additionally, the Nonconformists had to compete with roving Church of England priests. These thrusting young Evangelicals had mostly been trained in Cambridge for their mission to awaken souls where the Established Church was thought to be failing. It proved an exciting time for parishioners, who found themselves courted by waves of itinerant preachers. First we examine how well equipped the parish clergy were to withstand the challenges facing them.

At a casual glance this article might be thought to tell a simple tale. The eighteenth-century Church of England, so the old story goes, was failing. The Revd John Wesley and his committed Methodist preachers flooded the countryside, roused the latent spirituality of the townsfolk and villagers, and soon the new movement’s chapels sprang up—as we see today in Blakeney and Cley.

In fact this study will chronicle a series of long-drawn-out struggles between competing forces. North Norfolk’s villages served as very small cogs in the great transatlantic organisations represented by the twin strands of eighteenth-century Methodism headed by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (Fig. 1) and by John Wesley (1703–91). Further, other Nonconformists had already arrived on the scene. These were the Independents: Dissenters active in north Norfolk by 1694, a century before the Wesleyan Methodists; they live on as part of today’s United Reformed Church.[1]

Importantly, this article focuses on mobility as a recurrent theme. Nonconformist and even Church of England religious observance transcended parish boundaries, for Old Dissent, Methodists and Anglican Evangelicals refused to be constrained by these long-fixed bounds.[2] And the Church of England was far from drifting in the doldrums in the Holt and Cley area, thereby delaying the march of the Wesleyans. Its touring young Evangelicals, fired with missionary zeal, fanned the flames of the Awakening in what has disparagingly—and inaccurately—been called the Dead See.[3]

By choosing a small, clearly defined area we can dig deep into the wealth of documentary sources available to us. The one covered in this study, as mapped in Figs 2 and 4, runs east from Stiffkey to Kelling and covers the hinterland south of the coast as far as Briston and Barney. These last two villages, each with a chapel financed and built by women, became local centres of Lady Huntingdon’s brand of Methodism.

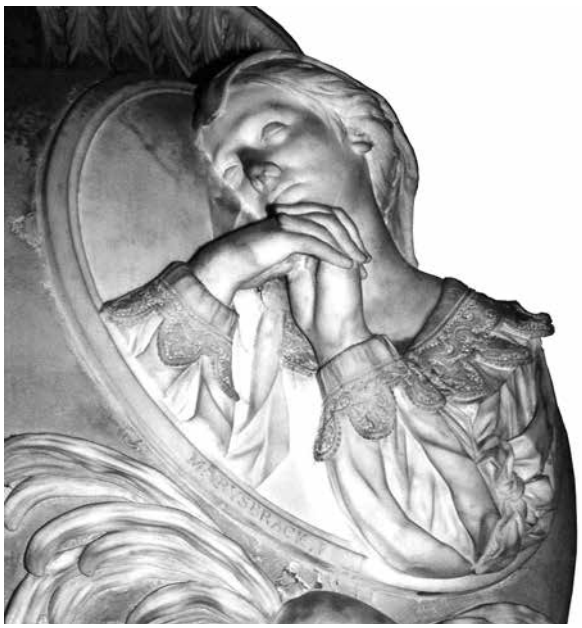
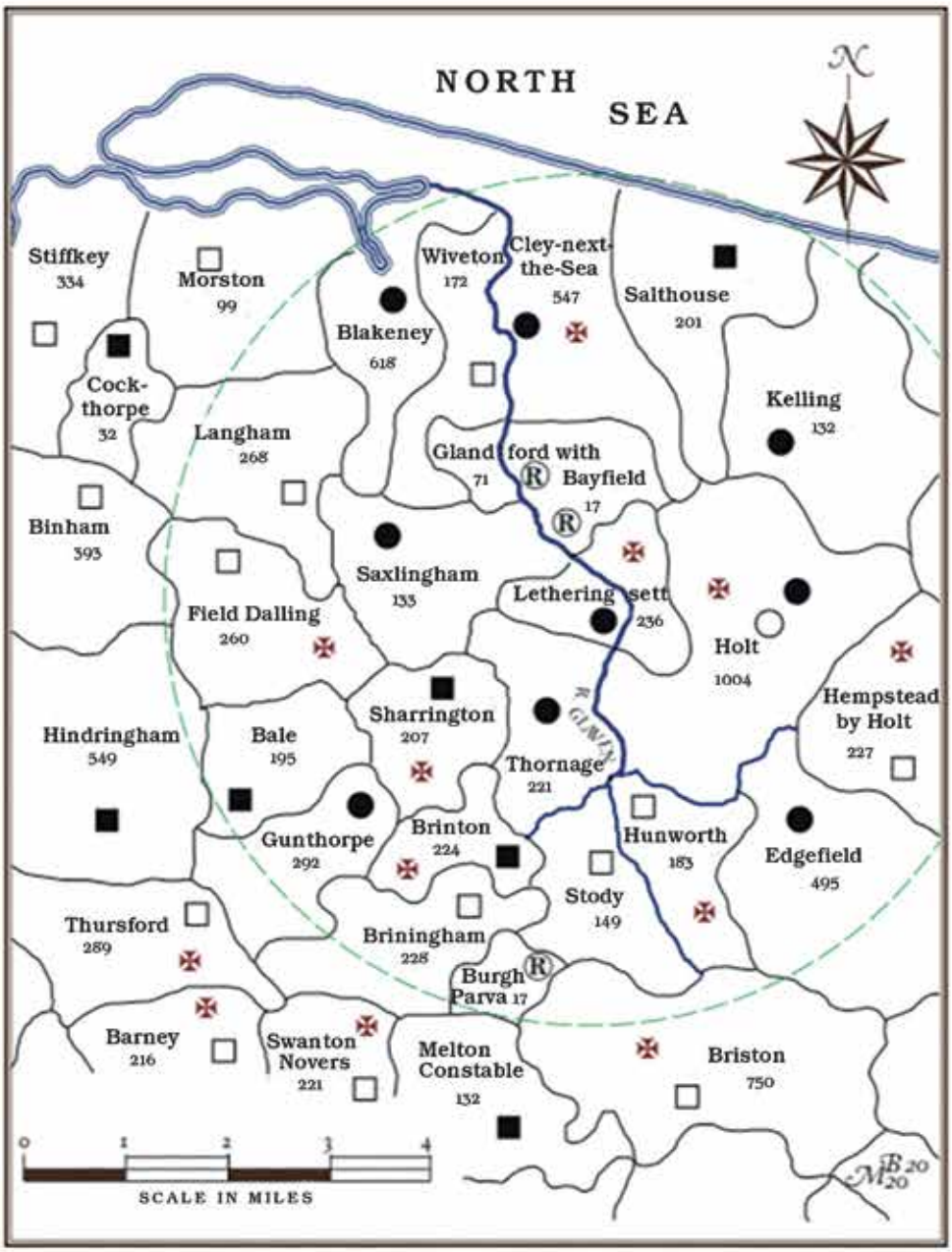


Fig. 1 Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–91), patroness of George Whitefield (1714–70) and Methodist leader: detail of her monument by Michael Rysbrack in her husband’s ancestral church at Ashby de la Zouch, Leics.
[photo Christopher Bird 2001]

Cley, a strongly matriarchal hub (as seen at Fig. 6), is singled out in the article’s title. From the mid-1790s it became prominent in Wesleyan Methodism thanks largely to the efforts of one woman. Elizabeth Smith, formerly Mrs Hunt, who died 21 September 1803 aged 63, was the first wife of the Cley attorney John Smith.[4] With little or no support from her husband, evidently a loyal Anglican, she registered in her own name a series of meetings in the parish and was instrumental in building its first Methodist chapel in 1799—the earliest purpose-built Wesleyan Methodist chapel in the area depicted on the maps. Her staunch friend, the Letheringsett diarist Mary Hardy (1733–1809), recorded many of these developments and reveals patterns of local religious observance in her 36-year-long diary.[5]

The dates 1757 and 1815 in the title mark significant developments. The Briston attorney and money lender Thomas Mendham (d.1793 aged 58), one of Lady Huntingdon’s preachers, first registered a meeting house at Holt in 1757.[6] As we shall see, he went on to register sixteen other Calvinistic Methodist meetings in north and north-central Norfolk. In 1815, thanks principally to Mary Hardy’s son William Hardy junior (1770–1842), the Wesleyan Methodists estab-



A 4½ mile (7.25-km) radius from the home of the diarist Mary Hardy at Letheringsett Hall is circled in green; 25 other parishes can be reached withing 4½ miles of the house.

The extreme eastern part of the circle is not mapped as she did not attend church services or Nonconformist meetings in that area.

The parishes shown here lie mostly in Holt Hundred and Holt Deanery. The River Glaven is fordable until being bridged near the coast at Wiveton.

sources National census 1801; Holt deanery episcopal visitation returns 1801 (Norfolk Record Office (NRO): DN/VIS 36/13)

KEY TO FIG. 2

- ● parish with its own resident incumbent
- ○ parish with its own resident curate
- ■ parish served by its incumbent living nearby
- □ parish served by its curate living nearby
- Ⓡ church ruinous (exact location not mapped)
- ✠ parish with one or more meeting houses
- 601 parish population total, 1801 census

Fig. 2 A landscape of Anglican incumbents: parishes in the Letheringsett area c.1801, showing total population, Anglican clergy and Nonconformist presence.
[Margaret Bird 2020]

lished Holt as the centre of a new circuit; this was carved from part of Walsingham Circuit to which local meetings had belonged from 1793. The Wesleyans were pushing strongly northward to the sea.

Calvinists and Arminians

We must pause at this point to describe the gulf between the followers of Lady Huntingdon, a Calvinist in belief, and of the Arminian John Wesley. The doctrinal divide was found among other Nonconformists: the General Baptists were Arminians, while the Strict or Particular Baptists were Calvinists; the Independents were Calvinists. These divisions run through our story.

The Church of England from the time of the Elizabethan settlement and the promulgation of the Thirty-nine Articles in 1571 had straddled both camps in an attempt to bandage the wounds inflicted by the religious turmoil of the mid-sixteenth century. Most Anglican parish clergy in Norfolk in the mid- and late-eighteenth century would have eschewed stirring up old doctrinal controversies until hit by the wave of eager Evangelicals who were almost without exception severely Calvinist.

Arminians, followers of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), believe in free will and in justification (eternal salvation) by good works. Calvinists, adherents of Geneva-based Jean Calvin (1509–64), believe in predestination, in justification by faith alone and in the salvation of the Elect only. This gulf provoked searing breaches among the faithful.

Time and again the episcopal visitation returns sent by the parish clergy to the Bishop of Norwich point to these divisions. A much-neglected source today, they offer an incomparable commentary on religious observance and on local life more generally.[7] The published minutes of the Methodist Conference, a Wesleyan body and another valuable source, record savage verbal attacks on Lady Huntingdon and her Calvinists. John Wesley and his followers would refer to them not as fellow Methodists, which they were, but as Antinomians: those who refuse to obey the moral law. The Calvinists' accusers would assert that where justification by faith prevailed there could be no incentive to conform to an ethical code and do good in this world.[8]

We shall describe these rival insurgent movements in the chronological order in which they appeared in north Norfolk. First to arrive were the Independents; then Lady Huntingdon's Methodists, followed by the Wesleyans; and lastly the Evangelicals of the Established Church.[9] And as the backdrop to their story stand the Church's parish clergy: a medley of different personalities from very distinct backgrounds. The Church, at least in north Norfolk, was in far better shape than is often claimed. It is with the Church that we begin.

Parish density

The oft-held notion that the Church neglected parishioners and was unable to serve their needs does not hold good for the Cley area mapped in Figs 2 and 4. The Revd James Woodforde, static and isolated in his rectory in the centre of the county at Weston, was far from representative of the Georgian clergy, despite claims to the contrary.[10] Most Anglican ministers were impressively mobile. Given the intense shortage of parish clergy they had to be, if they were to serve their tightly-knit parishes. They were in fact doubling (and tripling) up, rather as one minister will serve a group of parishes today: Nonconformist preachers were not the only ones on the move. Let us examine what the maps tell us.

At first sight Fig. 2 would suggest that clergy, both incumbents (rectors and vicars) and curates, were thick on the ground. Each parish was served either by a resident priest or by one living in a neighbouring parish. This coverage was achieved in part by a device peculiar to the see of Norwich: the consolidated living. As one parish alone could not provide a clergyman with sufficient income he was appointed to two neighbouring parishes yoked formally but at times uneasily, as at Thornage with Brinton, Hunworth with Stody, Sharrington with Saxlingham, Gunthorpe with Bale, and Melton with Burgh. Parish government however stayed separate and unconsolidated. Thornage and Brinton, for instance, elected their own distinct set of churchwardens, overseers and other parish officers, and set their individual parish rates.

Among the congregation were 'twicers': those who attended church twice on a Sunday. Morning service would be held in one parish, such as Saxlingham, followed by an afternoon service at Sharrington. The next Sunday the services were reversed, with Sharrington hosting Morning Prayer. Thus already, before the arrival of itinerant Nonconformist preachers, the Church of England was encouraging the adoption of what was effectively institutionalised extra-parochial worship—a harbinger of things to come. The restlessness which characterised the flock as they sought spiritual solace became a plank of the ministry of Methodists and Evangelicals, who were not bound within the unit of the parish. The preachers roamed widely, and the awakened flock followed their wanderings.

The peculiar topography of Norfolk rendered the consolidated living necessary. The county had a higher parish density than any other in the British Isles. Parishes were therefore unusually small geographically. The average parish acreage for Norfolk as a whole, as apparent from William White's 1845 county directory, was 1707 acres. And in the north-east quadrant the average was even smaller; it was the sprawling parishes of the Brecks and the Fens in the south and west which raised the average. In the area around Cley and Holt seen on the map the average was as small as 1336 acres.[11]

Why is this significant? This most unusual density of settlement, laid down by Saxon and Dane, enabled people to get about easily. The curate hurrying between three or four parishes on a Sunday, the rector covering for his fellow priest nearby, the flock determined to sample other parish churches as well as one or two Nonconformist meetings, or attending an evening meeting during the week; even brewers, such as the Hardys, who would build up a portfolio of tied houses to be served by their loyal draymen: all, with their beasts, benefited from an intricate network of highways, lanes and public houses.

Rural Norfolk in 1800 enjoyed good provision for residents and itinerants on the move: one public house served an average of 222 persons, including children. In the area shown on the map the ratio, as indicated by the 1801 census and the alehouse register for the 1790s, was as high as one public house to 183 persons.[12] This density produced a completely different pattern from that of the townships of the north of England, set in vast parishes and having recourse to chapels of ease if the faithful were to be able to reach a place of Anglican worship at all on a Sunday.

Fig. 3 The Lodge, Letheringsett: the home of four clerical generations of the Burrell family until shortly after the death of Mary Hardy's rector John Burrell in 1825. Privately owned, it served as the rectory since the parish's own parsonage house, a two-roomed single-storey cottage with an earth floor, had disintegrated early in the 18th century. As late as 1835 well over 40 per cent of parishes in England and Wales had no dedicated parsonage house.
[photo Margaret Bird 1989]

To demonstrate the opportunities provided by high parochial density I calculated how many parishes lay within an hour's cart-ride of Letheringsett (4½ miles), where in her later years Mary Hardy became a confirmed sermon-taster. The radius from her home village is marked by a green dotted line on Figs 2 and 4. The startlingly high number of twenty-five parishes lay within her reach and that of her family circle. They could sample to their heart's content—and did so, joyously.[13]

A few years before the Wesleyans started to despatch itinerant and local (lay) preachers to the mapped area in the 1790s a new development had accustomed the laity to cross-parochial co-operation: running Church of England Sunday schools. The schools were first founded in north Norfolk in summer 1786, Letheringsett and Holt being the two earliest parishes in our area to adopt the Raikes model. Perhaps surprisingly, a search of reports in the *Norwich Mercury* that summer suggests that Letheringsett, then a small parish of roughly 200 souls, was the first village in the county to found such a school.[14]

Mary Hardy enthusiastically supported the dynamic young rector John Burrell junior (1761–1825) and taught the village children regularly (Fig. 5). She also shows us that ideas were spread by emulation. She and the Holt surgeon's wife Sarah Bartell, née Dacke (d. 1828 aged 82), toured the schools' prototypes in Norwich to gain ideas; the diarist also hosted a succession of visitors to the Letheringsett school. Six of the eight visitors she welcomed on 14 July 1786 from Fakenham and Booton were women: female engagement and leadership were to prove vital in the success of the schools. Cley, Wiveton and Glandford joined forces and established a large joint school in which the Cley merchant and churchwarden John Mann (d.1794 aged 44) and his wife Priscilla, née Carr, were active; the Glandford farmer Theophilus Ives and his wife Mary, née Cobon, also championed the children.[15]

Why is this significant in the tale of the Awakening, otherwise known as the Revival? Nonconformists scorned confinement by parish boundaries. Their ministry was centred on the circuit with its meetings (for the Wesleyans) and on the individual meeting house (for the Calvinists and Independents) which welcomed members and visitors from a large group of parishes. Their adherents had perforce to travel beyond their home parish to attend services. The needs of consolidated livings and the provision of help with Church of England Sunday schools also encouraged such wanderings. Being on the move, as practised by all Nonconformist preachers and later the touring Evangelicals, was a far from novel ministry. Further, the Established Church eagerly turned to women in proclaiming the Word of God—if only to children. The Methodists in particular were to become adept at mobilising women in the advancement of their cause (Fig. 6). But it was the parish clergy who had shown them the way.

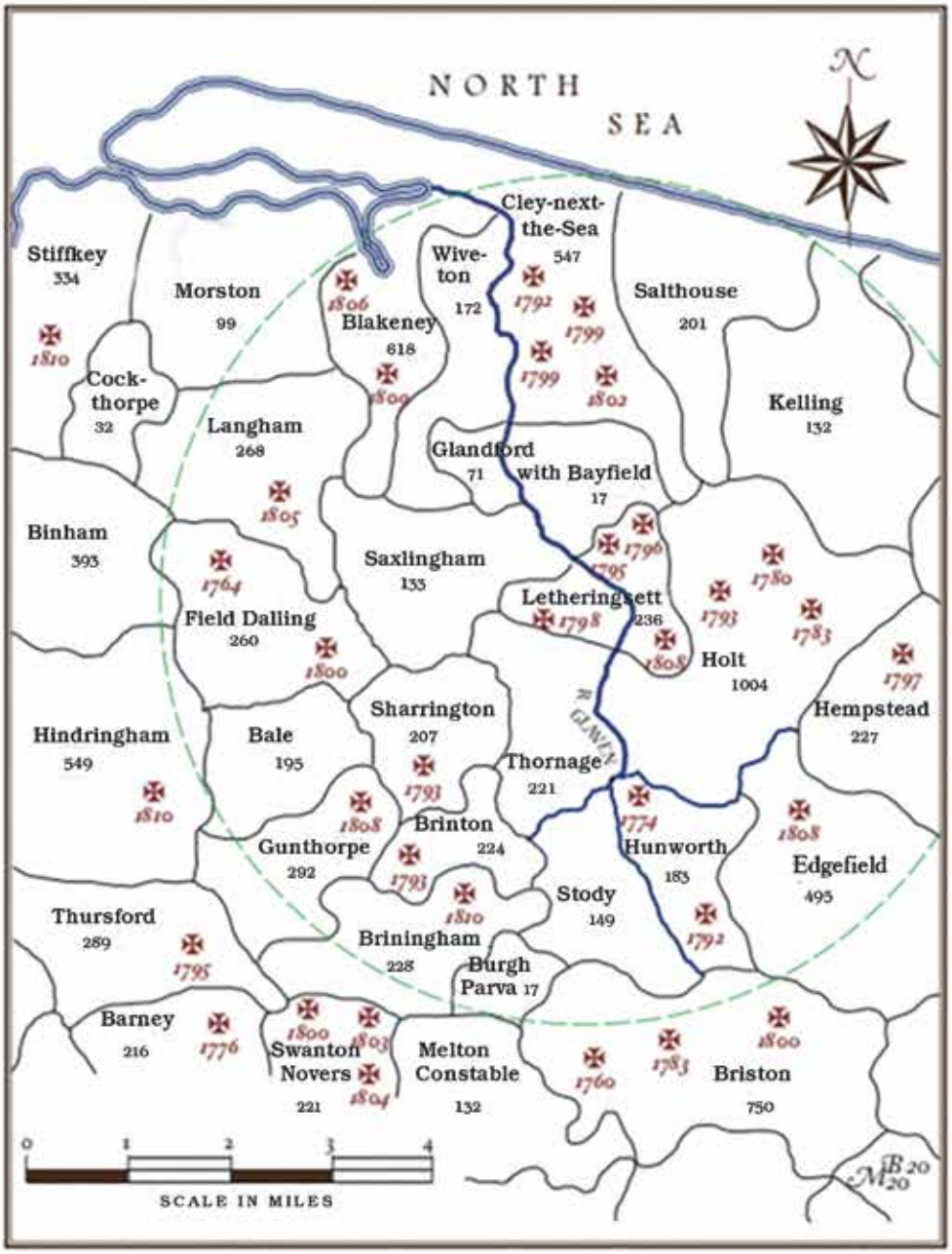
The overstretched parish clergy

Church of England clergy worked under enormous pressure. This was decades before 'the Age of the Squarson', the leisured squire–parson ensconced in his imposing rectory. The universities were producing ample numbers of graduates for ordination, but in 1791 the 11,164 parishes of England and Wales had only 4412 beneficed clergy.[16] As a result there was roughly only one incumbent for every third parish; hence the relatively few solid black circles on Fig. 2 denoting a resident rector or vicar. The beneficed clergy had perforce to double up and become pluralists, some appointing a curate to serve in person the second or third parish to which they had been instituted. Some incumbents elected to serve two or three cures in person and even then take on an additional curacy or two to make ends meet.

However these constraints did not necessarily lead to neglect. As the maps show, parishes lay within easy reach of one another and road journeys were short. Further, average population density at 147 persons to the square mile in 1801 was fairly low in Norfolk; the figure includes Norwich. This was just below the average for England and Wales at 152 persons, towns and cities included.[17] The existence of reasonably small populations per parish and per square mile further enabled the clergy to take on multiple cures.

Doubling and tripling up meant that only one parish could lay claim to having a resident incumbent. Much of the workload in the other parishes would fall on the 'clerical subalterns', the curates.[18] As late as 1835, curates serving non-resident clergy across England and Wales outnumbered those serving resident by more than four to one.[19]

Some of the non-resident curates were in fact incumbents elsewhere. Mary Hardy's resident rectors at Letheringsett, John Burrell senior (d.1786 aged 51 or 52) and his son John (Fig. 3), were at the same time most conscientious pastors serving other parishes nearby at Stody, Hunworth, Langham and Wiveton on behalf of absentee incumbents. Earlier the caring,



This strongly Nonconformist area has 34 licenses. A 4½ mile (7.25-km) radius from the home of the diarist Mary Hardy at Letheringsett Hall is circled in green; 25 other parishes can be reached withing 4½ miles of the house.

The extreme eastern part of the circle is not mapped as she did not attend church services or Nonconformist meetings in that area.

The parishes shown here lie mostly in Holt Hundred and Holt Deanery. The River Glaven is fordable until being bridged near the coast at Wiveton.

KEY TO FIG. 4

✠ Nonconformist meeting house in Parish (precise location not mapped)

1761 date of issue of meeting house licence

601 parish population total, 1801 census

source Register of meeting houses in the diocese of Norwich 1751-1810 (Norfolk Record Office (NRO): DN/DIS 1/2)

note Some of the Nonconformist congregations on this map will be duplicated. Meetings had to be re-registered when the host premises changed.

Fig. 4 A sea of meetings: Nonconformist meeting houses licensed in the Letheringsett area 1760–1810, with date of issue, and total parish population 1801.
[Margaret Bird 2020]

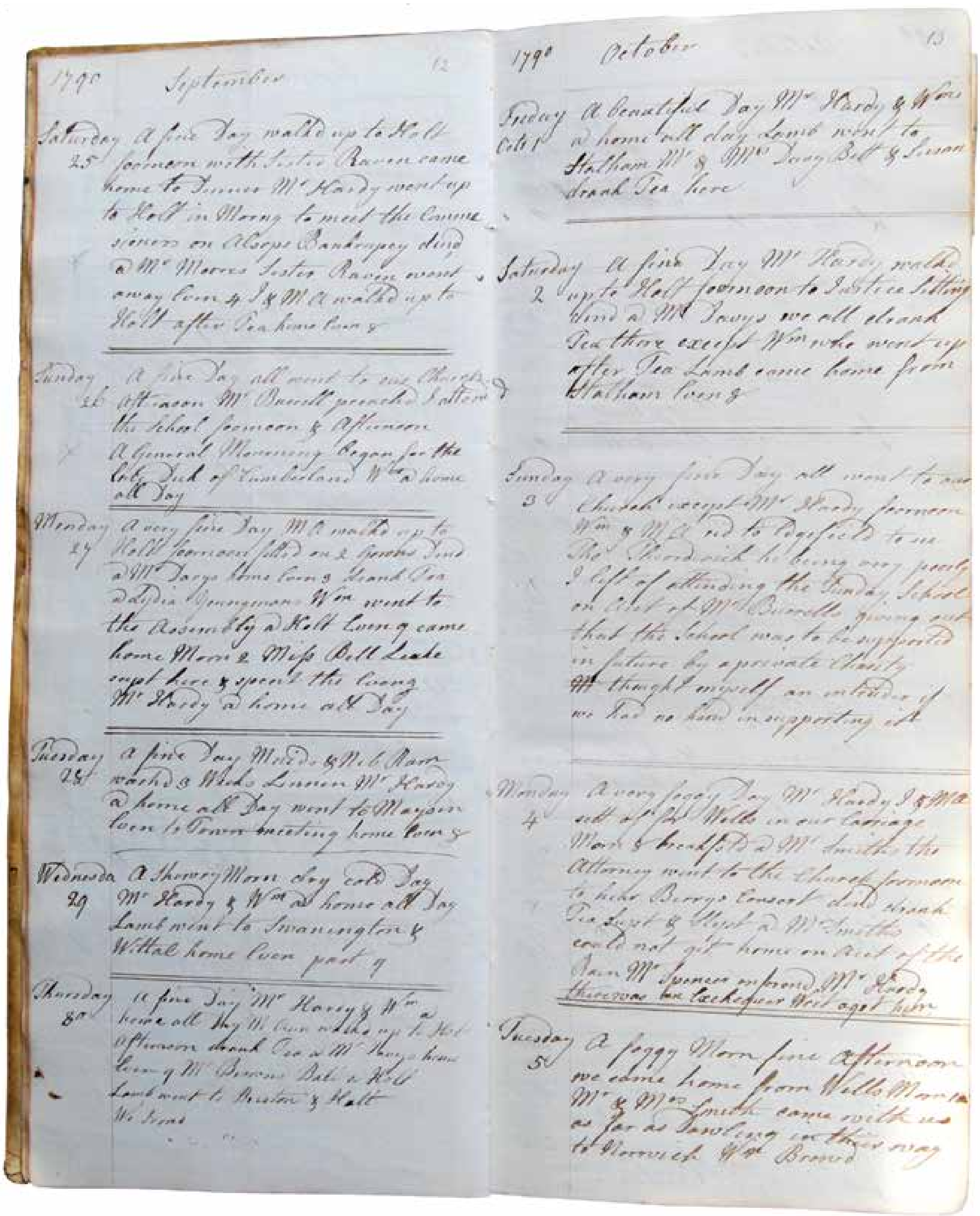


Fig. 5 Mary Hardy's diary for 25 September–5 October 1790: typically crowded days in this endlessly busy Letheringsett household. Their Cromer innkeeper is bankrupt; mourning begins for the King's brother the Duke of Cumberland; her son William attends the assembly ball at Holt and her husband the parish meeting at the King's Head; beer deliveries, including a 50-mile round trip to Stalham, and the heavy washing are noted; the older brewer attends the quarter sessions at Holt; the family undertake a two-day trip to Wells to attend a church concert and stay overnight with John and Elizabeth Smith, who were shortly to move to Cley; and William Hardy is informed by the excise supervisor of a brewing fraud case against him in the Court of Exchequer.

Mary Hardy had taught for four years at the village Sunday school, usually attending two sessions a day—as on Sunday 26th. Then on Sunday 3rd comes the bombshell. She falls out with the young rector John Burrell over its funding and resolves to take no further part in it: 'Thought myself an intruder if we had no hand in supporting it'.

[Cozens-Hardy Collection]

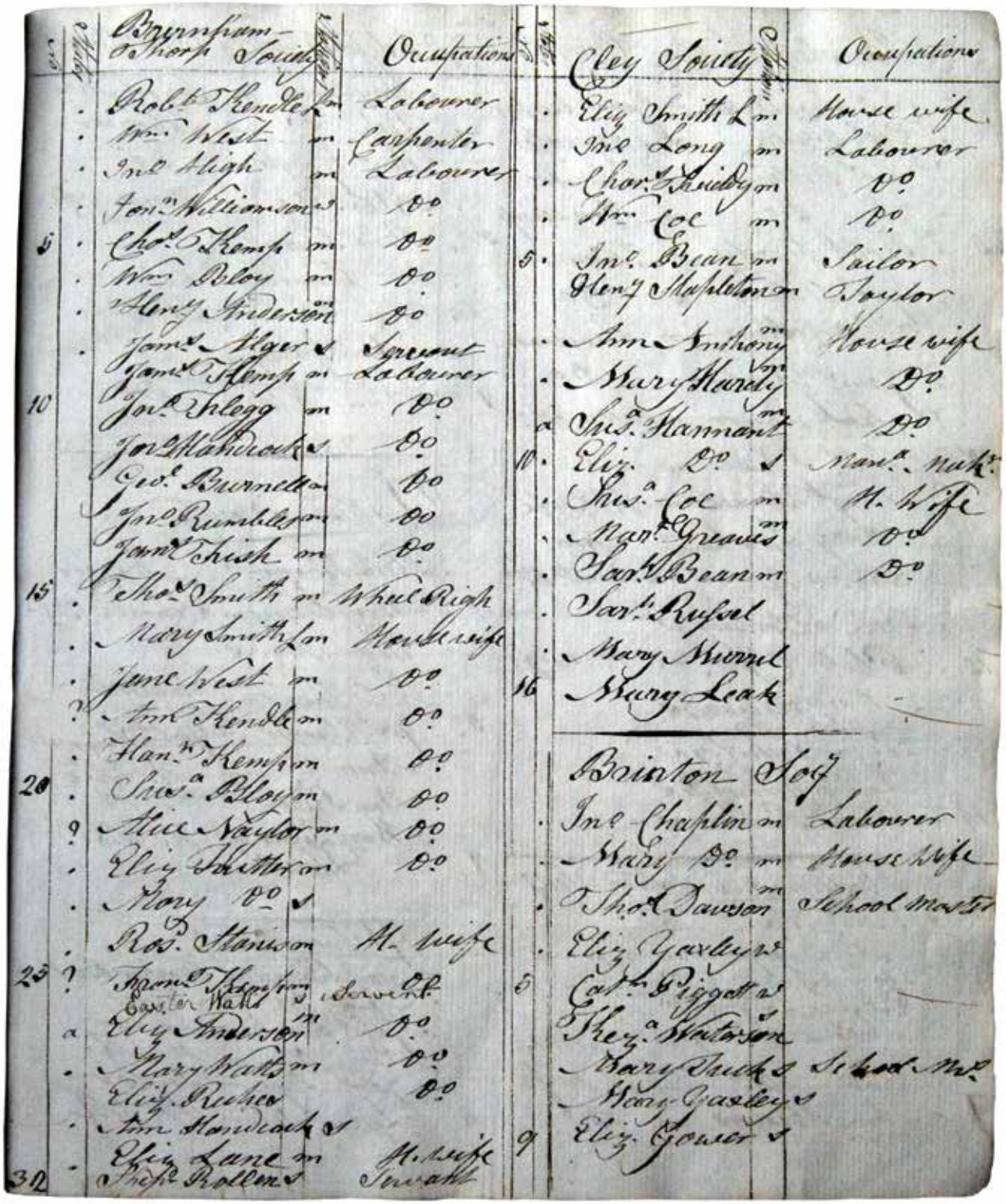


Fig. 6 Wesleyan Methodists 1799: the list of paid-up members of the 'societies' (congregations) in Burnham Thorpe, Cley and Brinton. Occupations are shown alongside the names of the men and one unmarried woman: Cley's Elizabeth Hannant, single, is a mantuamaker (dressmaker). Total numbers are given in the first column: 32 at Burnham Thorpe, 12 at Cley and 9 at Brinton.

Elizabeth Smith, a vigorous promoter of Methodism and wife of the local attorney, heads the names at Cley. The diarist Mary Hardy, her good friend, is at no. 8; Ann Anthony, another friend and wife of the Cley draper, is at no. 7. Only five of the 12 Cley members are men. The Walsingham Circuit had 13 societies in all at this time. The itinerant preacher Benjamin Leggatt (1761–1822) compiled the lists.

[NRO: FC 18/1, Record of members of the [Wesleyan] Methodist Connection, Walsingham Circuit]

active and resident Rector of Cley, Robert Thomlinson (d.1801 aged 61), had also served as Curate of Wiveton 1782–1801; at the same time he appointed a curate to serve Blickling, where he was absentee rector 1767–1801. (Technically he was not resident at Cley, as he did not live at the parsonage but in his own home, Cley Hall. There was no rectory, as was very common at the time (Fig. 3). However this strict definition of clerical residence is not adopted in Fig. 2.)

Thus the symbol for a curate on the map can actually refer to a rector from nearby who was standing in for his fellow rector—who might in turn be serving as incumbent or curate elsewhere, often far distant. Only Holt, with by far the largest parish population in the area, had a resident curate at this time, shouldering most of the work for his aged rector Joshua Smith (1725–1804). The Church of England relied on an exceptionally intricate system of 'cover'. But it worked, as long as the minister took his duties seriously and was prepared to officiate at as many as three or even four services on a Sunday.

Despite the doubling up, the preponderance of solid symbols on Fig. 2 points to a landscape of incumbents, further strengthened by the high numbers of curates who had benefices of their own close by. Identifying a significant Nonconformist presence where the Church was strong is held to be unusual. But that is exactly what was happening in our area, as indicated by the red crosses for meeting houses shown in Fig. 4. Much of the rest of this study will investigate how the Nonconformists managed to establish themselves so securely against the backdrop of good Anglican provision.

Fig. 7 The title page of the Countess of Huntingdon's hymnbook. From 1765 these sold in their thousands, the book running to many editions; more than 15,000 were printed in 1782–86 alone.

Her London chapels attracted vast congregations running into the thousands; hundreds would attend her principal Norfolk chapel, the Tabernacle, in Norwich. The term 'tabernacle' in the records denotes a Calvinistic Methodist place of worship.

[Cheshunt Foundation at Westminster College, Cambridge: CHES. 4.4.15, 1798 edition]

Registering Nonconformist meetings

The Register of Meeting Houses which survives for 1751–1810 in the Norwich diocesan archives in the Norfolk Record Office opens a window on the Nonconformists.[20] But it has to be handled with care. The sea of red crosses representing meetings in Fig. 4, with their dates of opening, is not what it seems.

Firstly the register does not record the denomination of the group involved. Instead we learn who applied for the licence, and the name of the host or hostess. The great majority of these meetings were not held in chapels or purpose-built meeting houses but in cottage kitchens and working buildings such as barns and granaries. At Wells a former 'engine house' (a pump house or pump room), hired from a mariner, sufficed.[21] All that we know for sure is that the adherents were meeting 'for Protestant worship', as required under the provisions of the Toleration Act of 1689. However it was often the preacher who applied for the licence, and once the preacher's denomination is identified we can make progress.

Secondly a new licence had to be sought every time the host premises changed. Letheringsett would appear from the map to be a hotbed of Nonconformity, but this was not so. The early Wesleyans changed their premises when the host moved away or died, or became bankrupt. The meetings of 1796, 1798 and 1808 shown in Fig. 4 are all for one congregation or 'society', to use the Wesleyans' term: it just moved about. The fourth meeting, of 1795, was Independent, with the preacher John Sykes (d.1824) attending from the chapels at Guestwick and Briston.[22]

Similarly the four meetings in Cley parish, with the possible exception of the first, of 1792 (as explained later), are all Wesleyan. Elizabeth Smith herself was the applicant for all four. She was the society's leader at Cley, the 'L' against her name noted by the Walsingham-based itinerant preacher confirming her status (Fig. 6). The four licences 1792–1802 were, in turn, for her own dwelling house (an interesting phrase, given that she had a husband living there too, and confirmation that the common-law concept of coverture was not adhered to over the issuing of certificates); then for premises at Cley owned by John Johnson of Weybourne; thirdly, also in 1799, for a new purpose-built 'Methodist Chapel' belonging to Mr Cubitt of Sheringham; and lastly for a dwelling house in Cley owned by John Parson of Salthouse.[23]

A third difficulty surrounding the statistics is that not all meeting houses were licensed. For many years Methodists, of both persuasions, did not regard themselves as Dissenters; their leaders Whitefield and Wesley were after all loyal, ordained ministers in the Church of England. Only from 1782 and 1787 do the Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists start to flood the licensing records. Happily we can turn to the parish clergy's responses to the Bishop of Norwich for data on the unlicensed meetings: the episcopal visitation returns form a vital resource.[24]

The figure of 34 licences on the map is thus thoroughly misleading. The diocesan records enable us to trace the formation of meetings and chart their peregrinations, and the existence of 34 successful registrations in the years 1760–1810 by no means proves there were 34 distinct Nonconformist congregations in the area shown on the map.

Mention of Letheringsett's Independents, a group who later became Congregationalists, points to the lingering presence of Old Dissent: religious movements formed by those who had rejected the Established Church in the upheavals of the seventeenth century. There were no Presbyterian, Baptist or Unitarian meetings in the parishes shown in Fig. 4, but there was one Quaker meeting at

Holt. Four Independent meetings attest to a sturdy presence: one at Hunworth and (briefly) at Letheringsett, also two at Briston (only one of these being licensed). The host at Letheringsett, the cordwainer William Mayes, joined the Army and was serving in Ireland by 1805; the Independents were thus forced to seek spiritual solace further afield.[25] It was only as chapels gradually came to be built that Nonconformists could hope for stability of tenure.

Thomas Mendham and Lady Huntingdon

For 36 years a remarkable preacher evangelised north Norfolk. This one-man missionary whirlwind was the Briston-based Thomas Mendham: attorney, manor court steward, schoolmaster, scrivener, money lender and loyal minister in the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion (Figs 8–11). In addition to the Holt meeting of 1757 he registered and/or served no fewer than sixteen Calvinistic Methodist meeting houses across north, north-west and north-central Norfolk 1773–92.

In date order, these were at Fakenham (1773), Hunworth (1774), Wells (1775), Great Ryburgh (1775), Colkirk (1775), Briston (chapel built 1775 but unlicensed, served officially by Mendham from 1777), South Creake (1779), another at Wells (1780), Titchwell (1780), Downham Market (1780), Docking (1781), Briston (1783, on a new site: see Figs 8 and 11), Holt (1783), Toftrees (1784, unlicensed), Barney (1792, unlicensed) and lastly Saxthorpe (1792, also unlicensed).[26]

It is not known why Mendham did not penetrate north beyond Holt. He defined his home territory as the villages between Briston and Holt long before the Wesleyans arrived; also Wells and the area south and west of Walsingham. It is doubtful whether he managed to preach at the Countess's more distant outposts in the north-west and at Downham Market. At the time of his death he was working on a history of Methodism in Norfolk: part autobiography, part a vindication of his extraordinary career in which he chronicled the many wrongs he had suffered (at the hands of the Independents and the Wesleyans, the latter using applications to Chancery to wrest Mendham's chapels from him). Entitled 'Memoirs mostly Methodistical', his story of the Countess's 'peaceable sect' in Norfolk was never published.[27]

The significance of Mendham's awakening of the countryside is that he reached parts then untouched by Wesleyans; but in so doing he laid the groundwork for the subsequent advance of the rival movement. John Wesley made one fleeting visit to Fakenham and Wells in 1781, in which his principal aim was to dislodge the 'Antinomians', as he termed them (Lady Huntingdon's followers). But this foray remained as far as the great preacher penetrated in the north-east quadrant of the county bordered by Wells, Norwich and Caister-on-Sea; as related later, he had no sympathy at all for 'fickle Norfolk' and its independent ways. Until the formation of the Wells Circuit in 1791 (soon to become the Walsingham Circuit) any Wesleyan missionary endeavour in north and north-east Norfolk had to be conducted from King's Lynn, from Norwich or from Great Yarmouth. As late as 1785, apart from one meeting of 36 members at North Walsham, the Wesleyans had no toehold in that extensive quadrant. The Calvinists held sway.

Mendham's achievements and also his sorrows are well documented in the very large village of Briston, on the southern edge of the maps at Figs 2 and 4. Here the Established Church was unusually weak, as the episcopal visitation returns demonstrate. The succession of demoralised non-resident young curates posted from elsewhere received no support whatever from the absentee rector. The lofty Isaac Horsley was also Rector of North Walsham and served that more lucrative benefice in person; in his dismissive fashion he could not recall for the Bishop in 1784 whether his unfortunate curate were licensed or not. By 1813 the new rector lived two counties away at Lexden Parsonage, near Colchester.[28]

Interestingly Hunworth, with its Calvinist Methodist meeting house of 1774 served by Mendham, was also a problem parish for the Church. As we have seen, two rectors of Letheringsett did their best as non-resident curates of Hunworth with Stody. However, as the older John Burrell told the Bishop in 1784, the rector of the consolidated living flitted about: 'The Revd Mr Greene . . . being absent, and the place of his residence uncertain, sometimes in England, sometimes in France, and at this time unknown to me . . .' [29]

Briston and Hunworth thus proved unusually fertile parishes for a competitor of the Anglicans, and the followers of Lady Huntingdon seized their chance. The sisters Elizabeth and Mary Franklin, later Mrs Grieves and Mrs Parker, founded the Briston Tabernacle in 1775. Mary had already founded Fakenham's chapel of 1773 and was active promoting a chapel and preachers at Wells, while Elizabeth had founded a meeting in her dwelling house at Hunworth in 1774. North of Fakenham, Ann and Martha Glover erected the tabernacle they owned at South Creake in 1779. In her will of 1788 Mary Parker made it clear that she owned the chapel at Barney.[30] All these places of worship were attached to the Countess's Connexion, the deed at Briston copied into the Briston Mautbies manor court book on 11 April 1777 recording Mendham's appointment and his involvement in Lady Huntingdon's movement:

> . . . The said trustees and their heirs and all other trustees . . . shall and do permit Thomas Mendham of Briston aforesaid the present minister or teacher of the people called Methodists assembling for religious worship at the said chapel to preach, teach, exhort and exercise the office of a minister or teacher . . . during the time and term of his natural life without molestation, denial or interruption.

The minutes also record that in the event of Mendham's death the trustees 'shall and do proceed to the election of some other godly minister, preacher or teacher in the Connexion of the Right Honourable Selina Countess of Huntingdon'.[31]

The end of Calvinistic Methodism in the area

It will have become strikingly apparent by now that the coastal area on the maps, the villages at the centre of the Blakeney Area Historical Society's focus, would seem to have been bypassed in the early phase of the Nonconformist thrust into rural Norfolk. Stiffkey, Cockthorpe, Morston, Blakeney, Glandford, Wiveton, Cley, Salthouse and Kelling: not one was touched by movements outside the Church of England—as judged by the registration of licensed meeting houses up to Mendham's death in February 1793 (Fig. 4). The one meeting which predates Mendham's death, Cley's of 1792, will be considered shortly. It would appear that the Baptists, the Independents and the Calvinistic Methodists had not established a secure base in these parts, while the Wesleyans were nowhere to be seen at that time.

However, the willingness of the population to wander undermines that bold assumption. Extra-parochial worship, both Anglican and Nonconformist, was endemic across the whole mapped area; and meetings drew mem-

bers and adherents from the coastal parishes, as we learn from the clergy's visitation returns to the Bishop and from Mary Hardy. The Revd John Sykes, the tireless Independent minister based at Guestwick and, from 1783, at Mendham's former chapel at Briston, attracted a committed following from 22 parishes stretching from Blakeney in the north to Foxley and Great Witchingham beside the River Wensum in the south and over to Walsingham in the west. On 1 January 1788 the 63 members (38 women and 25 men) of his united chapels were named.[32]

These were just the members; adherents and sympathisers swelled the throng. In 1784, for instance, Hindolveston had thirty people attached to Sykes's meetings, as the resident vicar the Revd William Ivory (d.1802 aged 50) admitted sorrowfully to the Bishop; the total parish population in 1801 was 621. So successful was Sykes's preaching and pastoral care that by 1794 the village harboured 100 residents attending Independent meetings: more than 16 per cent of the whole population.[33] Almost certainly the Calvinistic Methodists were equally as willing as the Independents to undertake long journeys on the Sabbath to attend meetings. Sadly their records (if kept at all) have not survived, so we cannot chronicle what was happening in the coastal area in and around Cley.

It is thus entirely possible that the earliest meeting registered in the coastal parishes, at Cley in 1792 under Mrs Smith, was for a few years Calvinistic Methodist before becoming Wesleyan. Women were very much to the fore in Lady Huntingdon's movement in Mendham's time: as meeting-house trustees, as preachers and as funders; of the eight trustees at Fakenham in 1773 four were female.[34] As seen at Fig. 5, Elizabeth Smith had lived at Wells for some years before moving to Cley with her lawyer husband John—the only person recorded by Mary Hardy in her 500,000-word diary as smoking a pipe.[35] And Wells was a stronghold of Lady Huntingdon's preachers long before it became Wesleyan. As well as Mary Parker herself one of these was Mrs Mary Proudfoot, née Vaux (d.1833 aged 90), whom we meet later in this study as a Wesleyan preacher at Cley and Letheringsett.

Mary Hardy may herself have been attracted at first to the Calvinistic strain. She attended Mendham's meetings at Briston in 1786 and 1791, some years before she turned Wesleyan from 1795 onwards; her daughter Mary Ann joined her at Wesleyan meetings from 1798.[36] On a five-week trip to London in 1800 the diarist was assiduous in attending ten meetings at five of Lady Huntingdon's chapels; by contrast she worshipped only four times at Wesley's City Road Chapel and only once at a Baptist meeting. She also attended a variety of Church of England services and twice went to the synagogue. When we delve into religious practice in this period the open-mindedness and eagerness to sample are a revelation.[37]

The year 1793 proved highly significant for our area. Not only did war break out once more with France, with

Fig. 8 Briston: Thomas Mendham's manse, on the right, adjoins the Calvinistic Methodist chapel of 1775. It became Independent in 1783, requiring the preacher to build a replacement chapel nearby. This is the second oldest surviving Methodist chapel in Norfolk, the one of 1773 in the Countess's connexion at Fakenham being the oldest. Walsingham Methodist Church, dating from 1794 and often described as the oldest, is in fact third in line. Walsingham is the earliest Wesleyan Methodist chapel in the county still standing, and continues in full use (Figs 12 and 13).
[photo Margaret Bird 2011]

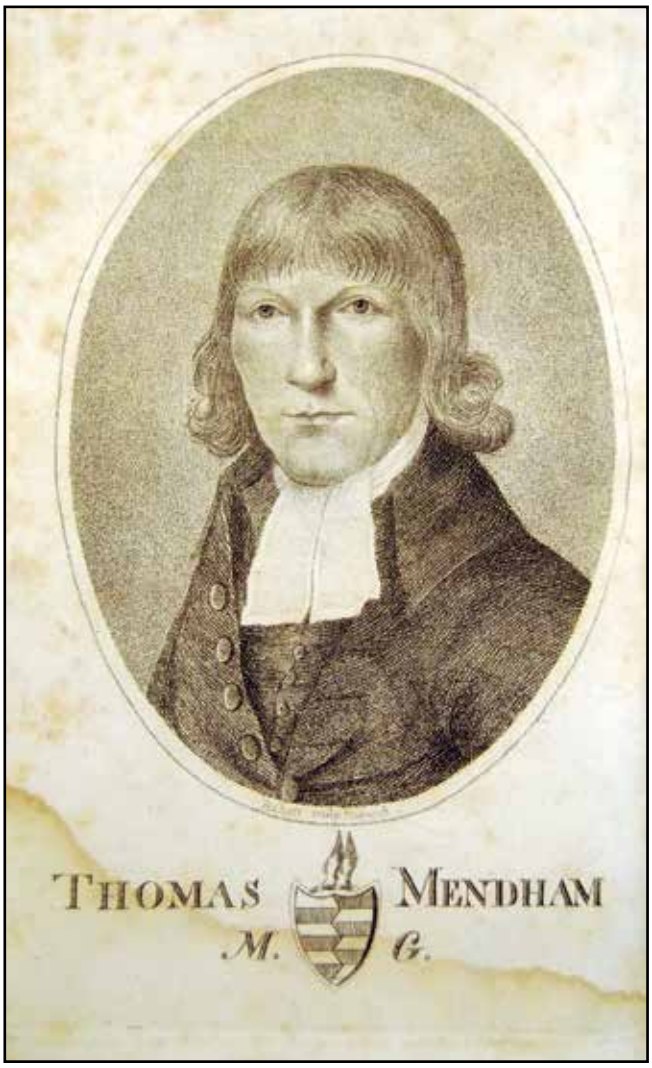


Fig. 9 Thomas Mendham: the frontispiece to The Wonder-Working Watermill Displayed, one of his many self-published works. 'MG' presumably stands for Minister of the Gospel.

The driven preacher and attorney, whose pamphlets show him to be a visionary with a burning sense of social justice and an ability to write lyrical prose, never spared himself. His name crops up frequently in the press, in manor court minutes and in conveyances and other legal matters across north Norfolk.

The stain near the foot of the image reflects water damage from the Norwich library fire of 1 August 1994. My pre-fire photographs bear no such blemish.

[engraving by Bassett of Norwich; Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norwich]

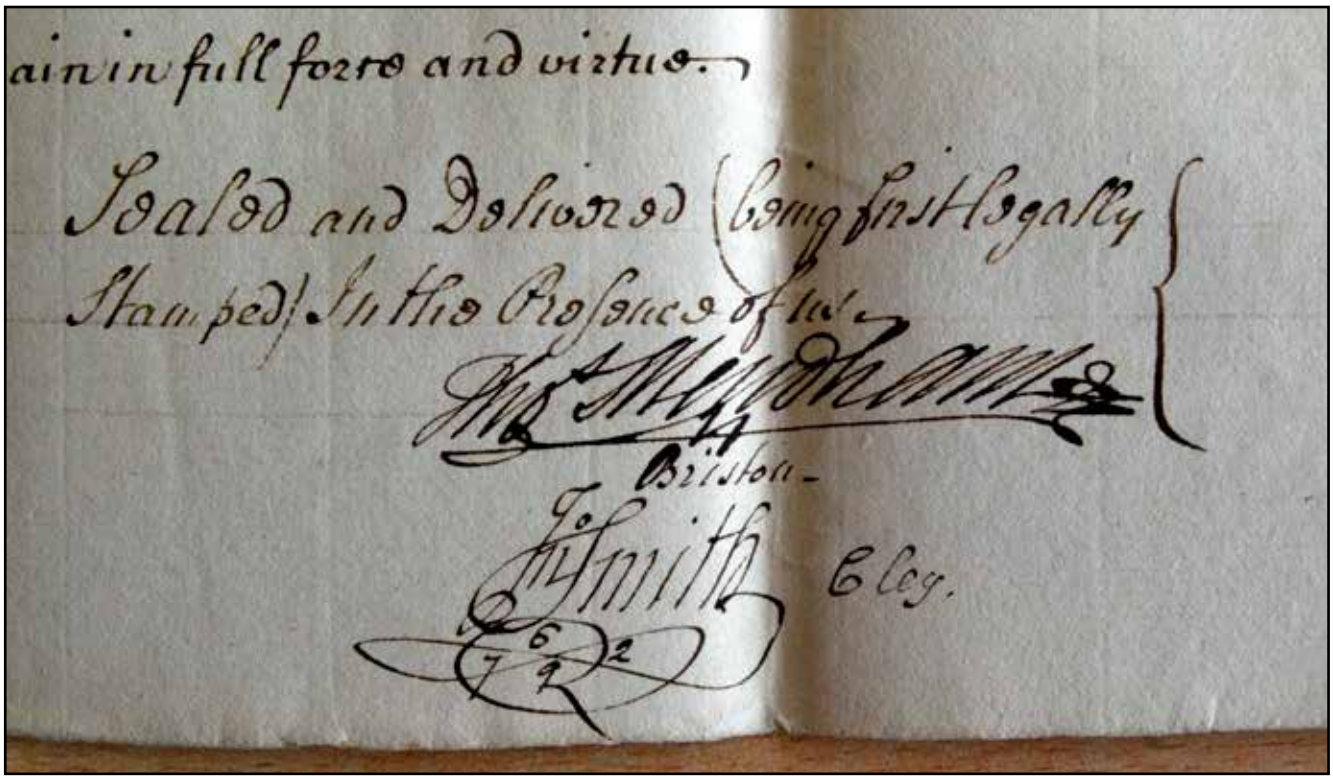


Fig. 10 Mendham's signature appears above that of John Smith, the Cley attorney whose wife Elizabeth was a zealous Methodist with a flair for leadership. She encouraged the Wells preacher Mary Proudfoot (d.1833 aged 90), one of few female Wesleyan local preachers at the time. Mrs Proudfoot had been a Calvinistic Methodist preacher before turning to the Wesleyans when the earlier movement died down locally following the deaths of Lady Huntingdon and Thomas Mendham.

John Smith has got the year wrong, looping 1692, not 1792, into his swirling signature.

[Norfolk Record Office: BR 10/1, Deeds of the Bell public house, Fakenham]

Fig. 11 Briston: this former Wesleyan Methodist Church was built in 1812 on the site of the Calvinistic Methodist chapel of 1783 built by Thomas Mendham after his ejection from the 1775 chapel seen at Fig. 8. The earlier one here only became Wesleyan in 1795, two years after Mendham's death. Some of the graves in the burial ground predate the later building.
[photo Margaret Bird 2011]

consequent disruption to trade and the mobilisation of male civilians, but the Calvinistic Methodists lost their chief preacher and missionary. The Wesleyans at the same time moved their new local base from Wells to Walsingham, building the very handsome chapel of 1793–94 which survives to this day (Figs 12 and 13). From this chapel a series of determined itinerant Wesleyan preachers pushed north-east, gradually converting the Calvinists to their way of thinking and taking over their meeting houses. These included even the Calvinistic Methodists' purpose-built chapels at Fakenham (of 1773) and Briston (of 1783).

The Wesleyans were prepared to adopt aggressive measures to triumph over their rivals, forcing them by means of Bills in Chancery to transfer the chapels which thereupon became established 'on the Conference plan'. Lady Huntingdon's chapels had not always been securely enrolled in Chancery within the twelve-month period required under the Charitable Uses Act of 1735.[38] The Countess ran a much looser structure than the Wesleyans, and had no annual conference to push through the Calvinists' measures. Her movement was consequently in a far more precarious position following her death a few months after Wesley's in 1791.

Had Mendham lived to publish his book on Methodism we should have discovered the sequence of events leading to the end of the Countess's movement in north Norfolk. He intended in 1792 to give 'a faithful narrative of facts respecting the assigned causes of sundry separations from them [her chapels and meeting houses], which have happened within the last 12 years, in which many living characters will be introduced'.[39]

Thomas Mendham's passing had produced a vacuum which the Wesleyans hastened to fill. The blow was doubly bitter in his home village of Briston, which he had served so valiantly. Twice his chapels, and the manses belonging to them, were taken over by other sects. In 1783 the congregation at the 1775 tabernacle, led by the preachers William and Elizabeth Grieves, voted to turn Independent and invited the Revd John Sykes of Guestwick to serve them. No reason is given for their rejection of Mendham and the Countess, but at least the Independents were fellow Calvinists (Fig. 8).[40]

Undeterred, Mendham moved across the road, converting the 1782 schoolroom of his brother-in-law Thomas Gunton into a replacement Calvinistic Methodist chapel with a manse next door.[41] But again the Wesleyans thwarted him. Around 1795, two years after his death, the buildings were taken over by the rival Methodists. In 1812 they built a new Wesleyan chapel on this site; it closed for worship in 2010 (Fig. 11). Mendham's earlier chapel of 1775 had closed for worship in 1990 after an unbroken history of religious witness spanning 215 years.

The Wesleyan organisation—and 'a town notorious for wickedness'

The Nonconformists' breakthrough as they strove to establish a permanent presence in the northern part of the area mapped in Figs 2 and 4 came with the formation of the Wesleyans' Walsingham Circuit in 1793. The market town's impressive chapel (Figs 12 and 13), funded by local tradesmen, male and female, signalled to the wider population their dedication and also their ambition: this was a force to be reckoned with.[42]

The Wesleyans had found progress very slow across the northern half of the county since the founding of their Norwich Circuit in 1749. In date order, other circuits were opened only gradually: Lynn in 1776, Great Yarmouth 1785, Diss 1790, Wells 1791 (moved to Walsingham in 1793), North Walsham 1813 and Holt 1815.

John Wesley, whose abrasive leadership style was to drive rather than to encourage, would express his impatience and dissatisfaction with the unpromising material to be found in 'fickle Norfolk'. This county, so he held, gave him more trouble than any other in England, Wales and Scotland together. The 'Do Different' locals would not bend to the dictates of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, while backsliders added to the preachers' problems. Wesley himself spoke in forthright terms of the need for the Norwich Wesleyans to 'bow to his yoke'.[43]

We can follow the numbers of paid-up members, and the way these rose and fell. The Wesleyans kept remarkably good records, and the itinerant preachers did not try to conceal their problems and reverses (Fig. 14). The title of this article is taken from the earnest prayer of the 23-year-old itinerant preacher Richard Reece (1765–1850) in the Norwich Circuit as he apprehensively contemplated his mission at New Year 1789:

> The work goes on but slowly. What the hindrance is I cannot conceive. Thou knowest, and thou only canst remove the impediment. Make bare thine arm, and work mightily in this barren part of the Vineyard. Make thy Ministers as flames of fire that shall spread the heavenly contagion everywhere.[44]

The 485 members of 1773 had become 722 by 1778; by 1789 there were 1080 members, according to the Conference statistics. Ten years later, in the year the first Methodist chapel was built in Cley, there were 2162 members in Norfolk; and by 1813, the year the Holt chapel opened, there were 3881.

Over the period 1773–1813 Wesleyan membership in Norfolk represented between 1.2 and 2 per cent of the total Wesleyans in Britain, Ireland and Gibraltar. This figure was rather lower than the county's percentage of the total population, which in the 1801 census was 2.6 per cent: the Church of England was holding its own in the county. The bar graph at Fig. 15, covering the years 1791–1815, demonstrates the problems in

Fig. 12 Easy to miss: Walsingham Methodist Church (centre) was built discreetly up a narrow loke in 1793–94; Nonconformists often chose not to advertise their presence. The Wesleyan congregations at Cley, Blakeney, Letheringsett, Brinton, Briston and elsewhere were run from this mother church, the head of the circuit, until Holt became a separate circuit in 1815.
[photo Margaret Bird 2016]

Fig. 13 The corner stones of Walsingham Methodist Church were laid on 10 June 1793 by three men and one woman: the class leader William Wetdrill and the local miller Lewis Minns, both of whom had contributed generously to the building fund, the shopkeeper Martha Lambert and the full-time circuit preacher William Denton.
[photo Margaret Bird 2012]

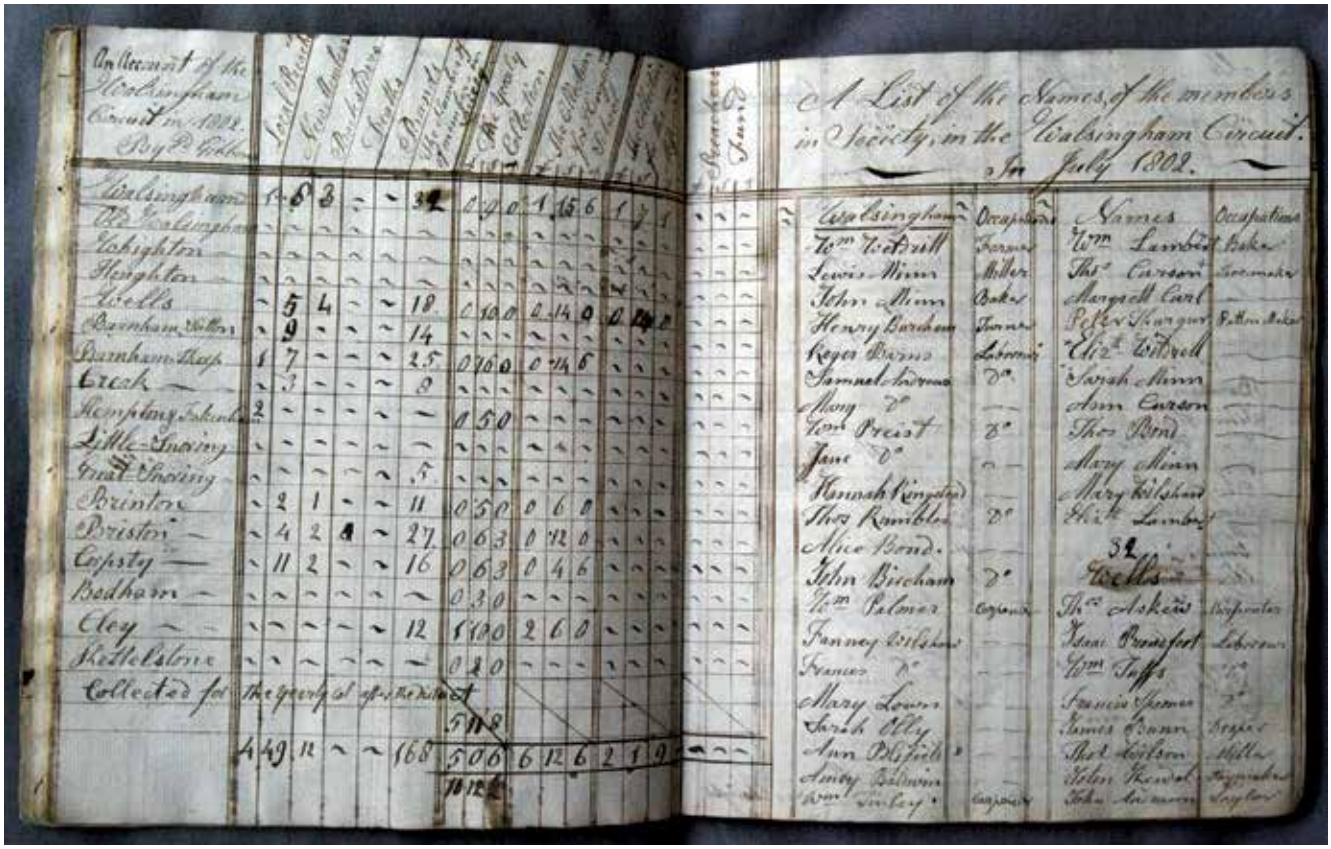


Fig. 14 The raw material from which the Wesleyan numbers were presented to Conference. John Wesley's organisation was an association to which the paid-up faithful belonged, in contrast with the inclusive Church of England which embraced all souls in the parish. These are some of the figures for 1802, prepared by the itinerant preacher Edward Gibbons for the Walsingham Circuit. In theory 17 societies constituted the circuit, but seven were struggling and had no paid-up members. There was a funding crisis.

Walsingham itself had 32 members, Wells 18 and Cley 12. Some of the villages were doing well: 25 in Burnham Thorpe, 14 in Burnham Sutton, and 11 in Brinton. The large number, 27, at Briston will in part reflect Mendham's legacy, for some of his congregation joined the Wesleyans rather than the Independents. In all the circuit had 168 members. Occupations are given against members' names on the right-hand page; tradesmen, craftsmen and labourers predominate. Cley stands out as by far the chief donor to the Kingswood School (near Bristol) for itinerant preachers' children: £2 6s is entered in the columns.

[NRO: FC 18/1, Record of members in the Wesleyan Connection, Walsingham Circuit, extract]

the north Norfolk area covered by the Walsingham Circuit: the Wesleyans did not make appreciable inroads until 1807. A later part of this study will suggest that the fiery presence of the Anglican Evangelicals, the very 'flames of fire' for which the young Reece had prayed, had succeeded in delaying the advance of the Wesleyans.

The Wesleyans would almost certainly not have gained their Holt chapel (Fig. 16) without the active support of Mary Hardy's son, the brewer William Hardy junior of Letheringsett Hall (Figs 17 and 18). He funded it, and it was designed by his architect William Mindham (1771–1843).[45] As William's epitaph records in the second Mindham-designed Wesleyan chapel he built at Holt, in New Street in 1838, he had valiantly supported the cause against local opposition:

> This tablet is erected by various friends of the Wesleyan denomination, as a spontaneous tribute of respect to his memory, and an enduring record of the zeal with which he supported the cause of Wesleyan Methodism, amidst the obloquy, the reproach, and the persecution, which attended its introduction into this neighbourhood . . .[46]

The long epitaph, which records the brewer's erection of the two chapels, was probably written by his nephew and heir William Hardy Cozens-Hardy (1806–95). This younger William was the son of the brewer's sister Mary Ann, who in 1805 had married the Calvinistic Baptist Jeremiah Cozens, a Sprowston farmer. By the time of her marriage Mary Ann had fervently embraced the Wesleyanism of her mother Mary Hardy. Her only son, who inherited the Letheringsett Hall estate, farmland, maltings and brewery on William Hardy junior's death in 1842, adhered to his mother's brand of religious observance and not his father's—partly perhaps as there was no Baptist meeting within reach of Letheringsett.

However in his reference to persecution of the Wesleyans William Hardy junior's heir may not have faithfully chronicled what was happening in our period. During her Letheringsett years 1781–1809 his grandmother the diarist makes only one mention of persecution of the Methodists in her diary. This was with reference to the meeting at Holt registered by Mendham's brother-in-law Thomas Gunton in 1783. Three days later Mary Hardy recorded, 'A mob raised at Holt on account of a Methodist meeting in the town'. A few weeks later she also noted, 'Some of the rioters taken into custody at Holt by the Methodist'.[47]

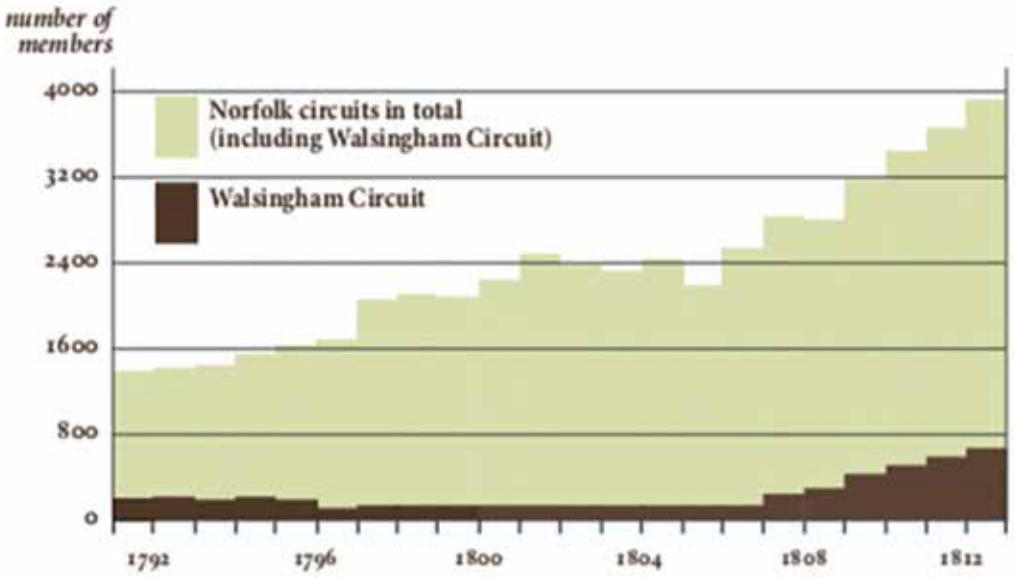


Fig. 15 Wesleyan Methodist membership numbers in Norfolk and (in brown) in Walsingham Circuit 1791–1813, taken from membership figures published in the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, vols 1, 2 and 3 (London, 1812, 1813, 1863). Whereas numbers were rising steadily across the county as a whole, the northern area's figures were flat-lining until 1807.
[Margaret Bird 2020]

But this was not a Wesleyan meeting. It was Calvinistic Methodist, the second in the town of the Calvinists' persuasion. When in 1862 William Hardy Cozens-Hardy, on land he had given, laid the foundation stone of today's Methodist Church on Holt's Obelisk Plain he told a large gathering about the persecution Mendham had suffered. Yet he forbore to mention that Mendham was a follower of Whitefield and not of Wesley:

> You will remember that Methodism was cradled in a storm . . . Holt was no exception to this. It was notorious for wickedness at the time to which I allude [1783]; and a zealous local preacher of the name of Mendham, who resided at Briston, having gained permission to occupy a small cottage, made an attempt to declare the truths of the gospel to the people. This cottage, I believe, was very near the site upon which we have laid the corner stone today . . . [48]

Fig. 16 Chancery Buildings in Albert Street, Holt: the town's first purpose-built Wesleyan chapel. Funded by the Letheringsett brewer William Hardy junior and built 1813, it bears the sturdy stylistic hallmarks of his architect William Mindham.

It served as the mother church of the Holt Circuit in 1815 until that role was taken over by another Hardy–Mindham creation nearby: the 1838 chapel in New Street. It was divided into two homes in 1853, its gallery and pews having gone to the new chapel.
[photo Margaret Bird 2003]

The Wesleyans' preachers

We learn a great deal about the Wesleyan preachers from Mary Hardy. She would give them hot meals and offer them a bed for the night at Letheringsett Hall, thereby easing their hardships on the road. She had great sympathy for itinerants, having married into the Excise. Her husband William Hardy (1732–1811) only became a brewer at Letheringsett at the age of 49; he had previously been a brewery manager at Coltishall. For twelve years, from the age of twenty-five, he had served as an excise officer, posted to six different stations across England.

Mary Hardy is the sole source for much of our knowledge of the way the system of itinerant (full-time) and local (part-time) preachers worked in the Cley area. On a Sunday the same preacher would take the morning service at Cley, sometimes stay for midday dinner with the Hardys, and then take the afternoon service at Briston. When Mary Hardy re-founded Letheringsett's Wesleyan meeting, in her washerwoman's cottage, the preacher would attend on Thursday evenings—a time to suit working people (Figs 19 and 20). Previously, in 1798, the little flock of Methodists had met in the for-

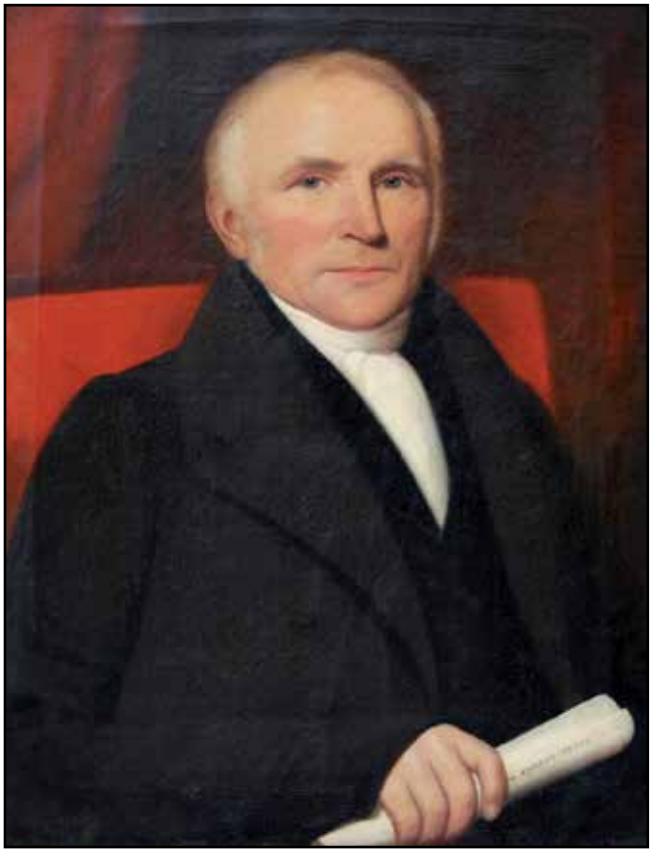


Fig. 17 (left) Mary Hardy in 1798, by which time she was regularly attending Wesleyan meetings at Cley, Briston and elsewhere.
[portrait by Immanuel; Cozens-Hardy Collection]

Fig. 18 (above) Her son William Hardy junior. Both actively promoted the Wesleyan cause.
[portrait by an unknown artist c.1826; Cozens-Hardy Collection]

mer granary at new-built Letheringsett Watermill.[49]

The itinerants, also known as circuit preachers and travelling preachers, were moved at Conference's whim; the great majority were permitted one or two years at most on station. They and their families endured bewildering transfers not just within Britain but also to Ireland, the British West Indies and the eastern United States. The faithful attending the north Norfolk meetings heard sermons by men (all the full-timers were men) who rose to high office in the Wesleyan organisation or who also served as missionaries on the other side of the Atlantic.[50] Richard Reece, the anxious young itinerant whom we have met already, rose to be President of the Methodist Conference in 1816 and 1835 and served as Superintendent of Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London 1840–42; he died in the manse where John Wesley had died. He too crossed the Atlantic during his long career as a preacher.

We also meet Wesleyan local preachers, who had to earn their living during the week before devoting their Sundays, and often their evenings, to journeying across their local area to attend meetings. They were not subject to changes of station, and their careers were not determined by Conference. Most were working tradesmen and craftsmen, drawn from among the paid-up members of local congregations. The final two columns of Fig. 14 cite the occupations of named members at Walsingham and Wells in 1802: baker, shoemaker, pattenmaker, carpenter, labourer, draper, miller, staymaker and tailor. The occupations of female members, even though many would have been gainfully employed, are not entered.

Samuel Eastaugh (d.1840), of Hempton and Fakenham, was active first with Mary Parker and Thomas Mendham as a Calvinistic Methodist preacher until that movement faltered following the Countess's death. He is first named by Mary Hardy in 1796, when he preached at Cley's Wesleyan meeting. Two years later he was leader of the seven-strong Wesleyan society at Little Snoring.[51] He quickly found a refuge with the diarist's family at Letheringsett Hall, sometimes bringing his wife Catherine, née Child, with him on these visits; they had married at Fakenham in 1799. The diarist notes him preaching at Fakenham, Cley, Briston and Corpusty. He also preached twice one Sunday, at 3 pm and 7 pm, 'to a crowded congregation', at her own Letheringsett meeting shortly before she died in March 1809.[52] By the time of his death Eastaugh had spent fifty years on the road, ministering to some of the meeting houses shown on the map at Fig. 4.

Another local preacher who came to Cley and Letheringsett had also served as an active Calvinistic Methodist before turning to Wesleyanism. This was Mary Proudfoot, wife of Isaac Proudfoot (d.1809 aged 58), a Wells limeburner. She had the honour to be called 'Sister Proudfoot' by John Wesley in 1781 during her early career as a 'teacher'; Wesley could not being himself to regard Calvinist women as preachers. But

ig. 19 Letheringsett in 1904, with the Glaven bridge of 1818 in the foreground. The workers' cottages on the left were refronted by Mary Hardy's grandson William Hardy Cozens-Hardy in the mid-19th century, but date from earlier.

Wesleyan meetings were held in the ground-floor room of one of the far cottages from 1808 to c.1813. Mary Hardy's former maidservant and washerwoman Elizabeth Bullock hosted the meetings; the diarist and her daughter Mary Ann Cozens had arranged for the room to be licensed.

Arthur Preston records his brother Thomas, who has set up his tripod on the bridge.
[photo by the Preston Brothers of Holt; NRO: MC 2043/6/3, 909x5, Checkley Collection]

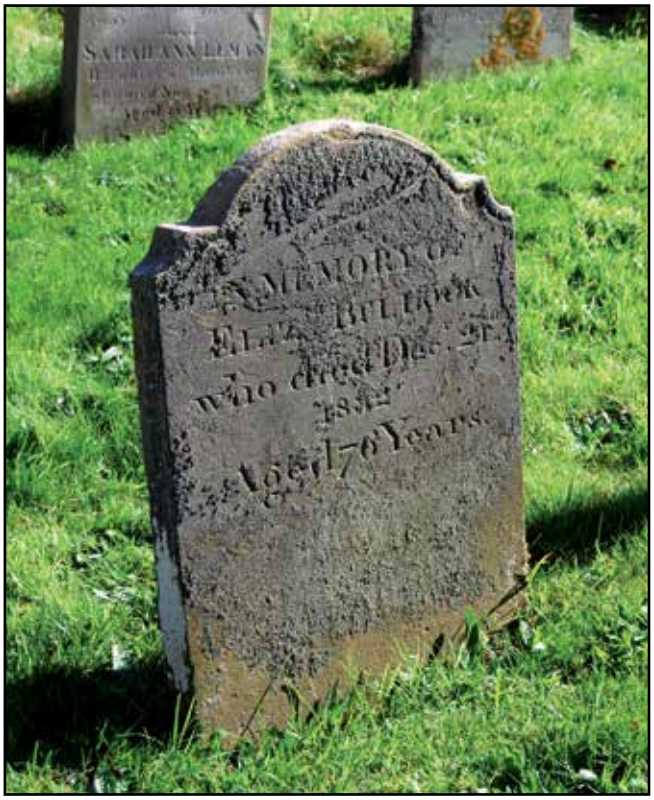


Fig. 20 The grave of Mrs Bullock in the south churchyard at Letheringsett. Born Elizabeth Jeckell and formerly married to Thomas Milligen, she died in December 1832 aged 76. William Hardy junior may have paid for the substantial headstone.
[photo Margaret Bird 2011]

Fig. 21 King's College, Cambridge, from the west. Here the inspirational tutor Revd Charles Simeon trained promising future ordinands from other colleges in his 'pulpit classes' held in his rooms in the arched part of the Gibbs' Building (right). Mary Hardy and her extended circle of acquaintance eagerly followed these young preachers across the area shown in Figs 2 and 4 and beyond to Warham All Saints. *[photo Margaret Bird 2012]*

even he had to acknowledge the presence of six female preachers among the despised 'Antinomians' at that time in north Norfolk.[53]

Women who delivered sermons and took services were sufficiently rare to be regarded as something of a freak show by many among the laity. The brewer William Hardy almost never joined his wife at Methodist meetings. Instead he remained a devoted Anglican—despite having a mother and brother in Yorkshire and Lancashire who were fiercely loyal members of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. He made an exception however when Mrs Proudfoot was preaching at Cley one Sunday in 1796, choosing to accompany his diarist wife to the meeting house. He also welcomed Mary and Isaac Proudfoot to his home when Mrs Proudfoot was preaching at Letheringsett one weekday evening.[54]

Without doubt Mrs Proudfoot was a prominent figure as leader of the Wells Wesleyans in 1798 and 1799. Inspired perhaps by her example it was a strikingly matriarchal group: as late as 1811 only 24 of the 71 paid-up members in the seaport were men.[55] The historian David Hempton characterises Wesleyanism at local level as 'without question preponderantly a women's movement', while lamenting the paucity of local records to prove the point.[56] Mary Hardy thus becomes an extremely valuable informant.

Roving Anglican gospel-preachers

The picture is emerging of a pluralist form of society in the Cley area. Individuals were willing to experiment and to seek new outlets for their religious fervour. Double-mindedness had become a hallmark of local worship for families like the Hardys, as also many in their circle from as far afield as Mary Hardy's childhood village of Whissonsett, five miles south of Fakenham. They would attend Church of England services either in their own parish church or in neighbouring churches, while also enjoying the stimulus of less formal worship among a variety of Nonconformist sects.

This easy toleration was however about to be shattered. The driven young Evangelicals bursting onto the local scene determinedly sought to disrupt this harmony and bring back the straying sheep into the Establishment fold. Broad Church Latitudinarianism, as embraced by the parish clergy featured in the early part of this article, was to be replaced among the Evangelicals by a narrower, more intense brand of heart religion. It was one severely Calvinist in tone, and one which chose not to focus on the joyous Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension. The Evangelical mindset in this period was dominated by the pain and anguish of the Crucifixion. As the Cambridge mural tablet to their mentor, the Revd Charles Simeon of King's College (Fig. 21), proclaimed: 'I preach Christ crucified'.[57]

We can see this agonising crucicentric imagery in Field Dalling Church, in the jewel colours of the great east window commemorating the dedicated minister William Upjohn (Fig. 22). He served there as curate 1804–11 and then as vicar until his death in 1855; he was also Vicar of Binham 1822–55. He was unique among the Evangelical preachers known to Mary Hardy in being educated at Oxford and in not moving away from the area covered by this study. The other restless gospel-preachers she followed from parish to parish never became incumbents; instead they saw themselves as missionaries, willing to forgo family life in the service of their Lord.

We meet them in the diary: George Barrs (Fig. 23), James Bingle, John Meakin, William Henry Deverell; all

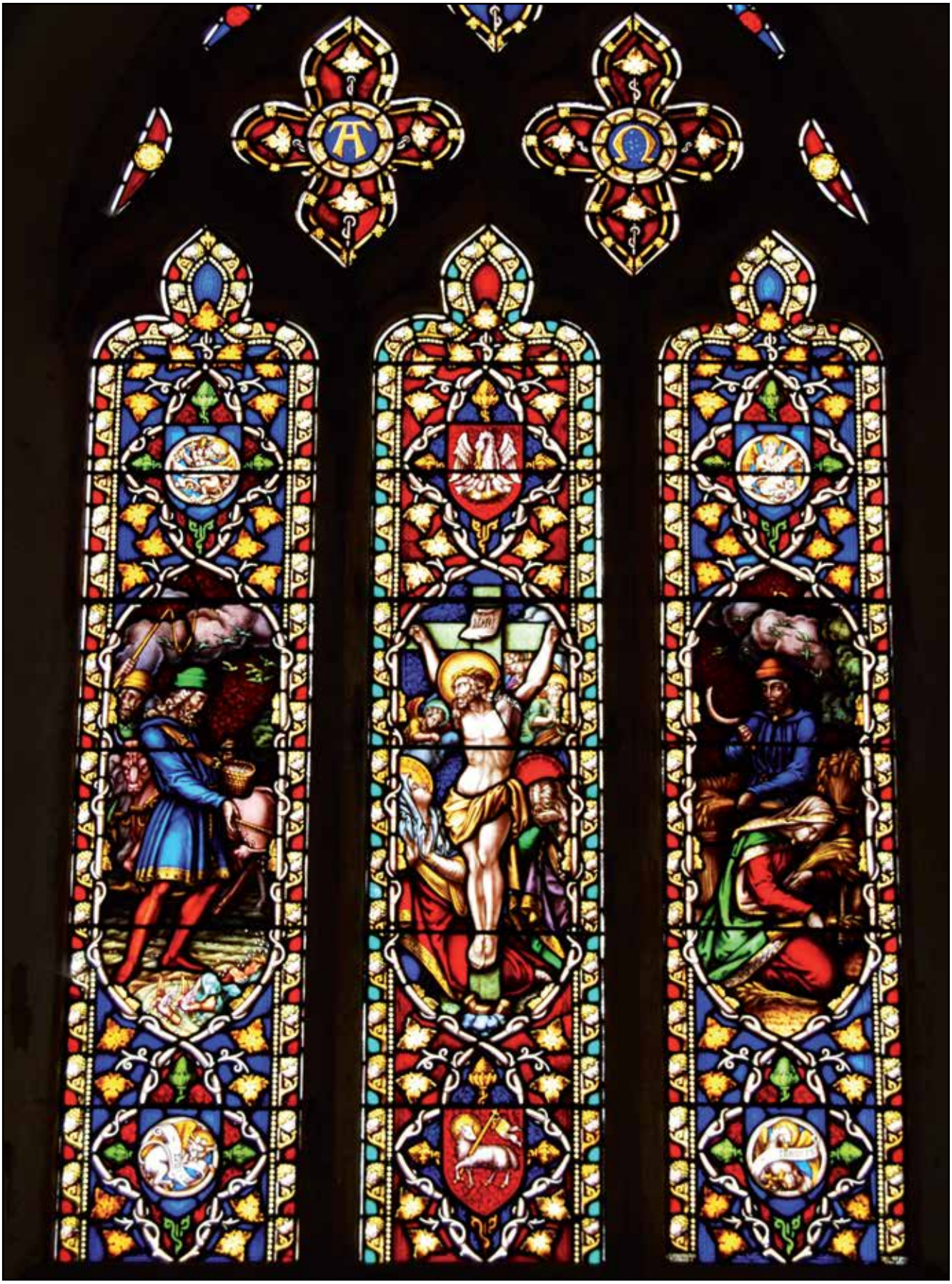


Fig. 22 Field Dalling Church's memorial east window to the gospel-preacher William Upjohn (d.1855 aged 81), a man greatly admired by Mary Hardy and her son. Like the Upjohn family's mural tablet nearby on the north wall, the cental panel draws our thoughts to pain and suffering. This is Christ broken on the cross and not the risen Saviour. Other Evangelical elements include the Gospel parables recounted by Christ which Upjohn featured in his published sermons.
[photo Margaret Bird 2011]

Fig. 23 The Revd George Barrs (1771–1840), one of the 'Sims' or Simeonites. He was lionised during his brief mission to north Norfolk 1799–1800 before moving to Birmingham. *[portrait by Thomas Kirby 1820; photo Matthew Shelton 2012]*

Cambridge men influenced by Simeon. William Ivory, from whom we heard of his struggles to compete with the Independents at Hindolveston, was one of Norfolk's foremost Evangelicals and a founder member of John Venn's Little Dunham Clerical Society. He did not attend university—a career path fairly common among the parish clergy in our period. A tormented soul, his replies to the Bishop of Norwich represent some of the most poignant testimonies in the visitation returns.

The parishes with pulpits in which these roving preachers were welcome included Holt, where Mary Hardy first heard George Barrs in July 1799; also Letheringsett, Field Dalling, Warham All Saints and Briningham (Figs 24 and 25). The significance of their presence in our story is that they stayed the advance of the Wesleyans and helped to effect a change in the public mood—elements we can track in the pages of Mary Hardy's diary.

The preachers' mobility and their commitment to pastoral care were just two of their strengths. Others were the avoidance of politics in their sermons in the divisive wartime decades, and their direct appeal to each individual soul. Simeon had taught them how to work on their hearers. As a result their published sermons with their musical cadences are works of art.[58]

The gloom of the grave': changes in public mood

Calvinism is associated with a puritanical lifestyle, giving little opportunity for self-indulgence and frivolity. Without doubt the period under scrutiny in this article saw a marked diminution in pleasurable activities, especially those engaged in by the poor; the nobility, gentry and leisured class generally continued their private pleasures such as shooting and visits to Bath and other spas. A new restraint and puritanism (the non-political form carrying a lower-case 'p') was imposed on the lives of working people. Work relationships changed. The easy, mutually respectful bond of custom between master and man was replaced by the colder, controlling bondage of capitalist ways.[59]

One historian of the common man, Robert Poole, has gone so far as to argue that the second half of the eighteenth century saw the fading of Merrie England, with its public sports and pleasure fairs. He has written powerfully of the importance of fairs for the labouring class: the one occasion a year when servants and labourers could meet up with family and old friends at the home fair.[60] Cley had one such small fair, held on Newgate Green on a Friday close to 20 July—the feast of St Margaret of Antioch, to whom the church is dedicated.[61]

These fairs did not cease because they no longer had a function. They were deliberately suppressed, as when the stern Bishop of Norwich, Charles Manners Sutton, suppressed Horning Fair in 1803. Binham Fair, another small-scale affair, had been closed by the lord of the manor in 1793. Horning had proved a great attraction for the Hardys' men in the Coltishall years, and they liked to linger after delivering the beer for the event. The Hardys themselves gradually stopped attending the more minor fairs, while still supporting the stock fairs such as Holt, Cawston and Hempton Green, near Fakenham.[62]

We can trace related developments in Mary Hardy's diary. In the early years the exceedingly hardworking farm and brewery workforce would occasionally be permitted time off to watch a boxing match or wrestling match. From the 1780s onwards no such latitude was given the team.[63] The Hardy family personified the loss of frivolity. Apart from William Hardy junior, who carried on a little longer, the other members gave up going to the theatre and balls in the early years of the 1790s; previously these had been frequent events in the calendar which they greatly enjoyed. Travelling players ceased coming to Holt. Even card-playing is no longer recorded as a pastime in the diary.[64]

The visitation returns are full of disapproving remarks by the more Sabbatarian and Evangelically-minded clergy: men like William Ivory when at West Somerton, before his move to Hindolveston; or Lancaster Adkin, the man who introduced Sunday schools to his Norwich parishes in 1785 and set in train the movement which quickly spread round the Norfolk countryside.[64]

The Wesleyans, as represented by those at the top whose instructions are recorded in Conference minutes, vied with the Calvinists and Evangelicals in the suppression of fun in the early 1790s. Anyone who danced or allowed their children to dance could no longer be a member of a Wesleyan congregation. All singing had to be communal, with no individual performances. Frivolity in dress attracted severe condemnation.[65]

This marked change of mood was recorded by a tourist passing through Letheringsett in 1798. Samuel Pratt was appalled by the dark, solemn tracts and hymns pinned up around the village, and found the whole atmosphere oppressive. Almost certainly Zebulon Rouse (d.1840 aged 75), the mentally unstable miller and zealous Methodist who hosted meetings at his watermill, was the unnamed person responsible for the billposting. The colourful Zeb, son of the miller at Glandford and Letheringsett, was about to be consigned as a bankrupt to the debtors' prison in London. A few years later he attacked Mary Hardy's former maidservant Susan Lamb and broke her head. He

Fig. 24 (right) Briningham Church: an Evangelical hub. The Yorkshire-based William Atkinson (1758–1811) would preach here on his annual visits to Norfolk. Lecturer of Bradford Parish Church, he was a member of a family hugely influential in the story of the Awakening. As rector also of Warham All Saints, near Wells, he appointed George Barrs as his temporary curate.
[lithograph by J.B. Ladbrooke c.1823]

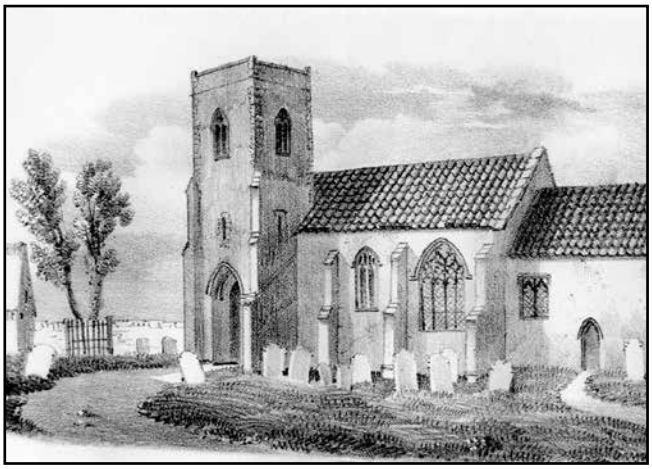


Fig. 25 (left) Briningham's sanctuary rails of c.1700. Here Mary Hardy and some of her family heard Atkinson of Bradford, Barrs of Warham All Saints, Upjohn of Field Dalling, Meakin of Holt and Bingle of Hevingham, among other touring preachers. Here also she attended her last Church of England service, in January 1807. By the time of her death two years later she had moved over totally to the Wesleyans and was no longer double-minded.

She may possibly have emulated her close friend Elizabeth Smith, whose funeral service was held in Cley Methodist Chapel, as we learn from Mary Hardy's 1803 diary; this was followed by interment in the churchyard of the home parish (see note 4). Parish registers, like headstones, record only the place of interment, and not where the funeral was held.
[photo Margaret Bird 2011]

had to be held in Bethel for a time until adopting a completely different way of life as a land surveyor at Cley and acquiring a wife and large family.[66]

Pratt was struck by the contrast between on the one hand the beauties of the landscape around Letheringsett and Bayfield and on the other the fear struck into 'the votaries of Methodism' with their 'downcast eye, the shaded brow, the drooping figure, the melancholy air, and the heavy step'. Their devotion, or 'infuriate zeal', for Methodism not only 'hurries them out of themselves, but impregnates their whole lives with the gloom of the grave'.[67]

It is a chilling description, but there is some truth in it. A comparison between the two portraits of Mary Hardy shows the clear onset of melancholy. In 1785, when dressed frothily for the 'playhouse' at Holt (an outbuilding behind the White Lion), she conveyed gaity and liveliness. Thirteen years later, by which time she was a committed Wesleyan, she had lost her smile and animated expression and had adopted Quaker dress (Figs 17 and 26).

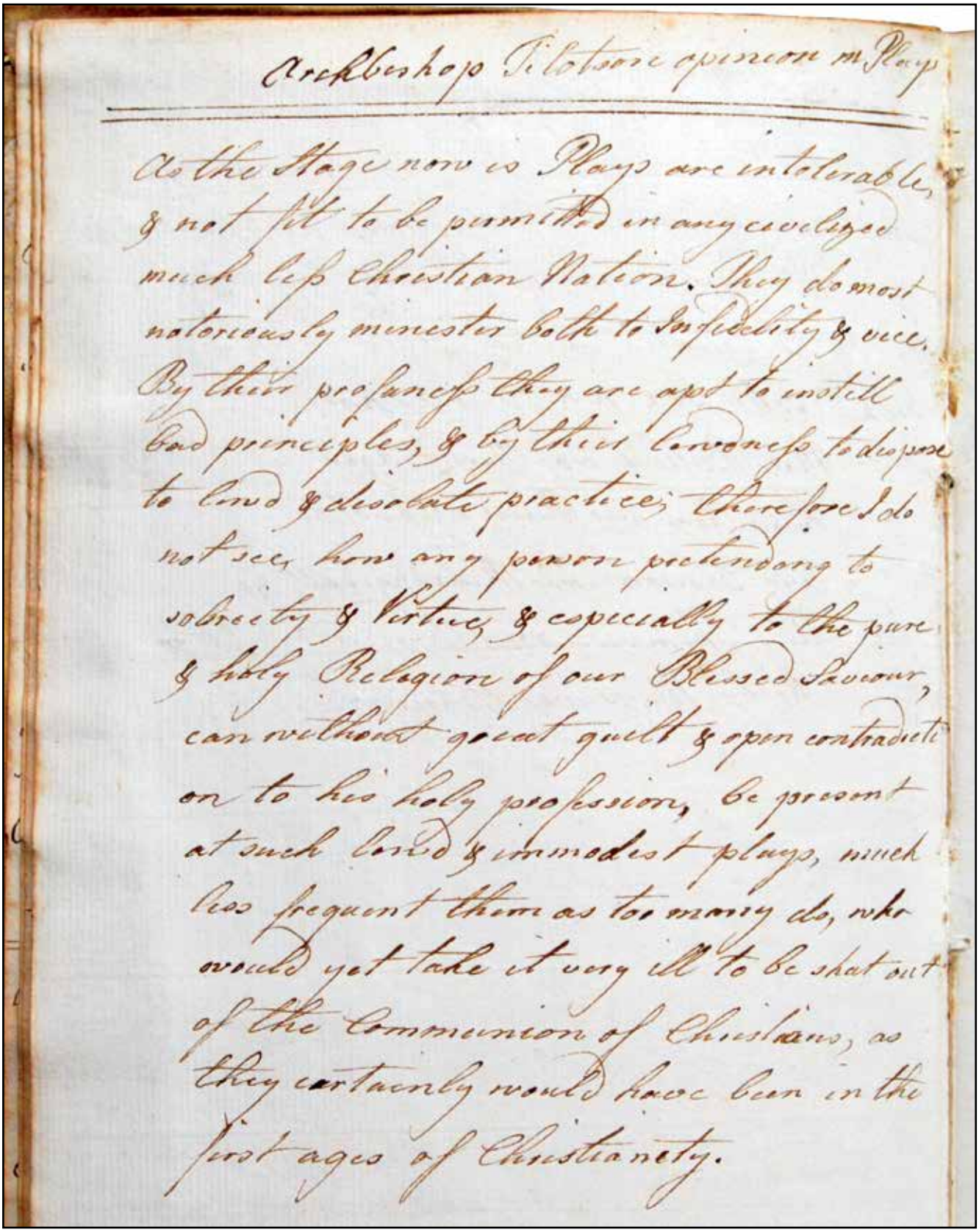
There was more to it than this. Zeb Rouse introduced singing to Letheringsett Church in 1798,[68] suggesting that even he knew how to be joyful; also the followers of the Calvinistic Methodists, the Wesleyans and the Anglican gospel-preachers would have derived spiritual comfort, and probably even joy, from the services and meetings. Many of the communal events which had brought pleasure to people in peacetime had to be dispensed with during the hardships and high taxation of the war years 1793–1815 and in the series of wheat famines which struck following unusually severe winters.[69] But it can justifiably be argued that the coming of the Methodists to north Norfolk coincided with, and may in part have caused, a loss of lightheartedness and 'harmless fun', to use the poet John Clare's words:

Thus ale and song, and healths, and merry ways,
Keep up a shadow still of former days.[70]

The vigorous, questing spirituality of the Revival

For about forty years groups of north Norfolk Nonconformists belonged to a female-led religious movement noted for its intensity of belief and its spiritual vitality. George III thought very highly of the Countess: 'I wish', declared the King to the Earl of Dartmouth, 'there was a Lady Huntingdon in every diocese in my kingdom.'[71]

If nothing else, I hope this study will have persuaded readers of two important points. Firstly, religious observance could have developed in a very different fashion in England had the Calvinistic Methodists of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion managed to prevail following their much-loved leader's death in 1791. They had too loose a structure however to withstand this loss, and their adherents tended to move to the su-


Archbishop Tillotson's opinion on Plays

As the Stage now is Plays are intolerable, & not fit to be permitted in any civilized much less Christian Nation. They do most notoriously minister both to Infidelity & vice. By their profaneness they are apt to instill bad principles, & by their lewdness to dispose to lewd & dissolute practice; therefore I do not see how any person pretending to sobriety & Virtue, & especially to the pure & holy Religion of our Blessed Saviour, can without great guilt & open contradiction to his holy profession, be present at such lewd & immodest plays, much less frequent them as too many do, who would yet take it very ill to be shut out of the Communion of Christians, as they certainly would have been in the first ages of Christianity.

Fig. 26 The new puritanism which increasingly gripped local society from the early 1790s onwards and is discernible in Mary Hardy's Quaker style of dress seen in Fig. 17. Here at the back of one of her diary volumes she copies an extract from a tirade by Dr John Tillotson (1630–94), Archbishop of Canterbury in the reign of William and Mary.

A stern Calvinist, his views were to be echoed a century later by the Wesleyan Conference and by the zealous Anglican Evangelicals in their mission to north Norfolk. The Archbishop opens: 'As the Stage now is Plays are intolerable, & not fit to be permitted in any civilized much less Christian Nation. They do most notoriously minister both to Infidelity [irreligion] & vice . . .'
[Cozens-Hardy Collection]

perbly organised Wesleyans or, less frequently in our area, to the Independents. It is all too easy to let the historical narrative be dominated by the survivors—in the case of Methodism, the Wesleyans—without investigating fully what was actually happening at the time.

The Countess's movement was one to be reckoned with in the second half of the eighteenth century, proving particularly successful and long-lasting in Wales and in the United States: the Countess helped to found the institution which became Princeton University.[72] In 1768 she also founded the first free theological training college in Britain, at Trevecca (Trefeca Isaf), South Wales.[73] Even now in England some of Lady Huntingdon's chapel congregations continue to meet for worship; Bath's closed only in recent years. Her influence is still felt in Africa, the Connexion being especially strong in Sierra Leone.

The second significant conclusion to draw from this winding exploration of the spread of 'the heavenly contagion' of Methodism is that its progress was far from straightforward. The Wesleyans had to work hard as they strove to gain a foothold in the Cley area. Only in 1815, nearly sixty years after the arrival of the Calvinistic Methodists, did they manage to establish a circuit headquarters within the parishes mapped at Figs 2 and 4. They found themselves hampered in our period by the strong attachment of the locals to the Countess and to Independency. The Established Church put in a strong showing too, at parish clergy level and through the stiffening provided by the selfless missionaries of the Evangelical Revival.

Without doubt the Norwich diocese was far from being 'the Dead See'. The flock revelled in all the opportunities surrounding them for sermon-tasting and experimentation. I hope this article will have exploded the stale, but tenacious, notion that parishioners either trooped docilely to their home church of a Sunday or clung doggedly to a humble meeting house nearby. Instead, drawn by the report of some new preacher, they took to the road in droves, as did the preachers themselves, with no thought for parish boundaries.

It was truly an exhilarating time to be a believer.

Notes

1 *Independents* The church book of the Guestwick Independents opens in 1694 (Norfolk Record Office (NRO): FC 11/1). They drew members and adherents from across a wide area, as related later in this article.

2 *Dissenters* Methodists of both persuasions are, and were then, regarded as Nonconformists but not as Dissenters, for their leaders Whitefield and Wesley were ordained Anglican clergymen and Lady Huntingdon was also a loyal Anglican; the Church of England liturgy was used in her chapels. All the sects were protected by the Toleration Act, which granted freedom to non-Church of England forms of worship from 1689. Justices of the Peace were required under the Act to ensure these rights were respected.

3 *Dead See* Ascribed to 'some wit' during Henry Bathurst's long episcopate 1805–37, as quoted by R.G. Wilson in *'The Cathedral in the Georgian Period', Norwich Cathedral: Church, city and diocese 1096–1996*, ed. I. Atherton, E. Fernie, C. Harper-Bill and H. Smith (The Hambledon Press, London, 1996), p. 583.

4 *Mrs Smith* In her grief the local diarist Mary Hardy noted the time of her friend's passing as between 11 pm and midnight (M. Bird, ed, *The Diary of Mary Hardy 1773–1809* (4 vols, Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2013): Diary 4, p. 244). Mrs Smith's funeral service was held in the Wesleyan meeting house she had founded; her interment was in St Margaret's churchyard. Many early meeting houses and chapels had no burial ground attached to them.

5 *Mary Hardy* Her 500,000-word text is published in full in the well-annotated four-volume study cited in note 4 and in Margaret Bird's *The Remaining Diary of Mary Hardy 1773–1809* (Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2013). The latter work contains the entries omitted from the main edition.

6 *Holt meeting house* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2, Register of meeting houses 1751–1810, p. 7. It was described as 'Independent', but the sect of George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon was sometimes called Independent Methodist as well as Calvinistic Methodist.

7 *visitation returns* An excellent series survives for the parishes of the Norwich see, covering Norfolk and Suffolk, for the years 1784, 1794, 1801, 1806 and 1813. Holt deanery's have these references in the DN/VIS series in the NRO: DN/VIS 29/6, 33a/4, 36/13, 41/4 and 46/7.

8 *Conference minutes* John Wesley sent his full-time preachers away from the 1776 Conference with this denunciation of the Countess, her free training college at Trevecca in Brecknock and her preachers: 'Do not imitate them in screaming, allegorizing, calling themselves ordained, boasting of their learning, college, or "my lady" . . . Pray constantly and earnestly that God would stop the plague!' *(Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, vol. 1 (London, 1812), pp. 127–8).

9 *Established Church* The term Anglican for an adherent of the Church of England did not then exist, but is for convenience adopted here.

10 *Parson Woodforde* A study of the complete text of his long diary dispels some of the grosser caricatures which have exaggerated his record of daily meals and socialising with the gentry. The Parson Woodforde Society published his full text in 17 volumes between 1978 and 2016, edited variously by Roy Winstanley, Peter Jameson and Heather Edwards. The volumes are listed, with their ISBNs, on the society's web page <https://www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk/publications.htm>, accessed 18 February 2021. Ronald Blythe's assertion that Woodforde was 'the very epitome of the country clergy' of his time is open to challenge (*J. Woodforde, A Country Parson: James Woodforde's diary 1759–1802* (Century Publishing, London, and Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 9).

11 *parish acreages* These and related figures are tabulated and interpreted in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World 1773–1809* (4 vols, Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2020), vol. 1, pp. 16–20. See also a discussion of the Anglican footprint in vol. 3, pp. 30–44, with maps and tables.

12 *public houses* See tables 2.9.1 and 2.9.2 in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 2, pp. 514, 515. Figures are calculated from the national census of 1801 and the alehouse register 1789–99 for the hundreds of Norfolk (thus not including the boroughs and the city of Norwich): NRO: C/Sch 1/16.

13 *willingness to wander* M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 30–9.

14 *Letheringsett's school* *Norwich Mercury,* 17 June 1786.

15 *Anglican Sunday schools* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 2, 25 June, 28 June, 2 July,

14 July 1786, and thereafter. The Holt shopkeepers Charles Sales and John Davy and their wives came to the Letheringsett Church service inaurgurating the school on 25 June and probably took away ideas for a Holt version. See M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 131–140 for the story of Letheringett's school and the spirit of emulation in nearby parishes; the Cley school is covered on pages 137–9.

16 *clergy numbers* W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman and G. Eayrs, eds, *A New History of Methodism* (2 vols, London, 1909), vol. 1, p. 364.

17 *population density* See table 1.1.1 in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 1, p. 17.

18 *clerical subalterns* Norman Sykes's phrase, in his massive study *Church and State in England in the 18th Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1934), pp. 189–230.

19 *curates* N. Sykes, *Church and State in England in the 18th century*, p. 217.

20 *register of meeting houses* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2.

21 *Wells engine room* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2, f. 37, 13 May 1786.

22 *Letheringsett's meetings* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2, f. 54, 30 Mar. 1796; f. 66, 17 Oct. 1798; f. 127, 18 Nov. 1808; also f. 54, 21 Dec. 1795.

23 *Cley's meetings* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2, f. 45, 10 Jan. 1792; f. 69, 12 Jan. 1799; f. 75, 7 Nov. 1799; f. 98, 6 Oct. 1802.

24 *Methodist licences* See note 7 for the references for the parishes of Holt deanery. Various pitfalls over interpreting the records are described in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 293–310.

25 *William Mayes* NRO: DN/DIS 1/2, f. 54, 21 Dec. 1795; NRO: PD 547/2, 17 May 1805 (baptisms) and 31 Aug. 1805 (burials): the Letheringsett rector noted the father's career in the parish register when little William Mayes was born and then died aged three months.

26 *Mendham's meeting houses* Listed, with full details and sources, in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, table 3.3.2, pp. 188-9.

27 *Mendham's History of Methodism Norwich Mercury,* 11 August 1792. His long statement, headed 'Methodism', in the newspaper reveals his burning sense of injustice over his treatment.

28 *Briston returns* NRO: DN/VIS 29/6 (1784); DN/VIS 46/7 (1813).

29 *Hunworth's rector* NRO: DN/VIS 29/6 (1784).

30 *Lady Huntingdon's movement* See note 26.

31 *Briston Mautbies manor court book* The manor is also spelt Mawtbies. Elizabeth Franklin was a preacher at the Briston Chapel, surrendering the copyhold in 1777 to her sister Mary, later Mrs Parker, and other trustees on Elizabeth's marriage to the preacher William Grieves. The typed extract from the manor court minutes, on a loose sheet of paper, is among the uncatalogued NRO deposits of Basil Cozens-Hardy (1886–1976), Mary Hardy's descendant: ACC Cozens-Hardy 11/2/1976. The trustees were also those of the Fakenham Chapel in the Connexion (NRO: MS 15403, 44B, Fakenham Lancaster manor court book 1791–1806, pp. 66–8, 20 July 1795). This chapel, like Briston's, still stands. When last seen in 2019 it was serving as the Conservative Club at 1 Whitehorse Street.

32 *Independents* NRO: FC 11/1. The 22 parishes were: Bale, Barney, Blakeney, Briston, Corpusty, Edgefield, Field Dalling, Foulsham, Foxley, Great Witchingham, Guestwick, Hindolveston, Hunworth, Melton, [?Wood] Norton, Saxlingham, Sharrington, Stody, Swanton Novers, Thornage, Walsingham and Wood Dalling. Many of these villages feature in the visitation returns as having residents who attended the industrious Sykes's meetings.

33 *Hunworth Independents* NRO: DN/VIS 29a/9 (for 1784) and DN/VIS 34a/7 (for 1784), Sparham deanery visitation returns.

34 *Fakenham Chapel trustees 1773* NRO: MS 15403, 44B, Fakenham Lancaster manor court book 1791–1806, pp. 66–8.

35 *smoking* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 4, p. 329, 23 Apr. 1806.

36 *Mary Hardy* She attended Mendham's meeting at Briston, where on the second occasion she and her family heard his funeral sermon for Lady Huntingdon (M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 2, p. 186, 4 June 1786; p. 342, 31 July 1791).

37 *London visit* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, pp. 118–32, 15 May–17 June 1800; the sidenotes identify the various places of worship.

38 *enrolled in Chancery* B. Cozens-Hardy, 'The Countess of Huntingdon *versus* Methodism *versus* Independency', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, vol. 21 (1972), p. 76.

39 *sundry separations Norwich Mercury*, 11 Aug. 1792; written from Briston 30 July 1792.

40 *Briston Tabernacle* NRO: FC 11/1, p. 154. Elizabeth and William Grieves were admitted as members of Guestwick Independent Church 12 September 1783, the husband becoming a deacon by 1788. He was still in that office at his death in 1825 (pp. 154, 156, 166).

41 *Briston schoolroom* B. Cozens-Hardy, 'The Countess of Huntingdon *versus* Methodism *versus* Independency', p. 75. In his rather quirky will of 1790 Mendham refers to this second chapel which he had 'erected, pewed and fitted up about ten years since, with burial ground surrounding' (NRO: ANW (1793), f. 80, no. 78, dated 22 Apr. 1790, proved 7 Mar. 1793).

42 *Walsingham Chapel* Its erection, funding and opening are very well documented (NRO: FC 18/14, Walsingham Methodist accounts 1793-1814, unpaginated). The local shopkeeper Martha Lambert laid one of the four corner stones on 10 June 1793.

43 *fickle Norfolk* Wesley is extremely outspoken about the failings of his Norfolk followers. See for instance J. Wesley, *The Journal of the Revd John Wesley* (5th edition London, 1800), vol. 3, p. 38, 18 and 20 Jan. 1761; p. 39, 1 Feb. 1761; p. 199, 12 Oct. 1764. These, and other strictures, are quoted in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, p. 348.

44 *flames of fire* From Richard Reece's MS diary of his year on the Norwich Circuit (NRO: FC 17/151, pp. 1–64 (photocopy); the entry is for 7 Jan. 1789). He shows that the faithful greatly disliked the constant changes of preacher and alterations to the circuits; nevertheless his selfless ministry drew new converts.

45 *Holt Chapel* See M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World,* vol. 3, pp. 338–49, for the private financing of this and other chapels.

46 *William Hardy junior's epitaph* The mural tablet is now in the Holt Methodist Church of 1863, built largely under the direction and at the expense of William's nephew and heir William Hardy Cozens-Hardy.

47 *rioters at Holt* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 2, p. 95, 6 July 1783; p. 100, 14 Aug. 1783. Licensed meeting houses enjoyed the protection of the law. The meeting was held in 'part of a house or lean-to in the tenure of Thomas Spicer of Holt' (NRO: DN/DIS

1/2, f. 34, 3 July 1783).

48 *cradled in a storm* A much fuller extract from W.H. Cozens-Hardy's speech is given in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, p. 190. Holt's Methodist Church of 1863 was not Wesleyan. The speaker, infuriated by 'Conference tyranny', had led a breakaway movement from 1849 known as the Wesleyan Reformers or Free Methodists. Designed by Thomas Jekyll, the new church could seat 400 persons.

49 *Letheringsett meetings* These are described in detail, with sources, in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 266–9, 292–7.

50 *itinerant preachers* Those posted to the (Wells and) Walsingham Circuit 1791–1813 are listed in full in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, p. 228. Others would pass through Cley and Letheringsett on their way to a new station: men like John Brownell (1771–1821), whose death was hastened by 'the heat of the climate and the violence of persecution' he had endured in the West Indies 1794–1805 (*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, vol. 5, p. 293). He dined at the Hardys' on 1 May 1808.

51 *Samuel Eastaugh* NRO: FC 18/1, for 1798.

52 *Eastaugh's career* It is summarised in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 318–9.

53 *Sister Proudfoot* She met Wesley at Wells in October 1781. He referred to six female teachers (preachers) 'within ten or twelve miles, all of whom were members of the Church of England'. These might have been Mary Parker, Elizabeth Grieves, Frances Spooner, Ann Glover and Martha Glover as well as Mary Proudfoot herself (J. Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (The Epworth Press, London, 1931), vol. 7, pp. 116–17; J. Wesley, *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley*, vol. 4, pp. 218–19. Calvinistic Methodists, following the example of Whitefield and the Countess, would frequently be practising Anglicans as well.

54 *Mrs Proudfoot's preaching* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 3, p. 289, 17-18 July 1796; p. 368, 5 June 1797; Diary 4, p. 15, 31 Dec. 1797. See also the long biographical note on the Proudfoots on p. 289 of Diary 3.

55 *matriarchal Wells* NRO: FC 18/1.

56 *women's movement* D. Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (Yale University Press, London, 2005), pp. 145, 146.

57 *Simeon's epitaph* In Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge; he died in 1836.

58 *Evangelicals* They are covered in detail, and their careers described, in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 3, pp. 239–65, 361–71.

59 *custom and capitalism* These arguments are developed in M. Bird, 'Fairs, frolics and the forces of change in the Norfolk of James Woodforde and Mary Hardy', *Parson Woodforde Society Quarterly Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (winter 2014), pp. 4–16; also in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 2, pp. 5–73.

60 *Merrie England* R. Poole, *The Lancashire Wakes Holidays* (Lancashire County Books, Preston, 1994), pp. 5–9; also, on fairs and revels, R. Poole, *Time's Alteration: Calendar reform in early modern England* (UCL Press, London, 1998), pp. 141–64.

61 *Cley Fair* Dating from 1253, it was declining in importance. Some of the Hardys' servants and their miller liked to attend (M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 4, pp. 376, 384 and 386).

62 *Horning and Binham Fairs* *Norwich Mercury*, 11 July 1801, 10 July 1802, 9 July 1803; 20 July 1793. Horning had been a popular event in the 1770s, as Mary Hardy tells us in her Coltishall entries and as confirmed by the Norwich Mercury, 15 July 1780.

63 *outdoor sports and pastimes* Discussed in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 4, pp. 364–72 and 391–400. Village cricket, tenpin-bowling in public houses and badger-baiting, among other activities, also ceased to be recorded.

64 *cards* A regular pastime among the Hardys and their friends at Coltishall in the 1770s, all references cease in the diary after Aug. 1787.

65 *Sabbatarianism* For Ivory's strictures on the 'openly licentious' poor who should have been in church on a Sunday and not playing ball games or wildfowling on the River Thurne, see NRO: DN/VIS 30/11, Flegg deanery visitation 1784, W. Somerton return. Ten years later Adkin raged against 'profanation of the Sabbath' by his flock at Scottow, near Coltishall, who refused to give up their 'sports and pastimes sometimes at the time of divine service, sometimes immediately on coming out of church' (NRO: DN/VIS 34a/4, Ingworth deanery visitation 1794, Scottow return).

66 *Wesleyan Conference* Its increasing restrictive measures followed Wesley's death in 1791. In 1795 Wesleyans were forbidden to buy or sell on the Sabbath, on pain of exclusion, and they were urged not to encourage the preachers to smoke (*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, vol. 1, p. 248 (1791) and pp. 319, 320 (1795).

67 *Zeb Rouse* He and his father Richard feature in all four volumes of *Mary Hardy and her World*; see especially vol. 2, pp. 408–12 and vol. 3, pp. 357–60. Zeb should not be confused with his uncle of the same name—the Hardys' loyal Coltishall farm servant.

68 *gloom of the grave* S. Pratt, *Gleanings in England* (2nd edition London, 1801), vol. 1, pp. 408–16, 422–5.

69 *singing* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*: Diary 4, p. 50, 9 Sept. 1798.

70 *severe winters* Described, with graphs, in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 2, pp. 167–87. Seven-inch hailstones fell on Letheringsett on 20 July 1783.

71 *merry ways* Verses for June, from John Clare's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, first published 1827.

72 *George III* F. Cook, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon: Her pivotal role in the 18th-century Evangelical Awakening* (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2001), p. 299.

73 *Princeton* The Countess gave generously to the founding of Princeton College, New Jersey (<https://www.francisasburytriptych.com/book-series/characters/selina-countess-of-huntingdon>, accessed 12 March 2021).

74 *Trevecca College* Its well-catalogued archives, together with those of the whole of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion, are held by The Cheshunt Foundation at Westminster College, Cambridge. They are freely available for study by the public by prior appointment with the Archivist.

Privateers, the Press Gang and service in the Sea Fencibles: the pressures on Blakeney and Cley's seafarers c.1800

Margaret Bird

Synopsis

This is an expanded version of an unscripted talk given to the BAHS at Cley on 30 November 2021.[1] It covers aspects of life at sea and in coastal communities which are often neglected by maritime and defence historians in the period of the French wars 1793–1815. Far more merchant ships were lost to enemy privateers than to attack by warships. The depredations caused by privateers in the North Sea are exemplified by the twelve-year career of the small sloop Nelly*, a Dundee-built ship which spent her last four years operating from Blakeney Quay. The Royal Navy's Impress Service, known as the press gang, posed a constant danger to merchant seamen and those in related trades. Lastly, this study highlights the significance of the local 'Home Guard', the Sea Fencibles, who served 1798–1810. Their records in the National Archives are a boon for family and local historians.*

Introduction: the threat from the French and Dutch

We need to begin by unpicking the various elements of this article's somewhat unwieldy title. First, the date c.1800 is shorthand for two wars against the French: the later years of the French Revolutionary War 1793–1801, and the opening years of the Napoleonic War which broke out in 1803 and ended at Waterloo in 1815. Almost ceaseless war is the backdrop to our story and the driver of the narrative.

Next, before defining the three topics in the main title, we have to identify the threat and establish why Norfolk was seen as standing on the front line as an invasion coast. For logistical reasons Napoleon always intended to land his main invasion forces on the Kent coast 1803–05, close to the shortest sea crossing. Yet the small port of Blakeney and Cley with its creeks and salt marshes represented a potential landing place for a secondary or diversionary amphibious assault for troops who would then go on to march on London.

Two recent events overseas had projected north Norfolk into the spotlight. The French had gained control of the Austrian Netherlands (present-day Belgium) in 1794. The following year they annexed the United Provinces (today's Netherlands) and renamed the country the Batavian Republic. In just a few months the enemy had acquired a very long stretch of coastline facing East Anglian shores; as a result these shores could fall victim to attack from across the southern North Sea.[2]

Adding to the danger, the people of Norfolk had over the decades welcomed Dutch fishermen to their ports and beaches and for annual herring fairs. As a result the Dutch had come to know the county's hundred-mile coastline and creeks intimately. Great Yarmouth lies only 95 miles from the coast of Holland, but 123 miles by road from London. The ties were traditionally close, and war with the Dutch was seen as a civil war between cousins holding much in common.[3] The years 1798–1801 and 1803–05, the height of the invasion peril, form the time span of our story.

The article focuses on three fascinating issues which have been neglected in seafaring studies of this period: the threat from enemy privateers; the danger to merchant seamen posed by the Royal Navy's press gang; and the civilian volunteers who joined the Sea Fencibles, this last forming the new anti-invasion 'Home Guard' along the British coastline.

Definitions of the three distinct topics

Until 1856, when the practice was banned in Britain and Europe, merchant vessels were routinely transformed in time of war into privateers bristling with weaponry. They served the national interest while remaining free of direct state control, as confirmed by their letters of marque: a commission from the sovereign or ruler stating that the ship, captain and crew were operating in aid of the government. Privateers did not form part of a national navy such as, in the British case, the Royal Navy; nor did they usually fight in conjunction with the Regulars.

A privateer was distinct from the chartering (or requisitioning) of a merchant ship by government for wartime service. Readers with memories going back to 1982 will recall that the British merchant fleet supplied numerous ships which speedily joined the Task Force as it sailed to the South Atlantic at the start of the Falklands conflict. The luxury cruiseliners *Canberra* and *QE2* took part; also the 15,000-ton *Atlantic Conveyor,* this last being sunk by Exocet missiles in May 1982.

It was a centuries-old tradition. In summer 1803 the shipowners of Wells-next-the-Sea offered twenty-two vessels to the government, totalling 1992 tons.[4] As the tonnage table in the next section shows, this represented a sizeable proportion of the port's complement three years earlier of fifty-two ships, totalling 3078 tons. Much earlier, in Edward III's reign, Yarmouth's massive contribution of merchant shipping at the start of the Hundred Years War helped secure the early naval victory off Sluys in 1340. The Norfolk port's loyalty won it the prefix Great and the halving of the heraldic golden lions of the Royal Arms with the silver herrings of the town's existing arms.[5]

Those manning privateers were not classed as pirates, who were unregulated marauders motivated totally by greed. Privateers and their crews, by contrast,

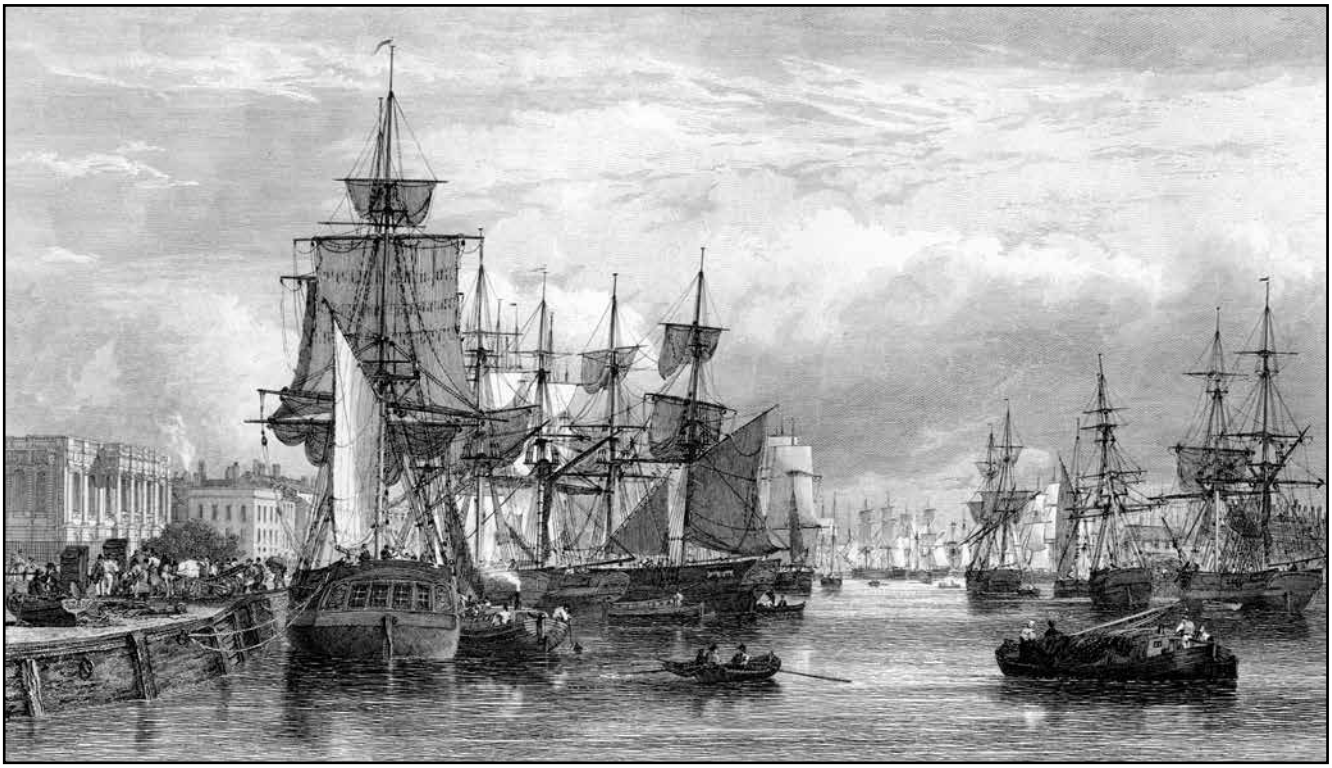


Fig. 1 Great Yarmouth South Quay. The Customs House here was greatly occupied with handling prizes, some of which were former British ships recaptured after seizure by French, Dutch and Danish privateers. The smaller prizes were moored near the South Gate. *[painting by James Stark; engraving by George Cooke, 1830]*

were recognised in Britain by courts such as the Admiralty High Court and by the Customs (Fig. 1). Both of these bodies had to identify which vessel brought into port was a prize, thereby bringing privateers under forms of legal control.

In this article we shall meet the 56-ton sloop *Nelly*, a Blakeney ship 1800–04, which was to know only 2½ years of peace in her twelve years of life. This Dundee-built vessel had been captured on the high seas by a Dutch privateer in December 1797 only to be recaptured by the Royal Navy in Amsterdam early in 1799 and brought triumphantly into Great Yarmouth as a British prize. She was lost close to Blakeney Pit in a storm on 12 February 1804 while owned by the Letheringsett farmer, maltster and brewer William Hardy junior (1770–1842). All five on board died (Fig. 2).[6]

The press gang posed a constant threat to merchant seamen and those in related trades in coastal communities. Part of the Royal Navy, its formal name was the Impress Service and it was tasked with recruiting, often by coercion, experienced men into the Navy. (Royal Marines, both officers and men, were never impressed, all being volunteers.) The press gang was greatly feared, with seamen and inland waterways sailors jumping into the water to avoid being taken; as we shall see, many would drown. Impressment fell into disuse following the resolution of the conflict with France in 1815.

The last of the topics in the main title, the Sea Fencibles, may be an unfamiliar one. 'Fencible' is an archaic term for a defender or guard. Samuel Johnson's dictionary defines 'to fence' as to guard against, fencible being the adjective. Formed of civilian volunteers, the movement resembled the Second World War's Local Defence Volunteers (renamed the Home Guard by Churchill in 1940) in constituting an anti-invasion force.

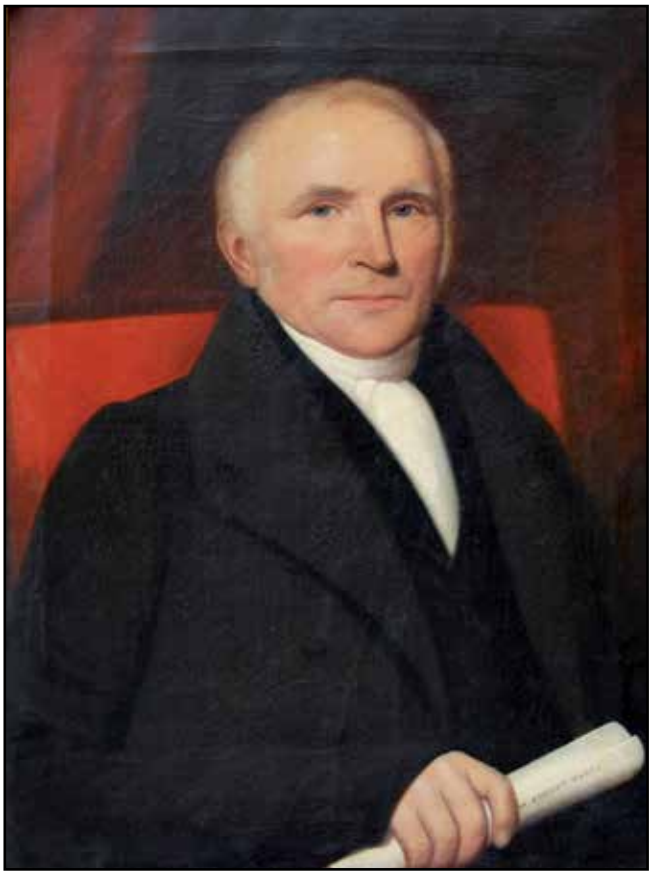


Fig. 2 William Hardy junior of Letheringsett Hall c.1826, son of the diarist Mary Hardy. He bought the small sloop* Nelly *at Great Yarmouth for £590 in April 1799 and berthed her at Blakeney Quay. *[Cozens-Hardy Collection]*

Fig. 3 Stiffkey marshes: unfavourable terrain for Dutch and French invaders. The Sea Fencibles' local knowledge equipped them to assess how best an amphibious assault could be impeded. *[photo Christopher Bird 2014]*

The essential requirement for its members was familiarity with the water and local coastal terrain. Merchant seamen, fishermen, shipbuilders and shipwrights, ferrymen, ropemakers, sailmakers, caulkers: all played their part while retaining their daytime jobs. As Lord Lowther, Lord Lieutenant of Cumberland, told the Home Secretary in July 1803, the mission of the Sea Fencibles was to resist an enemy attack by sea; their knowledge of the water would give them 'great advantages over the best disciplined troops in the world *in their own element*' (his underlinings are italicised).[7] A secondary function was to serve as a coastal watch, scanning the horizon for a possible hostile assault.

Formed in March 1798, stood down in October 1801 at the start of the short-lived peace with France, reactivated on a much larger scale in July 1803 and finally disbanded in October 1810, the Sea Fencibles formed part of the mass mobilisation of civilians in this militarised society. Norfolk had more than 1000 Sea Fencible members serving in 1803–04, out of a national total of 30,000. The land-based Volunteers (distinct from the Militia) numbered at this time about 385,000—the same number as those in the Royal Navy and Regular Army combined.

As well as supplying numbers John Cookson highlights the significance of these civilian part-timers who had no counterpart on the Continent:

> This huge mobilization, simply the greatest popular movement of the Hanoverian age, has always been regarded as the leading feature of the British armed nation, even its definition.[8]

Yet the Sea Fencibles have been ignored by most maritime and defence historians. Relying on the WO and HO series in the National Archives (for the War Office and Home Office), they have concentrated on the records of the County Lieutenancy when covering civilian participation in home defence (then termed internal defence). In so doing they have overlooked the voluminous records in the ADM series, for the Sea Fencible units were organised by the Lords of the Admiralty and paid by the Navy Board. Strikingly, they were commanded by serving senior Royal Navy officers; many of these commanders held the rank of captain at the time and would reach rear-admiral or vice-admiral shortly after stepping down from the units. The Sea Fencibles are lost in the fog-bound marram-edged creeks and salt flats in which they operated (Fig. 3).

Norfolk is left behind in seafaring provision

Before describing the operations of the privateers, press gang and Sea Fencibles we need to set the scene. How buoyant was Norfolk's seafaring provision and the British merchant fleet generally; and how far could merchantmen be protected by a Royal Navy grappling with a full range of operational needs across the whole empire? All three wars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were in essence world wars, being fought across a vast panorama from the Americas and the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, India and the East Indies. In retrospect, the Great War was actually the Fourth World War, and thus the 'Second' World War can be classed as the Fifth.

The shipping tonnages and numbers for 1800 in the table below highlight the way the Norfolk ports had been massively overtaken. Only a few ports, nationally

Table

Total tonnages of ships registered at each port in 1800, with ship numbers for Norfolk ports (selective)

London	568,262	
Liverpool	140,633	
Newcastle upon Tyne	140,055	
Sunderland	75,319	
Hull	68,533	
Great Yarmouth	32,957	(375 ships; in 8th place nationally)
King's Lynn	12,639	(119 ships; in 16th place nationally)
Wells-next-the-Sea	3078	(52 ships, 237 seamen)
Blakeney and Cley	1876	(24 ships, 115 seamen)

source D. Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce, Manufactures, Fisheries and Navigation* (London, 1805), vol. 4, p. 535

and locally, are here selected from the contemporary compilation which supplies the full list.

Norfolk had—and still has—an inhospitable coastline, punctured by silting creeks and renowned for its shifting sands (Fig. 4). The only deepwater ports were King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth, at the furthest ends of the county's limits. Even then, the larger warships of the Royal Navy's North Sea Fleet and the larger merchant vessels had to anchor in the Roads off Great Yarmouth, the town quays of the Yare estuary proving unable to accommodate deep-draughted ships.

While the table records twenty-four ships registered at Blakeney and Cley combined not all could reach the twin quays. Instead they had to anchor in the Pit to be lightered. Nevertheless, and despite all their disadvantages, Norfolk's ports were visited daily by ships berthed at major ports like Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland, Hull and London, as the Customs records attest.

The county was falling behind in having no wet docks until King's Lynn's were built way beyond our period, in 1869. Liverpool's, by contrast, dated from 1715; Hull's impressive dock from 1778; and the line of wet docks downstream of the Pool of London from 1800 onwards. Ipswich's wet dock dates from 1842. For seafarers and dockers these spectacular feats of civil engineering represented a new world: no mud, no tidal rise and fall, and easy access to quays and secure purpose-built warehousing. It was a world denied the people of Norfolk.

The inadequacies of the county's little harbours, such as Thornham and Burnham Overy, and of its bluff shores, as at Cromer and Mundesley, where vessels had to beach to unload their cargo, are vividly described by a most distinguished officer in the Royal Engineers. He was to rise to the rank of major-general, command the Engineers as Colonel Commandant, gain a knighthood and, from 1830, serve as Inspector General of Fortifications. Major Alexander Bryce (1766–1832) had already served in conflicts in North America, the Mediterranean and Egypt when he was ordered by Lieutenant General Sir James Craig, head of the Eastern (Military) District and a fellow Scot, to survey the coast of Norfolk and its anchorages late in 1803. Bryce was tasked with determining which places might be vulnerable to enemy attack and amphibious assault and then advising on the counter-invasion measures to be adopted.

It is a comprehensive, masterly survey, in beautiful handwriting; long extracts are transcribed in the fourth of the Mary Hardy diary volumes.[9] Major Bryce's comments on the nature of the coast and the role of the Sea Fencibles, who provided him with valuable information, are central to our story. Some very short extracts here give a flavour of his work and point up the difficulties facing not only the potential invader but also the merchant seamen trying to access the little ports.

The buoyancy of the British merchant fleet

Merchant seamen proved their worth as saviours of the war-stricken nation as valiantly as those in the Royal Navy. Without the efforts of the merchant fleet the British economy would have collapsed in weeks or, more probably, days. Coal and cinders (coke), grain, timber, foodstuffs such as flour and malt, daily essentials: all were carried by sea. The canals, which had yet to develop to their fullest extent, could not match the seaborne sailors' contribution as canal boats could transport only limited cargo tonnages and made their way comparatively slowly along the waterways. Until steam power took over, it was common for canal boats to go at the speed of the draught horse on the towpath.

In 1803 Britain had more than 18,000 registered seagoing merchant ships, totalling more than two million tons and employing 105,000 merchant seamen. The Royal Navy, the country's largest single employer, had slightly fewer: about 100,000 men.[10] For comparison, Napoleon's Grande Armée, 'the most formidable force in the world', camped above Boulogne in summer 1804, had 130,000 men.[11]

By the time the French wars drew to a close the British Merchant Navy had expanded dramatically:

> The size of the mercantile marine doubled between 1786 and the end of the French wars to reach a peak of 2.6 million tons which was not surpassed for another twenty-five years.[12]

Despite the dangers to which it was exposed, as will be described, and the financial difficulties caused by the inability to obtain insurance for either vessel or cargo in wartime, the merchant fleet proved extraordinarily resilient. In the main the ships got through. Not once in 36 years does the diarist Mary Hardy—writing daily at Coltishall (on the Broads north of Norwich) and Letheringsett (four miles south of Blakeney and Cley)—mention that the Hardys were unable to buy coal and cinders for their business and domestic use. The Norwich newspapers similarly are silent on the issue.

In theory, one of the principal roles of a national navy is to act as a protective force in support of mer-

Fig. 4 Salthouse Church from the south, with today's tamed coastline. In 1803 a distinguished officer in the Royal Engineers judged these marshes as impassable and thus unfavourable for an invasion force, being 'entirely under water' apart from a footpath. *[photo Christopher Bird 2009]*

EXTRACTS from Major Alexander Bryce's report to Lieutenant General Sir James Craig, KB, General Officer Commanding the Eastern [Military] District, 12 December 1803
source TNA: WO 30/100, Eastern District: Reports and proposals for measures of defence 1797–1805, pp. 147–63

... **Salthouse Marsh** is about half a mile in breath, entirely under water and described as impassable, the bottom being full of pits. There is a footpath on a causeway through it.

Cley Marsh is drained, but might be laid under water at spring tides by means of the sluice in the sea wall near Cley. I have been particular in describing this part of the coast because it seems very favourable for disembarkation, the beach being bold [broad, conspicuous], with 5 fathoms water close inshore [30 feet, or 9.15 metres], whilst the anchorage is said be secure in any wind but a heavy one from the north west. When I was there no boats could have landed, owing to a prevalence of the above winds for some days previous.
An enemy who knew the ground would not be likely to attempt a landing between Cley Marsh and the point forming the east side of **Blakeney Harbour**, nor opposite to Salthouse or Cley Marshes if this latter were laid under water, as in this case he would be obliged to defile [advance in single file] to his left on a very narrow front.

Weybourne Beach therefore, being the most favourable for landing, seems to require more attention . . .

The Sea Fencibles who are numerous on this part of the coast and well acquainted with the beach and roads through the marshes, if not altogether competent to the management of field artillery, would be extremely useful in assisting to manoeuvre it. An early attention to the drained marshes would in my opinion be of considerable use, to ascertain exactly how far they could be inundated, and at what state of the tides . . .

Blakeney and Cley Harbour is the best on this part of the coast. There is 20 feet water on the bar at high water. Since it has become well known it is much used by coasting vessels for shelter. The large vessels lie in what is called the Pit, and only those of small draught in general go to Cley or Blakeney Wharfs.

The Pit is not very extensive, and would not contain a large fleet. It might however be valuable to an enemy, in the event of wind becoming unfavourable, whilst attempting to disembark on the adjacent coast, when he might seek shelter here. On this account, and to protect the vessels in the harbour, a battery might be erected on the meals [marrams] in front of **Morston Marsh** ... As the marsh is overflowed at high tides the communication must then be by boats through the creek on the right or a small causeway or footpath raised through the marsh . . .

NOTE
¶ The people of Blakeney had a few years earlier been urging on the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Townshend, the need for a battery (TNA: HO 50/341, unpaginated, letter of 24 May 1798).

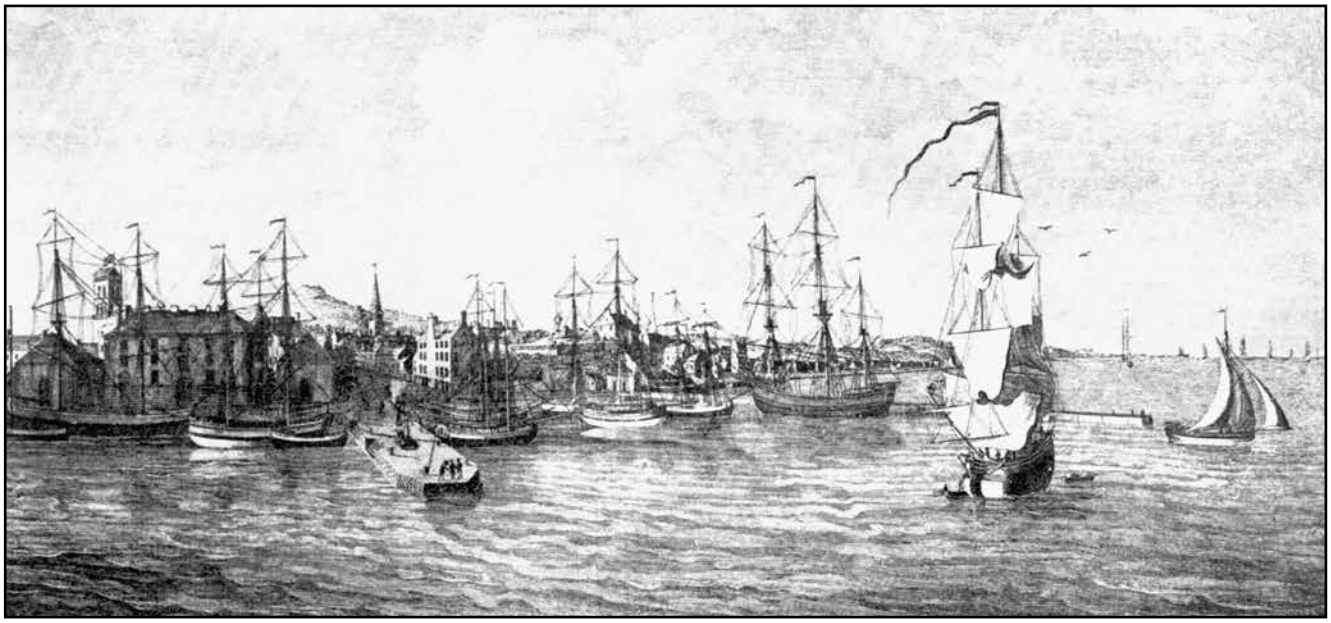


Fig. 5 Dundee in 1780, on the north bank of the Tay:* Nelly's *home port 1792–97. Captain Robert Mathew was sailing to Hamburg with a cargo of oats when the ship was captured by a Dutch privateer on the high seas. *[engraving by Alex Robertson: Dundee City Council, Central Library]*

chantmen and thereby keep trade routes open. But the Royal Navy was under severe pressure on many fronts in the French wars, including the requirement to protect the home islands from invasion; it could not clear the seas for a merchant fleet threatened by the French, Dutch and Danes. The Dundee sloop *Nelly* was captured on the high seas by a Dutch privateer on 28 December 1797 only a little over two months after the Battle of Camperdown in which the Commander of the North Sea Fleet, Admiral Adam Duncan (another Scot), had decisively wiped out the Dutch Navy in one of the great pitched sea battles of the period. Even that signal victory could not guarantee little *Nelly's* safety.

As well as blockading the estuaries of the Texel and the Scheldt, and major ports like Boulogne, the Royal Navy's North Sea Fleet had to patrol the eastern Channel and the North Sea from Selsey Bill in Sussex to the Shetlands. It was consequently impossible for Britain's 'wooden walls' to be everywhere when needed. From his Colchester headquarters General Sir James Craig, displaying a soldier's reluctance to make allowances for the burdens placed on his seaborne counterparts, expressed extreme concern that the Royal Navy was not patrolling the coast from Great Yarmouth to Mundesley in sufficient numbers late in 1803.[13]

The convoy system instituted during the closing stages of the American war, to preserve British ships from Dutch attacks in 1782, was reintroduced during the French wars. From summer 1803 merchantmen had to gather in port until a convoy could be formed, under threat of the swingeing penalty of a £1000 fine; many goods thus perished.[14] Yet the Royal Navy escorts were vital for the colliers from the North-East on whom the nation relied for its survival.

The danger to seafarers from privateers

Hostile privateers interrupted trade routes and were very damaging. Despite the Navy's efforts, 2861 British merchant ships out of its fleet of 18,000 registered vessels were lost to enemy action, mostly to privateers, in the period 1793–1800. The British fought back. In those same years, 2218 enemy ships were taken by the British, many by privateers operating with commissions from the King.[15]

The weekly Norfolk newspapers often published details of these actions in their 'Ship News' columns. Readers would have been painfully aware of the dangers posed by enemy privateers. In 1781, following the entry of the Dutch early that year into the American war alongside the French and Spanish, the Great Yarmouth-berthed 60-ton cutter *Argus* was equipped as a privateer with eleven carriage guns, four-pounders and six swivel guns, with ammunition. Significantly, she was described as 'a remarkable fast sailor', enabling her to overtake her cargo-carrying merchant prey.[16]

One lucky East Anglian merchant ship trying to bring coal up the River Deben in Suffolk was rescued within hours of her capture by the enemy at night. The Woodbridge-based cutter *Œconomy* was seized off Cromer in June 1803 and retaken by Lowestoft pilot-cutters the same day:

> The *Œconomy* of Woodbridge, with coals, was captured off Cromer on the 4th instant [4 June], at 3 am, by a small cutter privateer with 30 men; she was retaken the same day by two pilot-cutters belonging to Lowestoft, and Sunday brought into Yarmouth Haven.[17]

Although privateers were equipped with weaponry the object was not to blast the target vessel out of the water but to disable her and her crew so that she could not evade capture; enemy merchant ships were eagerly hunted down as potential prizes. As has for centuries been the tradition in maritime warfare, and remains the case today, merchant seamen captured by the enemy—if they survived the initial assault—were viewed as non-combatants and not as prisoners of war. The ships were retained, but prisoner exchanges were frequent and sailors were free to find their way home if they could afford their passage. As we are about to see in the next section, two Dundee captains in the late 1790s, Robert Mathew of *Nelly* and James Sime of *Aurora*, were out of enemy hands and back in Britain within months of their capture by Dutch and French privateers respectively (Fig. 5).

Fig. 6 'The Mouth of the Yare', showing a small sloop battling across Yarmouth Bar in the foreground; square-riggers are moored waiting to sail. A fort stands on the northern bank by the sand quay. *[painting by James Stark; engraving by W. Miller, 1828]*

Fig. 7 Amsterdam in the early 19th century. The Dutch privateer took Nelly here after her capture, only for Captain James Boorder's sloop of war to retake her in April 1799. Nelly was thus both a Dutch prize and a Royal Navy prize within the space of 16 months. *[drawing by W.J. Cooke; engraving by J. Poppel]*

The crew of the Dundee whaler *Tay* were particularly fortunate. In summer 1799 she was returning from Greenland under Captain Webster as a 'full ship with nine whales'. She had almost gained the safety of her home port when she was seized by a French privateer off Rattray Head, on the Aberdeenshire coast near Peterhead. Yet just four weeks after their capture the whaler's crew got back to Scotland from Norway, landing at Aberdeen. The loss of *Tay*, which had been taken by the privateer into Bergen, proved a grievous blow financially. The ship and her valuable cargo of whales were valued at £6000.[18]

The uncertainty of life at sea: the story of *Nelly*

A close look at one vessel demonstrates the complexity and uncertainty of life in waters menaced by privateers. The small sloop *Nelly* had a most adventurous career until she succumbed not to enemy attack but to a severe North Sea storm in 1804. A merchant sloop has one mast stepped towards the bow, one sail forward of the mast, and, like most leisure yachts today, is rigged fore-and-aft rather than being a square-rigger (Fig. 6). Royal Naval sloops differed.

Nelly was a Blakeney ship only in her last four years 1800–04, having been built in Dundee in 1792.[19] Like Hull this was a port renowned for its strong whalers capable of withstanding the rigours of the Greenland Fishery and the Arctic. She was sailing from Dundee to Hamburg with a cargo of oats when she was captured by a Dutch privateer in December 1797 while under the command of her part-owner Robert Mathew of Dundee; she was then taken into Amsterdam (Fig. 7).

It is not clear if the captain got home to Dundee in 1798 or 1799, but his ship was restored to him thanks to the Royal Navy. Captain Mathew testified in April 1800 that in April 1799 *Nelly* was still in Amsterdam when Lieutenant James Boorder, RN, a most impressive officer in command of the sloop of war HMS *L'Espiègle*, recaptured the Scottish ship and brought her triumphantly into Great Yarmouth harbour.[20]

It then fell to the Admiralty High Court, which sat at the Tolhouse at Yarmouth from 1559 to 1835, to identify the ship and determine her fate. As Captain Mathew stated in his affidavit, the commander of the Dutch privateer had demanded *Nelly*'s papers, including her Certificate of Registry, at the moment of capture. Anonymous vessels created problems for the Admiralty and the Customs, who liaised daily over the identification and assessment of prizes. In summer 1799 between ten and eighteen prizes a week were being brought into Great Yarmouth, putting immense strain on the customs officers and court officials.[21]

Amazingly the merchant captain James Sime of Dundee, who had been well acquainted with *Nelly* in her home port, either travelled to Great Yarmouth or was there already. It was he who identified the nameless vessel in the port on 13 June 1799, for Sime was also in Norfolk to identify his own 101-ton brig *Aurora*. He had been in command of *Aurora* when she was seized by a French privateer in December 1798, only to be retaken by HMS *Iris* in 1799—the same bold liberation as the one granted to *Nelly*. *Iris* was very active in combating enemy privateers, the Customs noting that she frequently brought in prizes to Great Yarmouth.[22]

While still in Great Yarmouth *Nelly* was restored legally to her Scottish owners, who then sold her to thirty-year-old William Hardy junior. He and his father William had journeyed to Yarmouth in April 1800, the younger man buying *Nelly* for £590.[23] Her sole captain under the Letheringsett brewer was John Coe, a north Norfolk man who in 1784 had married nineteen-year-old Hannah Lynes, daughter of the Hardys' innkeepers at the King's Head at Cley. The story of the Coes and two of her adult crew (Hannah's brother John Lynes and the Cley seaman Richard Randall) has already been told in this society's *Newsletter* issue 8 for February 2022.[24]

As described in *Mary Hardy and her World* and in the final *Diary* volume, Mary Hardy mentions some of *Nelly*'s voyages, including one to Norway for timber in the one year of peace, 1802. For months at a time the ship appears to have been laid up, probably owing to the danger from predatory enemy vessels and the need to sail under convoy. At one point, five weeks after the resumption of war in 1803, William Hardy junior had *Nelly* valued as he was considering selling her: 'William went to Blakeney afternoon (Mr Watson valued the sloop *Nelly* in order for sale).' [25] It would seem William was not contemplating offering her for government ser-

Fig. 8 Blakeney Pit (left, with yachts' sails) from the top of the church tower. The sheltered anchorage, lying downstream of the fork to the twin quays of Blakeney and Cley, was used by vessels waiting for the tide or to be lightered. *[photo Margaret Bird 2008]*

vice. Until then, as the diary records, *Nelly* had worked her way around the British coast, calling at Liverpool, Newcastle and London with Letheringsett produce and bringing coal from the North-East.

Judging by the measurements of other vessels of her approximate tonnage, the Blakeney and Cley customs order book suggests that the sloop was about 50 feet long and 18 feet wide (15.25 metres by 5.5).[26] She was shallow-draughted, and could thus reach Blakeney's quay, as we know from her navigation of the Forth and Clyde Canal in autumn 1800 with a cargo of malt. This, the first canal to bi-sect Scotland and opened in 1790, could take vessels with no more than seven feet draught (2.1 metres). *Nelly's* draught when fully laden was nine feet (2.7 metres), so she would have had to negotiate the canal light-laden. Her owner's accounts note that in fact she was carrying less than half her potential tonnage. And in her entries for 9 August, 11 October and 16 October 1800 his mother Mary Hardy records that *Nelly* took ten weeks to complete her voyage from Blakeney to Liverpool via 'the Scotch Canal'.[27]

This tale of endurance would not have surprised contemporaries. Sir Edward Parry, championing the cutting of the Caledonian Canal, had quoted in evidence to Parliament a case of two ships leaving Newcastle on the same day. The vessel bound for Bombay reached her destination *before* the other bound only for Britain's west coast which had rounded the north of Scotland! [28] Small ships like *Nelly* were regarded by the big players as unprofitable. The shipowners Michael Henley and Son of London made money only from ships of 200–400 tons, their agent putting it tersely in 1788: 'Small vessels are in general but pickpockets.' [29]

Mary Hardy shows clearly the way Captain Coe relieved her son of the great burden of travelling to a distant port to arrange sales of malt and other cargoes. Until the purchase of *Nelly* William, and earlier his father, had often travelled by road to meet the vessels carrying their produce. Now John Coe undertook all William's sales and negotiations, for during the four years William owned the ship he did not visit Newcastle, Hull or Liverpool. Thus captains were businessmen and agents as well as seafarers.

Nelly foundered in a winter storm in 1804 within sight of home following her voyage from Newcastle; many other vessels and lives were lost that night (Fig. 8). Mary Hardy, tight-lipped, tells us the fate of the ship and of all on board:

> February 12, Sunday Wind very high and stormy . . . Heard at evening that William's ship the Nelly was wrecked near Blakeney Pit and the whole crew consisting of the Captain John Coe, three men and one boy perished.[30] (She was coming from Newcastle loaden with coals and oilcake, no part of which was insured) . . . [31]

The terror of being taken by the press gang

During the French wars the Royal Navy remained forever in need of men able to keep vessels in working order and who were skilled in navigation, ship-handling, carpentry and ropework. If potential recruits could not be enticed into the service by a small bounty then coercion would be employed; hence the rough methods of the press gang. Such actions, and the terror which the prospect of impressment provoked in men—and their womenfolk—even some miles inland, are vividly described in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Trumpet Major.* First published in 1880, it chronicles in chilling detail the press gang's attempted hunting down of an experienced merchant seaman Bob Loveday inland from Weymouth ('Budmouth') in Dorset.

Hardy, born in 1840, based his novel on reminiscences shared with him as a child by those who had lived and fought through the French wars. Given the dearth of much in the way of first-hand historical sources for the experiences of working people the fictional narrative is recommended to us by Hardy as 'unexaggerated reproduction' of events in the period of 'our preparations for defence against the threatened invasion of England by Buonaparte':

> The present tale is founded more largely on testimony—oral and written—than any other in this series [the Wessex novels]. The external incidents which direct its course are mostly an unexaggerated reproduction of the recollections of old persons well known to the author in childhood, but now long dead, who were eye-witnesses of those scenes.[32]

Robert Loveday stands in grave danger. The press gang, in the form of 'more than a dozen marines . . . with cloaks on', have been spotted rowing ashore. Bob sombrely observes, 'Then there'll be a press tonight; depend upon it.' Soon we hear of their methods:

> ' . . . though . . . he was not averse to seafaring in itself [in the Royal Navy], to be smuggled thither by the machinery of a press gang was intolerable; and the process of seizing, stunning, pinioning, and carrying off unwilling hands was one which Bob as a man had always determined to hold out against to the utmost of his power.[33]

We learn in the novel, from Nelson's Captain Hardy of HMS *Victory* no less, that the attempted seizure of Bob came during a hot press in late summer 1805, not long before Trafalgar. Under a hot press all protections were withdrawn. In normal circumstances certain watermen and seamen could claim exemption from impressment as their work was deemed vital. In 1795–98, during the French Revolutionary War, the borough of Great Yarmouth issued cards of protection to all skippers and their male mates working the keels and wherries of the Norfolk Broads. Women, who often served as mates, were not registered since they were not called on to serve in the Royal Navy.[34]

However in times of the greatest emergency the guarantees were suspended. Not only seafarers along the coast but those on the inland waterways were liable to be pressed. John Ehrman refers to one such hot press which lasted for months in 1798. Referring to the seamen and inland watermen exposed to the Royal Navy's insatiable hunger for skilled personnel he writes:

> One obvious if unpopular source lay to hand: the men protected, in an uneasy balance with naval needs, in the sea and river trades. In May 1798 Government decided to suspend all such exemptions for five months, except in the coastal coal trade for one month.[35]

A similar hot press was instituted after the outbreak of war in May 1803. Again, as in 1798, even those in the coal trade were unprotected. As a result the keelmen of the Tyne went on strike, claiming that all coal carriage had been brought to a halt as so many keelmen along the river had been seized by the Impress Service.[36]

We have first-hand evidence of the press gang's operations in Norfolk as early as the American war. They operated surprisingly far inland, so great was the appetite for seasoned watermen. The diarist Mary Hardy, writing at Coltishall 32 miles up the River Bure, records their presence in her village and across the river at Horstead in April and July 1777.[37] And she was aware of the terror they inspired, as men had drowned trying to escape the gang's clutches. She writes in November 1776, when war with France was feared:

> Pressing for seamen very hot on the Thames, Portsmouth and other places, above 1000 men pressed at the above places and many lost their lives endeavouring to escape from them [the gang]. A war with France talked of.[38]

A government embargo on all shipping, imposed swiftly by an Order in Council two days before war resumed on 17 May 1803, effectively confined seafarers to port and, as was intended, made them easy prey for the press gang. The order of 15 May prohibited the departure or arrival of merchant ships in British ports. As the embargo also precipitated a paralysis of all trade the order was lifted on 18 May; but by then the Impress Service had done its work.[39]

Mercifully for the seamen an escape route had been proffered from 1798 onwards: service in a new volunteer force of part-timers named the Sea Fencibles. All those prepared to sign up, for pay, and to take part in the weekly training exercises were guaranteed exemption from impressment even during a hot press. It is no wonder the men came forward in droves, providing family and local historians today with a wealth of material.[40]

Service in the Sea Fencibles: an escape route

Details of the Blakeney and Cley Sea Fencibles, later called the Blakeney and Sheringham unit, together with its personnel, have already appeared in the BAHS's *Digital Newsletter* issue 8 of 8 April 2022. The information in that article is, largely, not repeated here.[41] Like the members of the land-based Volunteers, the Sea Fencibles were not called up by ballot—the principal mechanism for Militia recruitment; nor were numbers set by quotas, as enforced for the Supplementary Militia and Provisional Cavalry.[42]

Just as the Sea Fencibles secured exemption from impressment into the Navy, so members of the Volunteers, both cavalry and infantry, were granted permanent exemption from the hated Militia ballot. Consequently the numbers in both forces soared, as already explained in the section 'Definitions'. As seen in the extracts from Major Bryce's 1803 report, reproduced in the inset earlier, the Sea Fencibles were 'numerous on this part of the [north Norfolk] coast and well acquainted with the beach and roads through the marshes'.

Fig. 9 Lowestoft Beach looking south to Kirkley from Lowestoft Ness. A fishing boat unloads the catch into a cart backed alongside. Cart gaps were seen as vulnerable points in the event of an amphibious assault. *[painting by James Stark; engraving by G. Cooke 1833]*

However in the same part of his report he issued a caveat as to their capabilities. Bryce, who had served in the Royal Artillery before transferring to the Royal Engineers, harboured doubts as to the Sea Fencibles' ability actually to discharge fixed and mobile field artillery effectively. Mobile guns such as howitzers and six-pounders had to be wheeled over from the area's military hub at Holt and then hauled into position once a French invasion force was spotted out to sea. Bryce was nonetheless confident the Sea Fencibles would provide muscle power, and their knowledge of the marshes would assist the more skilled troops: the local force 'if not altogether competent to the management of field artillery would be extremely useful in assisting to manoeuvre it'.

By deploying mobile artillery and manning small batteries along the coast the Sea Fencibles could form part of a rapid-response team harassing and 'annoying' landing parties. Flexibility was required, as no one could forecast where the enemy would attempt to land. The diplomatic Bryce was prepared to listen to the anxieties expressed to him by locals, who considered they were vulnerable to attack and were now regretting the welcome they had customarily accorded Dutch seafarers in the years of peace (Fig. 9).

He was exposed to vigorous lobbying by the people of Mundesley:

> At Mundesley a small rivulet [the River Mun, called the Mundesley Beck] has forced a passage through the cliff . . .

> and formed in a cove not more than 20 yards across. This, with two artificial slopes wide enough to admit carriages going down to the beach, furnish the only means of getting up.
>
> The beach however below the cliff is good, and well known to the Dutch fishermen who have been in the habit of grounding their boats here at half-tide for the purpose of watering, and the anchorage off is reputed safe, being protected by the Happisburgh and other sands.
>
> The deepest water near shore is a little to the eastward of the rivulet above mentioned. Although the inhabitants of this part seem to attach considerable importance to Mundesley, I can hardly bring myself to be of their opinion.[43]

As seen in the inset earlier, Bryce considered Blakeney and Cley Harbour the best on the north Norfolk coast; as a result he recommended the construction of a battery on the western meals (Fig. 10). He was not impressed by Wells, however:

> Wells Harbour is not so good or so easy as that of Blakeney. The vessels lie about a mile below the town. A battery on the meals, near the Signal Stations on the west side of the entrance, would secure it and protect the anchorage. But the communication at high water must be by boats. If the battery were placed on the embankment of Wells Marsh it could be more readily manned but not so efficient.[44]

By studying this invaluable report we gain insight into the role of the Sea Fencibles. Even if they were judged incapable of firing the field guns with accuracy they could keep watch, help man the batteries, bring up ammunition and row the Regulars to and from their stations. They could also open the coastal sluices to flood the marshes and make them impassable for those attempting an amphibious assault. And Bryce may have been too cautious in his assessments. The Sea Fencibles were trained by the Royal Navy to fire naval guns on warships anchored offshore, as attested by the Wymondham farmer Randall Burroughes. He tells us of the Sea Fencibles' training off Great Yarmouth only four months after their formation. Burroughes and his party boarded the gun boat HMS *Contest* in July 1798 and witnessed an impressive display of firepower.[45]

The effectiveness of the Sea Fencibles

We can put figures on Bryce's adjective 'numerous' in his estimation of the Sea Fencibles along the Norfolk coast. In February 1804 the King's Lynn unit numbered 257 under Captain William Bentinck (1764–1813), the former Governor of St Vincent and the Grenadines in the West Indies. At Great Yarmouth in 1803 the majority of the 160 members were in their thirties and forties. No upper age limit was imposed: one member of the Lowestoft unit was aged 63. And Robert Allen, from the Cromer unit, was noted as having 'died of old age' on 30 October 1805.[46]

In the autumn of 1803 there were 48 members of the Sea Fencibles at Blakeney and Cley—parishes which in the 1801 census had total male populations (children and the elderly included) of 235 and 238 respectively. Soon afterwards the Blakeney and Sheringham unit had 131 members. Of these, 38 (29 per cent) could write their names. However, as explained in the BAHS *Newsletter* article of 8 April 2022, such statistics can be misleading. Sometimes a commanding officer in a hurry to press on with training would scribble an 'X' after each name present that evening to signify attendance. Many of the Sea Fencibles were in fact able to sign their names when given the opportunity to do so under a more patient captain.

Attendance at the weekly exercises was good, unless the seaman were away on a voyage; the guarantee of freedom from the press gang proved a strong incentive to remain a loyal member. During the whole month of October 1803 all but one of the eighty-eight members of the newly formed Wells unit was present every week for the exercises. An additional four men served as petty officers. These were likely to be members of the Wells unit granted promotion, for which they received 2s 6d at each attendance instead of the shilling paid to the others.[47]

In February 1804 the annotation 'Drowned 12 February' appears against the names of John Coe, John Lynes and Richard Randall—three of *Nelly*'s adult crew who were evidently also Sea Fencibles. They are the only members of the Blakeney and Sheringham unit recorded as lost that month. They had failed to be present during the previous few weeks while away on their final voyage to and from Newcastle.

Contemporary sources indicate that the Sea Fencibles were regarded as a dependable adjunct to the nation's anti-invasion preparations. Alexander Bryce, as Commanding Engineer of the Eastern District, usually deferred to their judgment when assessing the vulnerability of the coastal area and the various measures to be taken to harass the enemy.

Almost certainly their professionalism was gained thanks to their training by senior officers in the Royal Navy, a commitment the British Army would not afford the Volunteers. While the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, HRH Prince Frederick Augustus (1763–1827), Duke of York and Albany, was horrified by the prospect of letting the Volunteers loose in the event of a French landing, he was confining his remarks to the land-based part-timers. He feared their 'want of activity' would result in their clogging the movements of the Army.[48] By contrast, as he recognised, the seamen, fishermen, shipwrights and ferrymen of the Sea Fencibles were the very type of 'active', skilled and disciplined volunteers the country needed. Five weeks after the resumption of war in 1803 the C-in-C observed to the Secretary for War:

> The Sea Fencibles should again be enrolled upon the same or similar plan to what was adopted in the late war, under the superintendence of active and intelligent naval officers.[49]

One characteristic shared by the Volunteers and the Sea Fencibles should not be overlooked. They were local men prepared to fight to defend their patch, their bit of Britain. They remained with their families and were not sent abroad or to other parts of the country. Tenacious and dogged, they had invaluable local knowledge. But they were never put to the test.

Many of the small batteries that Bryce had recommended never came into being. His superior, General Sir James Craig, had been impressed by the arguments of the people of Mundesley and proposed that a battery 'might considerably annoy an enemy' if manned by the active and committed local Sea Fencibles.[50] Yet it was never built. Similarly there is nothing to suggest that the proposed small battery west of Blakeney Creek ever saw the light of day. It was evidently envisaged that flexibility and mobility would be the hallmarks of the defence of north Norfolk.

Conclusion: selfless service

We have no means of judging whether an enemy attack would have proved successful. However, the reluctance of contemporaries to engage in 'conjunct operations', as amphibious assaults were then termed, suggests that Napoleon and his troops would have had a hard time of it.

Such attacks required very close co-operation between a nation's army and navy. This was difficult to achieve, given the means of communication then available. The hazardous nature of such operations was brought home to the British during the abject failure of their expeditions to Den Helder in 1799 and the Walcheren in 1809 (both in northern Holland), when many thousands of men perished not in battle but through mismanagement, neglect, disease and exposure.[51]

We can be more certain of the commitment and resilience of Norfolk seamen. Officialdom at its highest levels had confidence not only in the Royal Navy officers providing the training but in the rank and file of the coastal Home Guard. Like the Volunteers these men had to attend weekly exercises in their own time in an age when working people had almost no spare leisure time at all. As seen in the article 'Supplying the beer' in this journal in 2014, the long-hours culture pervaded most trades and occupations. A seven-day week on top of a working day of twelve or more hours was common, and almost no holidays were granted other than a day or half-day to attend a nearby fair.[52] Yet, so great was the desire of north Norfolk seafarers to serve their country—and so intense their fear of the press gang—we can track their participation en masse in this voluntary movement for national defence.

As we read of the dangers they faced in their day jobs, whether from the North Sea storms then so prevalent or from attacks by enemy warships and privateers, we can only marvel at what they endured. Their service at the height of the invasion crisis in the French wars deserves to be more celebrated.

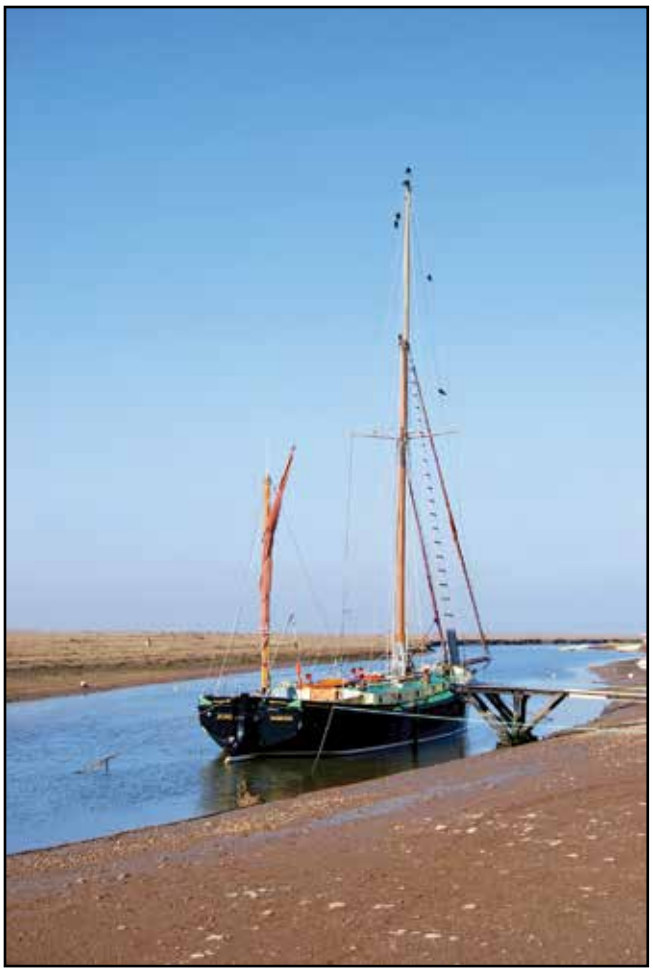


Fig. 10 The modern barge* Juno, *of Morston, in Blakeney Creek. Major Bryce considered the east bank of Blakeney Harbour unfavourable for a landing by the enemy. He recommended a small battery be built on the western meals in front of Morston Marsh. *[photo Margaret Bird 2012]*

Notes

1 *talk at Cley* A video of Margaret Bird's illustrated presentation can be accessed on the BAHS website. It lasts an hour, with an additional eleven minutes covering the edited question-and-answer session: http://www.bahs.uk/activities/events/lecture-recordings/recording-privateers-the-press-gang-and-service-in-the-sea-fencibles/

2 *Napoleon* The threat of an attack on England launched from the Low Countries is examined forensically in J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation* 1793–1815 (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997) in the chapter 'The French Encirclement'; see especially pp. 38–52.

3 *civil war* The sorrow at the breaking of ties with the Dutch in the deadly contest at Camperdown, recorded in the *Norwich Mercury* for 14 October and 21 October 1797, is described in M. Bird, ed, *The Diary of Mary Hardy 1773–1809* (4 volumes, Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2013): Diary 4, Shipwreck and meeting house, pp. 13–14 and notes.

4 *Wells ships* *Norwich Mercury*, 27 August 1803.

5 *Royal Arms* A.A.C. Hedges, *Yarmouth is an antient Town* (Great Yarmouth Corporation, 1959), p. 16.

6 *Nelly* The full story of Nelly, her crew and her owner William Hardy junior is told in the Mary Hardy commentary volumes by Margaret Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World 1773–1809* (4 volumes, Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2020): Volume 4, Under sail and under arms; also in M. Bird, ed, *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, for the years 1800–04.

7 *Lord Lowther* The National Archives (TNA): HO 42/71, f. 18, written at Lowther, Cumberland, to Lord Pelham, Home Secretary, 31 July 1803.

8 *numbers* The Norfolk numbers are calculated from the muster lists (TNA: ADM 28/14 and ADM 28/15, Navy Board: Sea Fencibles pay lists, Cromer to Fosdyke Wash [Lincs] 1803–05; also ADM 28/17 and ADM 28/18, Navy Board: Sea Fencibles pay lists, Southwold to Cromer 1803–05; I have included only the Norfolk units in the calculation of 1000 men). John Cookson supplies the government's figures for the Sea Fencibles and Volunteers and analyses their significance (J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation* 1793–1815, pp. 66, 95).

9 *Bryce's report* The long manuscript in the National Archives is cited at the head of the extract in this article. See also M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, pp. 467–71.
10 *seamen numbers* B. Lavery, *We shall fight on the Beaches: Defying Napoleon and Hitler, 1805 and 1940* (Conway, London, 2009), p. 36.
11 *Grande Armée* B. Lavery, *We shall fight on the Beaches*, p. 386.
12 *merchant fleet doubles* S.P. Ville, English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution: Michael Henley and Son, *London Shipowners, 1770–1830* (Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 11.
13 *General Craig* TNA: WO 30/100, p. 148, 20 December 1803.
14 *convoys in American and French wars* An Act of 1803 imposed a fine of £1000 for any vessel leaving a convoy or sailing without one (*Norwich Mercury*, 15 June 1782, 9 July 1803).
15 *losses from privateers* A.D. Harvey gives a wealth of statistics (A.D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires: Britain in three World Wars 1793–1945* (Phoenix, London, 1994), pp. 123–7).
16 *privateer Argus* *Norfolk Chronicle*, 21 July 1781. The cutting is illustrated in M. Bird, ed, *The Diary of Mary Hardy: Diary 2*, p. 29.
17 *Œconomy* rescued *Norwich Mercury*, 11 June 1803. This may be an early use of 'am' to denote morning. The Ship News in the papers makes it clear that vessels which could potentially be judged prizes were routinely brought into Great Yarmouth, seat of the Admiralty High Court and a large Customs House.
18 *Tay and whales* H. Robertson, *Mariners of Dundee: Their city, their river, their fraternity* (PDQ Print Services, Dundee, 2006), p. 83. He gives many examples of attacks by privateers.
19 *Nelly* Her story is told in full in M. Bird, Mary Hardy and her World: Volume 4, pp. 241, 270–90. Her capture by the Dutch, recapture by the Royal Navy and onward sale to William Hardy junior of Letheringsett are described in affidavits by her captain Robert Mathew, by James Sime, a Dundee shipmaster who had known her well, and by a Great Yarmouth shipwright and a customs tide surveyor also from Yarmouth (TNA: CUST 97/31, Customs outport book, Great Yarmouth, 13 May 1800).
20 *HMS L'Espiègle* Imp; Mischief. The warship was herself a prize, the Royal Navy having captured the vessel from the French Navy in 1793 off Ushant and then retaining her name. A merchant seaman named Patteson took command of *Nelly* to sail her across the North Sea into Yarmouth *(Norwich Mercury*, 20 April 1799). He may possibly have been one of her crew rescued by Lieutenant Boorder.
21 *prizes* See many references in the customs records at this time: TNA: CUST 97/31, Collector of [Great] Yarmouth to Customs Board, 1799–1800.
22 *HMS Iris* TNA: CUST 97/31, 1799–1800.
23 *Nelly* purchased M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy: Diary 4*, p. 112, 19 April 1800.
24 *Coe, Lynes and Randall* Further family details of these men and their local background is given in the article by Margaret Bird, 'More on the Sea Fencibles and the doomed sloop Nelly' published on the BAHS website in the open-access *Digital Newsletter* issue 8, 8 April 2022:
http://www.bahs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/BAHSDigitalNewsletterIssue8-8April2022.pdf
25 *sale valuation* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, p. 236, 27 June 1803.
26 *Nelly's length* TNA: CUST 96/175, Customs Board to Blakeney and Cley, order book.
27 *Scotch Canal* M. Bird, ed, *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, pp. 136, 142, 143. For the calculation, based on William Hardy junior's accounts, that *Nelly*'s hold was only half full on this voyage see M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World:* Volume 4, p. 252.
28 *ships from Newcastle* A. Burton, *The Canal Builders* (2nd edition David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1981), p. 11. Parry, long a Director of the East India Company, had earlier lived in Norfolk at Little Dunham near Swaffham.
29 *pickpockets* S.P. Ville, *English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution*, p. 44. See also Ville's analysis of profitability in his chapter 6, pp. 119–45.
For an analysis of an earlier Cley trader, William Jennis (d.1766), see R. Jefferson, 'The William and Thomas: Trading accounts (1726–1733)', the *Glaven Historian*, 5 (2002), pp. 58–65, available with open access online on the BAHS website:
http://www.bahs.uk/GH-Files/GH1-5/GH-5.7.pdf
Jennis's vessel frequently made losses on her voyages to Newcastle for coal. After an expensive trip to Rotterdam in 1728 Jennis made this bleak entry on the bottom line of his accounts: 'The ship is in debt to me' (p. 63)!
30 *three men* We do not learn the name of the third adult crew member. John Lynes was aged 41 at his death.
31 *Nelly wrecked* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, pp. 254–5. See also pp. 256–8 for the aftermath: the finding of 28-year-old Richard Randall's body at Burnham Overy and the search for the wreckage strewn along the north Norfolk coast. William Hardy junior managed to retrieve the 'cabin box where the captain's papers were', which would have eased administration (p. 256, 13 Feb. 1804).
32 *past testimony* T. Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major* (1st published 1880 in three volumes); preface to the 1895 edition.
33 *machinery of a press gang* T. Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major*, opening of chapter 31. A lieutenant in the Royal Navy and a sergeant of marines accompanied the shore party. They seized 'fifteen or twenty men' that night (end of chapter 32)—but not Bob Loveday, former first mate of a brig.
34 *cards of protection* For the register of 156 vessels, housed in the NRO under the reference Y/C 38/3, and the way it was compiled and used, see M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World:* Volume 4, pp. 186–200.
35 *suspensions* J. Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The continuing struggle* (Constable, London, 1996), p. 126.
36 *strike of Tyne keelmen* T. Douglas-Sherwood, *'The Norfolk keel'* (unpublished thesis, St Andrews, 1987, held in the Norfolk Heritage Centre), p. 43.
37 *River Bure* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 1, pp. 225, 237, 8 April, 12 July 1777. Great Yarmouth, the nearest naval port, was 24 miles away by road.
38 *men drowned* M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 1, p. 201, 2 Nov. 1776, quoting newspaper reports. Hostilities broke out the following summer.
39 *embargo on all shipping* Reported by Mary Hardy in Hull during a business trip there with her husband and daughter (M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy:* Diary 4, p. 228, 17 May 1803 and note).

40 *sources for the Sea Fencibles* The papers are housed in loose bundles in boxes in the National Archives and, of 21 January 2022, their content has not been uploaded to the internet. The principal records for the story in Norfolk are found under these catalogue references:
ADM 11/14 and 11/15, Admiralty service records: Entry book of orders appointing officers to hired cutters, signal stations and Sea Fencibles 1804–05 and 1805–08;
ADM 28/14 and 28/15 and 28/16, Navy Board: Sea Fencibles pay lists, Cromer to Fosdyke Wash [in Lincs] 1803–04 and 1804–05 and 1805–10;
ADM 28/17 and 28/18, Navy Board: Sea Fencibles pay lists, Southwold to Cromer 1803–05; ADM 28/19 and ADM/20 take the tale to 1810 for this eastern part of the coast.
41 *Newsletter article* Freely accessed online via the link given in note 24 in this study.
42 *Volunteers and Militia* These very significant British-based forces in our period are described, and their contribution analysed, in the chapter 'Civilians at war' in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World:* Volume 4, pp. 497–583. It was common for those selected in the ballot to find substitutes, if they could afford to pay for them.
43 *Mundesley* From Bryce's report (TNA: WO 30/100) and transcribed, with notes, in M. Bird, *The Diary of Mary Hardy: Diary 4*, pp. 467–8. The Mundesley unit in the autumn of 1803 numbered between forty and fifty, out of a total male population in 1801 of 88.
44 *Wells* M. Bird, *The Diary of Mary Hardy: Diary 4*, p. 468. Bryce considered Holkham Bay a vulnerable point owing to the deepwater anchorage (six fathoms), with access to the beach sheltered by the sands: 'The beach would be favourable for disembarkation at any time of tide' (Diary 4, p. 470).
45 *HMS Contest* NRO: MC 216/1, 668x3, The farming journal of Randall Burroughes (unpaginated MS), week of 16 July 1798. The full entry is transcribed in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World:* Volume 4, p. 556.
46 *Lowestoft, Cromer* TNA: ADM 28/17, July and August 1803; ADM 28/18, 10 November 1805. See note 40 for the sources on the Norfolk units.
47 *Wells* TNA: ADM 28/14, October 1803. The total male population in 1801 was 1023 persons. However men from nearby parishes such as Stiffkey would have joined the Wells unit, just as Morston men would have served within Blakeney and Cley, and Overstrand within Cromer.
48 *Volunteers* TNA: WO 30/76, pp. 107, 246–7, 30 December 1803. Extracts are transcribed in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World:* Volume 4, p. 539; see also pp. 538 and 540.
49 *Sea Fencibles* TNA: WO 30/76, pp. 4–5, 21 June 1803.
50 *Mundesley battery* TNA: WO 30/100, pp. 148–9, 12 December 1803.
51 *conjunct operations* For the sorry story of these expeditions to the Low Countries, and elsewhere, recorded at first hand by a conscientious officer in the Marines indignant at the treatment of his brave men, see A. Petrides and J. Downs, eds, *Sea Soldier: An officer of Marines with Duncan, Collingwood and Cockburn, The letters and journals of Major T. Marmaduke Wybourn, RM, 1797–1813* (Parapress, Tunbridge Wells, 2000).
52 *long hours* M. Bird, 'Supplying the beer: life on the road in late 18th-century Norfolk', the *Glaven Historian,* 14 (2014), pp. 2–29, available to current members online on the BAHS website: http://www.bahs.uk/publications/glaven-historian/glaven-historian-14-2014/

The disastrous Summer Storm of 1833

Jonathan Hooton

An account of the great storm of 31 August – 1 September 1833 in which as many as 15 vessels were blown ashore between Stiffkey and Cromer, two of which were complete wrecks, and a further 29 around Wells and King's Lynn. The images in this article are all photographs of ships wrecked later than 1833, but give an impression of what the wrecks of 1833 would have looked like.

During the days of sail deep depressions crossing the North Sea and bringing strong north or north-easterly winds were always going to cause havoc with the convoys of colliers and packets traversing the East Coast as they drove the ships southerly onto the unforgiving lee shore of the North Norfolk coast. They regularly occurred but usually during the Autumn or Winter months and brought disaster at sea and flooding and destruction on land. They were not expected to occur during the summer months so it was a surprise to the ports of north Norfolk when the weather suddenly changed on Saturday 31st August and Sunday 1st September to bring such destruction to the area in 1833. This event was very newsworthy and the following description is taken from the reports found in the *Norwich Mercury* and *Norfolk Chronicle* for September of that year.

There had already been a summer gale that year on June 11th that had been described as "extraordinary" and the correspondent went on to comment that "Two such gales in one summer we may fairly say are unprecedented, but the damage of the first hereabouts was nearly confined to the land, the wind blowing from the shore." The winds were south-westerly in other words they would be blowing the sailing vessels away from the North Norfolk coast, not towards it as happened with the August gale. The Cley correspondent wrote on 13th June that "on Tuesday last, we were visited with a most tremendous gale of wind from the west……many large trees in the neighbourhood are blown up by the roots and the damage done to the gardens is incalculable……..many of the trees wear the appearance of November." However, the only comment about the shipping was that "Several of our fishing smacks which were at sea, had much difficulty to make the harbour, two we are sorry to say are driven on the sands, but there is every reason to suppose they will be got off without any material damage." This was nothing compared with what was to come at the end of August. There was little disruption to the port from this unexpected June south westerly gale and thirteen ships arrived safely in port that week including eleven colliers from the north east and twelve vessels left port.

CLEY, Sept. 4.

Destructive Gale on the Norfolk Coast on Saturday and Sunday, August 31st and Sept. 1st, 1833.—The morning of Saturday was remarkably calm, but the unusually high tide which we had was looked upon as the harbinger of a gale, which we are sorry to say visited us in the course of three hours from the N. N. E. and has proved the most destructive both in loss of life and property along this coast which has occurred within the last 17 years. The wind continued to increase throughout the Saturday afternoon, and towards high water time (eight o'clock) the sea ran mountains high, rolling completely over our beach in every direction. The tide took possession of the Quay for some time, and it flowed a considerable distance up our streets; about this time and during the night the following vessels came ashore in this district—all hands saved.

On Blakeney Sands—The "Henry and Harriet," of and to Sunderland from London, in ballast, Lawson, master, expected to be got off; "Speu," J. Angues, from Charlestown, with coals to Rotterdam, likely to become a wreck. On Salthouse Beach—"Fanny," Whitby, N. Beddington, from Colchester, in ballast, has become a total wreck; "Aurora," of Sunderland, W. Dawson, from Plymouth, to St. Petersburgh, in ballast, expected to be got off. On Weybourne Beach—"Rising Star," of this Port, W. Kennedy, from —— "Friends," of Weymouth, —— Hill, from —— "Richard and Ann," of Blyth, D. Miller, from Dort to the North, in ballast, expected to be got off. On Sheringham Beach—"Vanilla," of and to Sunderland, —— master; "Newcastle," of and to South Shields, Pennington, master, in ballast, expected to be got off. On Beeston Beach—"Norfolk," of this Port, D. Bayfield, from——. Several vessels were seen to founder at sea and all on board perished.

The night of Saturday the oldest sailors present has never had its equal; the morning of Sunday was ushered in with the fury of the elements equally unabated. The scene during this day was of the most heart rending description. Vessels lying on the shore, some perfect wrecks, others dismasted, and all more or less damaged; others out in a sea which every moment threatened to swallow them. Several were enabled to make Yarmouth Roads, but melancholy to relate a brig and a sloop sunk in the course of the day with every soul on board; the latter had three men clinging to the rigging and was within a short distance of the shore when a heavy sea struck her and she instantly went down. A brig which had been riding off Weybourne during the day, having at last parted with one anchor, slipt the other and came to the beach, all hands saved.

On Monday the weather began to moderate, but the foaming billows loath to rest from their tempestuous career, still continued to break over the beach, and had by this time so much increased the water in the Salthouse Broads, as to cut off the communication between this place. Several of our small vessels are driven on the sands and the getting them off will be attended with much expence.

The most distressing intelligence continues to arrive of the vessels on shore and the washing up of bodies along the coast. The tide rose to so great a height that apprehensions were entertained for the safety of the sea-banks which enclose the valuable marshes here, but in no instance did they give way to the great pressure of water; the sluice at Blakeney blew up and inundated a considerable portion of marsh land, several loads of wheat were carried off the marshes during the Sunday.

The gardens have suffered very much indeed.—The apple crop is entirely destroyed, scarcely any remaining on the trees. They have been selling here 3d. per peck; vegetation never received such a blight, many trees are blown up in the neighbourhood, and in some places the roads are covered with branches. The injury done to barns and tops of houses is very considerable.

Last week, a sailor by the name of Sadler, was drowned in the Tyne, from the brig "Rolla," of this Port; it is rather singular, his father was drowned some years ago in the same river and not far from the spot.

ARRIVED.—Blakeney Packet, Hunt, from London, with goods; Active, Johnson, from Hull, with deals; Blakeney Packet, Bumbridge; Squirrel, Secker; and Rolla, Bowles, from Newcastle; John, Ellis, from Goole; and Amos, Jarvis, & Dolphin, Claxton, from Seaham Harbour, with coals; Good Intent, Bishop, and Rising Star, Bayfield, from Boston, and Herring, Simpson, from Scarborough, in ballast: Heron yacht, W. Delafield, Esq. from Aberdeen.

SAILED.—Henry and Elizabeth, Shaul, and Equity, Jordan, for Calthundberg, in ballast; Prudent, May, for London, with malt and flour; Providence, Grice; Rover, Bishop; and Rising Star, Kirby, for Boston, with red herrings; Amos, Jarvis, for Seaham Harbour, in ballast.

Fig. 1. The account of the storm in the* Norfolk Chronicle, *7th September 1833

The weather at the end of August 1833 had been very fine, as the Cromer correspondent recorded; "After a week of uncommonly fine and tranquil weather, during which our extensive sands and bold cliffs presented almost at all hours of each day a cheerfully animated scene, in the rides and walks of numerous visitors, both resident and casual, (many of the families of rank and fashion) a total and a fearful change took place." The locals were getting uneasy early on a "remarkably calm" Saturday morning because of the unusually high tide which was seen as "a harbinger of a gale" and three hours later they were proved correct. In the *Norwich Mercury* the correspondent described it as "a high spring tide on the Saturday morning with the wind South-west, when a low one was looked for, was a signal to prepare for something more than common, and so it proved." The wind switched to coming from completely the opposite direction, the north north-east, a very dangerous direction for sailing vessels on the Norfolk coast. This was particularly worrying to those on shore because the preceding fine weather had come after "much bad weather" and it resulted in "a vast number of vessels had gone to sea, and from the situation many of them must be in, several disasters were expected." The afternoon's "brisk gale" increased to "a stiff gale" and by the evening had become a "hurricane". The evening's high tide (at 8 o'clock) overflowed the quay and "flowed a considerable distance up our streets." The most immediate concern was for a lighter that had left Cley to be quanted out to the Pit to load coal but by "good management they were enabled to get it up to Blakeney quay, which was a shorter distance than our own (i.e. back to Cley quay), though they were for a long time in great danger." Within the waters behind Blakeney Point some boats were driven from their moorings and damaged but then vessels out at sea began to be driven on shore and this was to continue throughout Sunday because "the hurricane continued with very little or no mitigation till Sunday night late when it somewhat abated."

Casualties from Cromer to Stiffkey

Ship details	Where ashore	Fate of Crew
Unknown vessel foundered	Seen in distress off Cromer	All hands lost
Advance of Sunderland brig 240 tons Master: Shepperd	Ashore Cromer Sat 10pm in ballast	Crew 9 passengers 2 Saved
Regard of Newcastle brig 170 tons Master: Lesk	Ashore at Runton Sat 11-12pm in ballast	Crew 6 passengers 3 Saved by Runton & Cromer boatmen
Norfolk of Blakeney brig 70 tons Master: Bayfield	Ashore at Beeston Sat 9pm in ballast	Crew saved
Endeavour of Scarborough Schooner 77 tons Master: T Dobson	Ashore at Sheringham Sat 10pm in ballast	Crew saved
Newcastle of South Shields 238 tons Master: Pennington	Ashore at Sheringham Sun 1pm in ballast Expected to be got off. Hit the *Endeavour* when beaching.	11 crew saved
Venelia[1] of Sunderland Brig 145 tons Master: J Wardle	Ashore at Sheringham Sat 10pm in ballast	Crew saved
Friends of Weymouth 150-200 tons Master: Campbell[2]	Ashore at Sheringham in ballast	Crew saved
William & Ann[3] of Blyth c.200 tons Master: D Miller	Ashore at Sheringham Sun 6pm in ballast	Expected to be got off
Rising Star[4] of Blakeney 70 tons Master: W Kennedy	Ashore at Weybourne Sat 9pm in ballast	Crew saved
Aurora of Sunderland c.320 tons Master: W Dawson	Ashore at Salthouse from Plymouth to St Petersburgh in ballastExpected to be got off.	Crew of 10
Fanny of Whitby c.250 tons Master: Bedlington[5]	Ashore at Salthouse from Colchester in ballast	Became a total wreck. Crew of 8
Henry of Shields Brig	Near harbour mouth at Blakeney *(Norwich Mercury)*	
Spero Master: J Angues	From Charlestown with coals for Rotterdam	Likely to become a wreck
Henry and Harriot of Sunderland Master: J Lawson	Ashore on Blakeney Sands from London in ballast	Expected to be got off
Brig ?	lost foremast	A great way on shore at Stiffkey with apples on board

Alternative names from different correspondents
1 also *Vanilla & Vermilia*
2 also Hill
3 also *Richard & Ann*
4 also *Morning Star*
5 also Wedlington

Fig.2. Billy-boy* H M & R *aground at Blakeney Point, c.1885. Although this wreck is 50 years later than the 1833 storm, the scene in 1833 would not have looked very different.

In King's Lynn, "the tide anticipated its regular time by more than an hour, and the Quay was thronged at seven o'clock (the hour of high tide). It was a most distressing scene to witness the anxious and melancholy countenances of wives, children, and parents who had so recently seen husbands, fathers and children depart". They could not have been comforted by vessels breaking from their moorings, lighters sinking and many people actively trying to save other ships from a similar fate.

The winds reached their peak on Saturday night and it is during the evening that vessels whose anchors had finally given way started to come onshore. The *Mercury* estimated that "between Brancaster and Cromer, or near it, the number of vessels lost and on shore exceeds twenty: nine of them in about 5 miles from Salthouse to Sheringham." The Cromer correspondent of the Chronicle listed nine vessels on shore between Cromer and Weybourne. Later they say of them "the above nine vessels were part of a fleet of light colliers, which meeting the gale were compelled by its violence to put about." *The Mercury* also commented that many of the boats had been sailing together and who were "making a fine passage down" many of them having passed the Dudgeon light (32 km north of Cromer) and the *Fanny*, that had become a total wreck on Salthouse beach, was actually within five miles of the Humber estuary before the storm drove her back.

The Cromer correspondent gave timings for when the vessels came on shore so a picture can be built up of what the crowds of fishermen and locals witnessed as they stood onshore ready to give assistance wherever they could. It started with both of the local Blakeney boats being first to the shore. At about 9pm on the Saturday evening the *Rising Star* of Blakeney (mistakenly called the *Morning Star*) a 70 ton vessel, master, W. Kennedy came onto Weybourne beach and at about the same time the *Norfolk* also of Blakeney, a brig of 70 tons, master, D. Bayfiled, owned by Mr. Wheatley, of Mundesley, drove ashore under Beeston Hills. They were shortly followed (10pm) at Sheringham by two vessels, the *Endeavour* a schooner of 77 tons from Scarborough, Thomas Dobson, master (described as being in the bottle trade); and the *Venelia* (described elsewhere as the *Vanilla* and the *Vermilia*), of 145 tons, of Sunderland, John Wardle, master. Also at that time the *Advance* a brig of 240 tons, G. Shepperd, master, came on shore about 200 yards to the north of Cromer Jetty. The next to come ashore between 11 and 12 on Saturday night was the *Regard* a Newcastle brig of 170 tons, Henry Lesk, master. We are told that as well as the captain, there was a crew of five, and three passengers (one of them the wife of a captain in the Baltic trade, who was at that moment on a voyage to St Petersburgh) and all were got safely to shore by the Cromer boatmen. Of Leak, they said he "has lost everything, for which he is the more to be pitied; since had he been less attentive to secure the lives and property of others, his personal apparel at least might have been in his own possession." An hour later, at 1am on Sunday morning the *Newcastle* of South Shields, 228 tons, George Pennington, master, with a crew of eleven, drove

ashore, rather too close to the *Endeavour* and "pitched her bows against the stern of the *Endeavour* and did her considerable damage." The *William and Anne* (also referred to as the *Richard and Ann*) of Blyth, D. Miller, master, of about 200 tons and on a voyage from Dort to the North, managed to ride out the gale all of Saturday night and most of Sunday "but at length her cables having given way, she drove ashore between six and seven of Sunday evening" also at Sheringham. The last of the nine vessels in the convoy was the *Friends* from Weymouth, between 150 and 200 tons, Campbell (Hill, in another account) her master, but it was not recorded when she came onshore.

The Cromer correspondent was pleased to report that of this convoy of nine vessels, now all ashore "it is gratifying to add that the lives on board all these were without a single exception most providentially saved." Those watching from the shore did all they could to assist, although sometimes this was not accepted. This becomes clear from the following account:

> "A West Country brig rode out the storm all Saturday night and Sunday off Waborne, within three quarters of a mile of the shore, but she lost her chain cable in the morning, and, parting from her remaining one, came steadily on the beach without injury, just before high water in the evening. Captain Manby's apparatus was brought to the spot and two shots were fired over her, but the crew shewed no disposition to avail themselves of the offered assistance. Only two of the men appeared on deck, and they went down again immediately, although they could have left the vessel without any danger, as she laid so high that a landsman afterwards climbed up her side. He found the Captain taking his grog and fully determined not to leave her."

This indifference for the help offered was probably due to the fear that the cargo could well have been stolen had an abandoned vessel been left on shore. As we will see later, this is exactly what happened to the Lynn ship, *Waterloo* onshore at Heacham.

The boats in the convoy, mentioned above, had been in ballast making an empty return trip to the coal ports of the north so that they had no cargo to be lost or stolen. Writing about the *Advance* in the *Mercury* the correspondent stated that "being in ballast she had passed in safety over the rocks and was driven high on the beach; in about 20 minutes the crew, nine in number, and two passengers were brought safely on shore." Also most of the vessels were expected to be got off the beach and although damaged by loss of masts, rigging, cables and anchors, they were largely expected to be returned to service. They had also not suffered loss of life. This, however, was not the case for all the vessels involved as will become apparent when other sections of the coast are considered. The Cromer correspondent was also concerned about the Cromer fishing boats which that weekend had been working in the herring fishery off Scarborough and other parts of the Yorkshire coast, and as he put it "an intense anxiety was felt by the families of the crews for their safety." Luckily letters had been posted home stating that all the boats but one had weathered and survived the gale, the unfortunate vessel that was still missing was that belonging to Joseph West with his crew of two, of whom there was no news.

The oldest sailors of Blakeney and Cley were in agreement that the night of Saturday 31st "has never had its equal". The storm did not abate the next day either. It is worth quoting the Cley correspondent in full:

> "The morning of Sunday was ushered in with the fury of the elements equally unabated. The scene during this day was of the most heart rending description. Vessels lying on the shore, some perfect wrecks, others dismasted, and all more or less damaged; others out in a sea which every moment threatened to swallow them. Several were enabled to make Yarmouth Roads, but melancholy to relate a brig and a sloop sank in the course of the day with every soul on board; the latter had three men clinging to the rigging and was within a short distance of the shore when a heavy sea struck her and she instantly went down. A brig which had been riding off Weybourne during the day, having at last parted with one anchor, slipt the other and came to the beach, all hands saved."

Before the first of these vessels came on shore at Cromer at 10 o'clock on Saturday evening a vessel with a signal of distress was seen making for the shore but all of a "sudden the light disappeared, and as no tidings of the vessel have been heard, the probability is that she foundered." At 10 on the following day a sloop ten miles off shore from Sheringham sunk and its crew were lost. At 1 o'clock on Sunday another vessel was seen to go down with all hands between Runton and Beeston. Further west from Sheringham the *Argus* of Exeter sunk about a mile offshore. She had ridden out the storm over night and "it is supposed slipped her cable in the morning for the purpose of running on shore, which she would have done had she been able to have kept above water a few minutes longer."

Onshore between Salthouse and Cley was the *Aurora*, a 320 ton brig from Sunderland whose crew numbered ten plus the master, Mr Dawson and his wife. Dawson had been unwell, but luckily for the crew his wife took charge. Apparently she had had experience of four similar storms and "undertook the direction of the vessel, and brought her safe ashore; she was the last to leave the vessel after it had struck." Also it was expected that she could be re-floated. Near the *Aurora* was the *Fanny* of Whitby on a voyage northward from Colchester. The *Fanny* was considered a "complete wreck" but luckily was underwritten for £1,900. She had had "a young gentleman from Colchester going to the North on an excursion – he had a narrow escape; though a mere child, this is his second shipwreck."

The *Henry* of Shields was near the (Blakeney) harbour mouth, but nothing was said about its fate. Also a sloop sunk near the harbour. Her name was not ascertained but "we understand the sunken sloop is standing with part of her top-mast above water at lowest ebb tide; three of her crew were seen clinging to the top of the mast just before she went down, but it was impossible to render them any assistance." The correspondent then goes on to mention that two bodies had been washed up between Sheringham and Cromer and five others near Wells. Also worryingly "some bags of ground oatmeal have been washed up here with Clay upon them: we consequently fear that the sunk sloop belongs to this place." Just past the Point the *Henry and Harriot* of Sunderland, J. Lawson, master from London to her home port in ballast was washed onto Blakeney sands but expected to be got off. Near her was the *Spero* J. Angues, master, travelling from Charles-

Fig. 3. Another later wreck: the Norwegian brig "Ida" wrecked at Weybourne in 1893.

town (Scotland) to Rotterdam with coal, was not so lucky and "likely to become a wreck". Then there was a brig, name unknown which had lost her foremast and had apples on board that was "a great way on shore at Stiffkey."

The Blakeney and Cley correspondent who had estimated 20 vessels were lost or onshore to the east had not been exaggerating but more were in trouble to the west when the reports from Wells and Lynn are considered. The table below shows the vessels wrecked or disabled around Wells.

Shipwrecks near Wells

Ship details	Where ashore	Fate of the crew
Bellona of Sunderland Brig	In ballast; on shore	Crew saved; considerable damage; ship likely to be got off.
Tyne of Berwick Schooner	General cargo.	Crew perished; total wreck.
Economy of Newcastle Schooner	Loss of mainmast, rigging, anchors, cables etc.	Crew perished.
Three Sisters of Sunderland Brig	Loss of main & fore mast; bowsprit; cables; anchors completely water-logged .	Crew saved; brought into port by the pilots
Atlanta of Sunderland Brig	Laden with coal. Loss of mainmast, anchors, bulwarks & part of cargo.	Crew saved.
Cyrus of Whitby Brig	Ashore on Woolverton Marshes	Crew saved. Should be got off marshes at great expense.
Three Friends of Sunderland Brig	Seen in gale, presumed lost off Burnham.	Crew perished. A considerable portion of her wreck salvaged.
Henrys and Elizabeth of Wells Sloop	Ashore at Saltfleet on Lincolnshire coast, . loss of all sails.	Crew saved. Expected to be got off.
Wellington of Wells Sloop	For Goole with a cargo of corn. Capsized & sank in the mouth of the Humber.	Crew & 1 passenger saved, picked up by Hull vessel. Cargo lost.
Albion of Boston Sloop	Ashore at Thornham with general cargo.	Ship, crew and cargo saved.
Vine of Newcastle Brig	Ashore in ballast.	Crew saved and ship likely to get off.
Earl of Wemyss of Leith Smack, master, Nesbitt.	Ashore with general cargo and passengers.	Crew and some passengers & cargo saved. 11 passengers drowned.

When the *Economy* was found on shore there was no sign of anyone on board and it was assumed that the crew had been drowned after taking to the boats. "Immense quantity of wreck is drifted on shore and also a number of dead bodies. A quantity of foreign woolpacks have been picked up here, marked H. H. & Co., H. X. and others W. B. and Sons, Wakefield; also about 50 barrels of herrings, marked J. Nesbitt, Eyemouth, 1833." This was assumed to have come out of the *Tyne*. The *Three Sisters* after cutting away her masts managed to ride out the storm until it was possible for the pilots to reach her and bring her into the port. The passenger saved when the *Wellington* capsized was identified as a Mr. Neville, who had been visiting his brother in Wells. The *Earl of Wemyss* which came ashore at Brancaster had a sad tale to tell concerning their passengers. The *Chronicle* recorded it as follows: "a heavy sea broke in the Ladies cabin window, filled the cabin (the door of which got fixed), and melancholy to relate, six ladies, one gentleman, and four children were suffocated before any assistance could be rendered them. The crew and other passengers were safely landed." The *Mercury* had a slightly different version of the same event where "a sea broke over the vessel and burst the sky light, when the cabin instantly filled with water; the vessel being waterlogged must have sunk, had they not run her ashore; the crew are saved. After they got ashore one of the ladies was found with one of the children in her arms, pressing it to her; the position without doubt they were in at the moment of the water bursting in: life was quite extinct in all of them." Nine in the cabin were drowned along with Mrs. Rymer and child, who were "in steerage". It was a distressing event for the crew and those on shore who came to give assistance.

As well as the ships out at sea all of the inshore fishing smacks had broken away from their moorings, some became total wrecks and the rest "drifted high on the marshes, that will cause great expence to the owners to launch them and get fit for sea."

It was a similar story at Lynn as the following table shows:

Lynn wrecks

Ship details	Where ashore	Fate of the crew
Suffolk of Southwold Brig	Overturned to north of Purfleet Quay with a cargo of linseed cake.	Cargo damaged.
Celerity of Lynn Master, Watts	Main mast cut away to save the ship.	
Amiens of Lynn Sloop	Sunk off Bentinck's Point. With general cargo.	Crew took to the boat and were saved. Cargo partly saved, shipwrecked.
Grimsby pilot boat	Ashore on the east side.	Crew saved.
Waterloo of Lynn Brig, Master, Seales	Cargo of coals, broke from anchor and ashore at Heacham.	Crew in rigging saved by fishermen. Ship has broken up.
Margaret of Lynn Brig, Master, Osler.	From Blyth with coal. Lost near Lynn Roads on the Whiting Sand.	Crew perished.
Mayflower of Heacham Schooner, Master, Fox	Stranded on Hunstanton coast.	Crew escaped in a boat. Survived but Captain killed landing.
Speculator Master, Lakey	Loss of sails and both anchors.	Crew safe.
Earl St Vincent Master, Turner	Loss of sails and both anchors.	Crew safe.
Minerva Master, Chapman	Loss of sails, stern, boat & anchor.	Crew safe.
Betsey Master, Billing	Loss of boat and bulwarks.	Crew safe
Peace Master, Macdonald	Onshore four miles below Lynn.	
Lucy and Mary	Onshore four miles below Lynn.	
Venus, pilot boat, Dobson	Onshore four miles below Lynn.	
Mary of Lynn Master, Johnson	Lost on the Yorkshire coast.	Crew perished.
Jason of Boston Master, Hoop	For Newcastle with corn, onshore at Hunstanton dismasted.	Crew saved by the Preventive service.
Goode Verwagting of Amsterdam Master, Owehang	In ballast onshore undamaged on Snettisham beach.	No boat or anyone on board. Crew have not been heard of.

The greatest fears are entertained that the *Barbara* and *Neptune*, both of this port, are lost with all hands wreck belonging to these vessels having been washed on shore including pumps belonging to the *Neptune*.

The implications of the loss of some ships with all hands were clearly illustrated by the *Margaret* of Lynn which left "four widows and twenty-two fatherless children … entirely unprovided for." The *Mercury* stated that "a subscription is on foot" to raise money for their relief, whereas the *Chronicle* referred to the "admirable institution" of The Seaman's Widows Society. Captain Fox of the *Mayflower* managed to get on shore with his crew in the ship's boat after abandoning his ship but on reaching the shore "the boat overturned and the Captain in consequence, received such a blow on the head, that he was killed on the spot."

The storm also affected the land. At Blakeney the Quay and surrounding streets were flooded and at Cley it was reported that the waves continued to break over the beach and that by the Monday there was so much water in Salthouse broads that communications with Salthouse had been cut off. There was great apprehension that the marsh embankments would give way but "in no instance did they give way to the great pressure of water; the sluice at Blakeney blew up and inundated a considerable portion of marsh land." Many roofs were damaged and chimney stacks were down. The daughters of the Rev. J. Bransby, Master of the King's Lynn grammar school had a lucky escape, having left an upstairs room just before a stack of chimneys fell through the roof landing where they had been sitting. Also in that town "the public walks were completely covered with the leaves and branches of the trees, and now exhibit the appearance of having been blasted by the scorching simoom." The *Mercury* mentioned that the trees "are black and brown, and look as if we had had a severe frost or scorching fire." At Cley, the apple crop was "entirely destroyed, scarcely any remaining on the trees … the vegetation never received such a blight, many trees are blown up in the neighbourhood, and in some places the roads are covered with branches." At Wisbech the damage included "trees torn up, chimneys overthrown, houses partly unroofed, and a house in Timber Market partly blown down." The orchards suffered here as well and at Walsoken "not less than 80 trees have in these orchards been blown up by the roots, broken or otherwise damaged, besides the loss of more than 300 bushels of apples, plums etc." The *Norwich Mercury* stated of Blakeney and Cley that "onshore houses are unroofed partially, likewise chimnies blown down, mills injured, trees torn up by their roots," painting a picture of widespread devastation.

The *Chronicle* gave the following example of the strength of the wind at King's Lynn. "A singular circumstance that occurred at the common staithe may serve to shew the impetuosity of the wind; a large seagull, endeavouring to make way against it, was suddenly forced back, and the head being caught by some part of the rigging of a vessel, was torn from the body, which fell lifeless on the Quay."

The storm began to abate on Monday, but the aftermath also brought further tragedies. Although not a casualty of the storm, news reached Blakeney that a sailor, named Sadler, from the brig *Rolla*, a Blakeney ship, was drowned in the Tyne. The *Mercury* added further details; it was as he "was passing from one vessel to another, in the Tyne, fell in between them and was drowned." However, both newspapers pointed out the curiosity that his father had been drowned some years earlier in the same river and not far from the same place.

The following week the *Chronicle* noted that Sheringham fishermen had come across out at sea, a dismasted brig, the *Hope* of Dunbar; she had been abandoned, no crew and also, apart from 80 barrels of herring, no cargo either. It was assumed that she had been plundered after the crew had taken to their boats and it was hoped that the crew had survived. The fishermen ran the vessel on to the beach. The Cley correspondent went on to mention the 150 ton Newcastle brig the *Minerva*, which had been abandoned by her crew of seven. She had been in the gale and "had seven feet water in her hold, when they took to the boat; they landed safely at Blakeney; a few hours afterwards she went down, stern foremost; her bowsprit has been visible for some days since, and some portion of her rigging has been rescued." It is not clear if this was the same *Minerva* whose master was Chapman that was mentioned by the Lynn correspondent the week before.

However, at Lynn, the following week, they had had more information about the Dutch vessel the *Goode Verwagting*, which the previous week had been found onshore at Snettisham abandoned by her crew. It had been hoped that the crew had survived. They had survived and were found on the other side of the Wash on the Lincolnshire coast where "the vessel had been driven on shore on the Saturday morning, so high up that no apprehensions were entertained of the following tide reaching her; she was, however, washed off in sight of the crew, and drifted on shore at Snettisham." No further news had come about the Lynn ship, the *Barbara* and it was presumed she had been lost.

There was more certainty about the loss of the *Neptune* since one of her pumps and a cabin window had been identified amongst the wreck that was stored at Hunstanton. This meant that 33 children from the two vessels had been left fatherless in addition to the 22 from the *Margaret*, already mentioned. As well as raising money for these families a subscription had been started for rewarding "the brave fellows who went out in the fishing boat a distance of 14 miles in the heaviest of the gale to rescue the crew of the *Waterloo*. The correspondent also added "great blame is in this case attached to a party of the pilots which passed near the *Waterloo* without attempting to render them any assistance". This vessel was also a Lynn vessel and after the fishermen had saved the crew she went ashore and broke up at Heacham. She was then looted and we read further on that Mr Groom, a serjeant-at-mace was "actively engaged in recovering property which has been secreted from the wreck of the *Waterloo*. Several persons have been fined for stealing coals from a wreck." The loss of three vessels, as well as the damage to many others, and the sinking of lighters and retrieval of fishing boats left high and dry on the marshes was a big blow to the community of Lynn.

They were not the only local maritime communities stricken by the weekend storm. Wells had lost the *Wellington* and had the *Henry & Elizabeth* ashore at Saltfleet. At Cley they reported that "the schooner *Yarmouth* and the barge *Two Cousins*, both of this port, were in the gale, and we are sorry to say neither have been heard of since; there is every reason to fear they foundered at shore". The gloomy prognostication about the *Two Cousins* proved to be correct. In the *Norfolk Chronicle* for 12th October, six weeks after the storm, the bodies of the master (Sadler) and one of his sons were washed up near Spurn Point on the Yorkshire coast. They continue, "the former (the Master) had £25, in his pocket when found, it is not unlikely but the other son

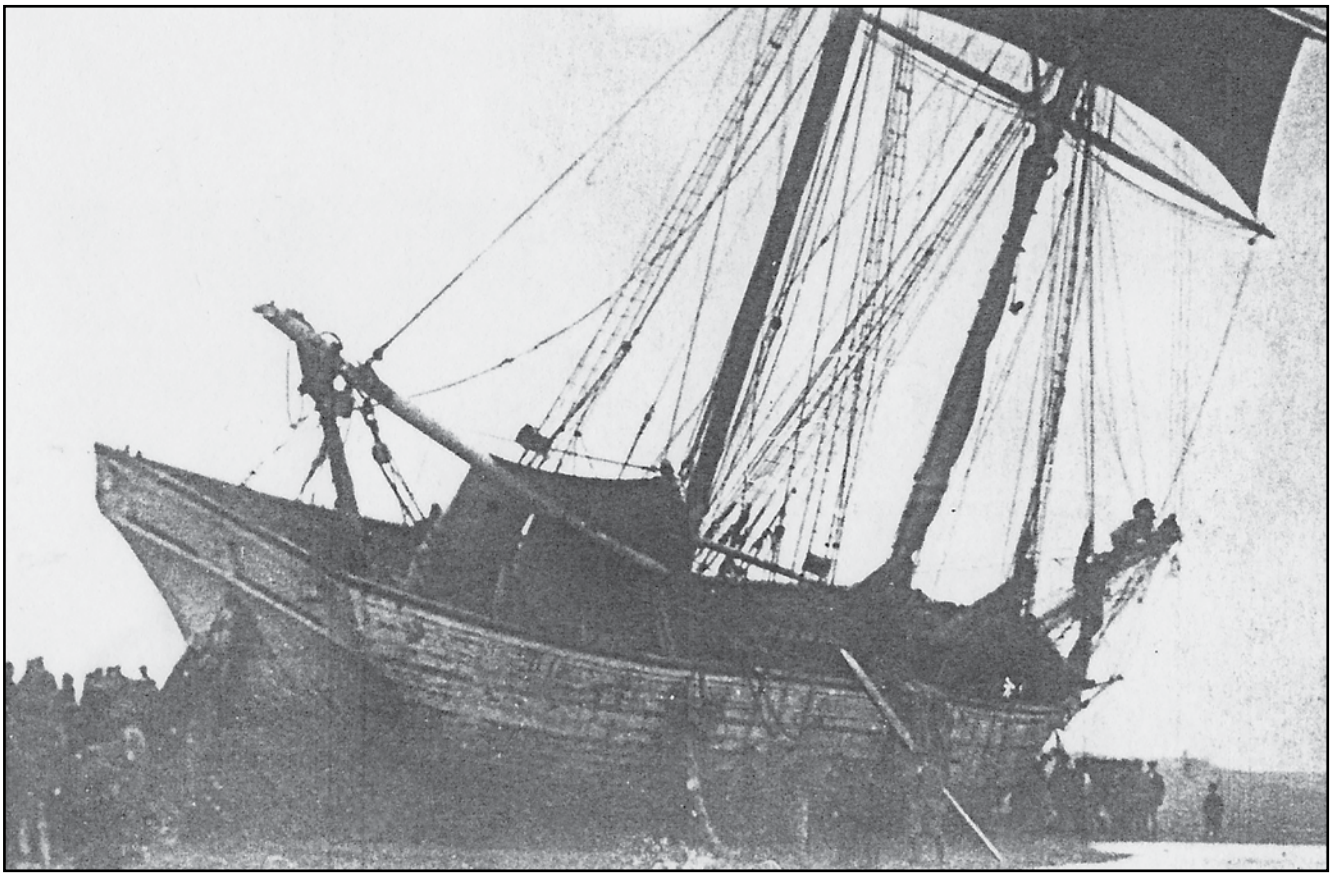


Fig. 4. The French schooner* La Gracieuse *of St Malo on Cley beach in 1913

and two nephews who were on board were amongst the great number washed up between that place (Spurn Point) and Hornsea, without any distinguishing marks upon them, it appears they were endeavouring to get into the Humber and were driven ashore, as the vessel was seen to strike the beach two or three times, but could not lay on account of the back water being so strong." The fact that the crew were all related illustrates the family tragedy that occurred during that fateful storm. One of those who were drowned left a widow and six young children.

There were further concerns expressed for local shipping. "Neither the *Equity*, which sailed from hence to Cullenbourg, in ballast, two days before the late gale, nor the *Ocean*, which left Christiansand, about the same time, laden with timber, have yet been heard of. The *Blakeney*, which has arrived here, sailed one day before the *Equity*, for the same place, or near it; she was in the gale, but this start of 24 hours had enabled her to reach the Categat, where by hugging the land, she escaped its greatest violence, being within a sort of large harbour. The *Ocean* ought to have arrived a month since." Cullenbourg was probably the Danish sea port of Kalundborg situated on the north western coast of the largest Danish island of Zealand on the opposite side from Copenhagen. The Kattegat is the strait between the eastern coast of the Jutland peninsula, the western coast of southern Sweden and the northern coast of the island of Zealand where Kalundborg is and these landmasses had a sheltering effect on the sea, which was missing from the more open North Sea. The site of Kristiansand on the southern coast of Norway is less sheltered and would lead to a course through the open North Sea back to Blakeney.

The 'Shipping News', recording the arrivals and departures of ships with their masters and destinations appeared haphazardly in different weeks for Blakeney and Cley in the *Norfolk Chronicle*. In 1833 there were 33 weeks out of 52 where there was 'Ship News' from Blakeney and Cley, which is enough to give an idea of the pattern of trade. The *Ocean* was mentioned in eight of these shown in the table below and for each voyage

Pattern of trade for the Ocean during 1833

Week ending	Arrived or sailed	Where from or to	Cargo
26th January	arrived	Sunderland	coals
26th January	sailed	Newcastle	ballast
20th April	arrived	Newcastle	coals
20th April	sailed	Kristiansand	ballast
18th May	arrived	Kristiansand	timber
3rd August	arrived	Newcastle	coals
3rd August	sailed	Kristiansand	ballast
31st August	sailed	Kristiansand	ballast

Howlett was the master. It seems it was probably a regular triangular trade sailing for Kristiansand in ballast and either returning to Blakeney with Scandinavian timber, or possibly sailing to the north-east and replacing the timber with coal for Blakeney.

As can be seen, the last entry was when she sailed for Kristiansand in ballast before the fateful storm of the 31st August. *Ocean* and Howlett do not appear again. The picture for *Equity* is not so miserable.

Pattern of trade for the *Equity* during 1833.

Week ending	Arrived or sailed	Where from or to	Cargo
12th January	arrived	Keadby-on-Trent	coals
26th January	Sailed	Gainsborough	corn, flour & goods
23rd February	Sailed	Hull	corn & flour
13th April	Arrived	Goole	rapeseed
4th May	Sailed	Lübeck	ballast
22nd June	arrived	Lübeck	oil cakes
6th July	sailed	St Petersburg	ballast
24th August	arrived	Memel (Klaipeda)	timber
7th September*	sailed	Kalundborg	ballast
14th December	arrived	Newcastle	coals

*The 7th September was the Saturday that the *Norfolk Chronicle* was published. The "Ship News" was dated 4th September, and had to be sent earlier to be in time to be published in the *Chronicle* at the week-end. A week before the 4th would have been 28th August so it is possible for the *Equity* to have sailed before the weekend of the storm and not have been recorded in the week before as the *Ocean* had been. What is surprising is that the *Blakeney* which we are told sailed a day before the *Equity* was not recorded in either week.

Whereas the *Ocean* under master Howlett did not appear again in the 'Ship News', in the week ending 14th December the *Equity*, master Jordan, sailed into Blakeney with a cargo of coal from Newcastle and so must have survived the summer gale in the North Sea. It is interesting that there is no mention of the *Henry & Elizabeth*, master Shaul, which also sailed to Kalundborg the same week as the *Equity*. She was not mentioned again in the 'Ship News' for 1833, although since the reports are not continuous this is not proof that she was lost. There were thirteen references to the *Henry & Elizabeth* earlier in the year although some had different masters and it is likely that there were two or possibly three vessels of that name. The *Henry & Elizabeth* under the command of Shaul, had frequently occurred in previous years and so it seems likely that this vessel was another casualty of the storm. This assumption proved to be wrong, because on 15th March the following year the *Henry & Elizabeth* with Shaul in command arrived in Blakeney to discharge a cargo of coal from Newcastle.

Some of the vessels had not foundered, but had been blown ashore. Most of these were expected to be salvaged and got off the beach, even if they would need repairs before sailing again. Several of these vessels were mentioned in the 'Ship News' for 5th October 1833. The following were recorded as having arrived at Blakeney.

Ship details	Master	Location
Norfolk	Bayfield	from off Beeston Beach
Vanilla	Wordel	from off Sheringham beach
Spero	Angus	from off Blakeney sands
Henry & Harriot	Lawson	from off Blakeney sands
Friends	Hills	from off Weybourne beach

The following, presumably had arrived earlier and been repaired as they were registered as sailing from Blakeney, the same week.

Ship details	Master	Location
Advance	?	from off Cromer Beach for Wells
Endeavour	Dobson	from off Sheringham beach for Newcastle
Newcastle	Pennington	from off Sheringham beach for Newcastle

The *Norfolk* was a Blakeney vessel and must have been successfully repaired as it is recorded again, with Bayfield still the master, arriving on 2nd and 16th November with a cargo of coals and oil cakes from Newcastle and again in December. There was no mention of the other Blakeney ship the *Rising Star* which had come ashore at Weybourne. She too, must have been successfully repaired as she is recorded as arriving with coals from Newcastle in December with Kennedy still as her master. The *Vanilla* was a large brig and this time spelt like the essence. The previous month it had been thought that the *Spero* was likely to become a wreck, but had obviously been salvaged. Strangely she does occur again in the 'Ship News', sailing for London on 2nd November with corn, flour and goods. What is even stranger is that her master was not Angus, who was in charge when she came ashore, but Bowles, a name from a family of Blakeney masters. It may have been that the wreck was bought by someone at Blakeney and she was successfully repaired and had become part of the Blakeney fleet. The *Henry and Harriot* was also successfully made seaworthy as the following week she is recorded as sailing from Blakeney with her master, Lawson, for Newcastle in ballast. The *Friends* does not appear again at Blakeney but there is no reason to assume that she did not continue sailing once repairs were carried out.

How severe was this storm, and how common was it? It is not easy to classify the severity of a storm since there are many effects to take into account; the area affected, the number of deaths, the number of wrecks, the storm's duration, the amount of flooding and data

for much of this is not available, or recorded in such a way as to make comparison difficult. Certainly it was not a unique occurrence and severe storms and floods recurred frequently enough for most coastal dwellers to remember them during their lifetime. However, they usually occurred after the Autumnal equinox and usually between the end of October and the beginning of March. Indeed only three years earlier there had been a heavy gale recorded at Blakeney and Cley on 23rd December 1830 where there had been some flooding and the 130 ton *Isis* had become a total wreck on Blakeney Sands and earlier that week a Wells pilot boat had capsized drowning three Wells pilots. However, the Cley correspondent reporting in the *Norfolk Chronicle* for September 4th 1833 described this summer gale as "the most destructive both in loss of life and property along this coast which has occurred within the last 17 years". Also the Holt correspondent added "it is exactly 17 years since this coast has been visited by a storm of such a frightful description viz. in 1816 between 31st August and the 1st September, a remarkable coincidence of dates." Was this summer storm as bad as 1833? The *Norfolk Chronicle* provides the details with which to compare these two storms.

Although there were many wrecks in 1816, the extent of the storm did not seem to be as large as in 1833. A week after the 1816 storm, the Cromer correspondent wrote "the effects of the late tempestuous wind do not appear to have extended beyond the Lincolnshire coast. Further North they had little or nothing of it; and the masters of some colliers, who have since arrived at Wells, wondered what could have induced the crew of the stranded vessels to run them ashore!" However, whereas in 1833 there were fifteen vessels ashore, with two of them complete wrecks, between Stiffkey and Cromer, in 1816 there were eleven ashore, five of which were complete wrecks in an area from Cley to Runton. In 1816 there were no local boats involved. Also in that year, all the crews were saved with only one death, that of Thomas Riches the master of the *Prince of Orange* of Ipswich, who was drowned endeavouring to rescue his twelve year old son. To add to that was "a vessel name unknown, was seen to founder off Sheringham, the crew of which must all have perished." Also at Mundesley the *Ranger* of London from Newcastle with a cargo of coal "was scattered in various pieces along the shore for two or three miles, and I am sorry to say, all hands perished excepting the carpenter" who was washed ashore clinging to some wreckage. A foreign ketch was also seen to go down presumably with the loss of all hands. The *Maria* of Yarmouth went to pieces after being "wrecked on Happisburgh Rock" with the loss of all hands. The impression is given that although there were many vessels ashore in 1816 there seemed less loss of life, and fewer local vessels were involved than in 1833. There were no reports from Wells or Lynn, so a complete comparison is not possible. A week later the report from Lynn mentioned that the sloop *Leeds* from Hull had been successfully re-floated and its master stated that "the sloop *Volunteer*, Hick of Hull, foundered off the coast, and that got stranded on the Lincolnshire coast during the "dreadful gale of the 31st." Fourteen vessels were mentioned with no loss of life and the vessels all showing little damage and they were expected to be got "off the strand" successfully. Only the *Good Hope* of Sunderland was described as a wreck.

So although it is impossible to be definite, the 1833 gale did seem worse, though not by much. In 1833 at Lynn it was reported "nothing near so much damage was sustained by the shipping in the March gale [of 1833], not perhaps by any other on this coast since the new year's gale of 1779." The New Year's gale was on a Friday so that the results were too late to be recorded in the *Norfolk Chronicle* which was published on Saturday 1st 1780. By the time of the next edition, Saturday 8th January, the news was not recent enough to be recorded so this paper cannot be used for a comparison. Fortunately, Raven Hardy copied a lengthy report "From the news" into Mary Hardy's diary. Margaret Bird who edited *The Diary of Mary Hardy*, noted that "the long account is mostly in the hand of Raven, who was awed by the might of the violent storm which had brought in the new year……ranging widely across England and the Irish and French coasts, extends to 3,310 words." There was widespread damage ashore, throughout the country and widespread flooding around the Wash and at Cley "a great many sheep and cattle were drowned, the marshes are all under water, & a deal of other mischief done." There were eight vessels ashore between Sheringham and Cley and another twelve driven ashore at Lynn. Eleven ships riding at anchor near Snettisham before the storm were all missing, their fate unknown. Sixteen ships had been wrecked between Sea Palling and Corton. This did not include Yarmouth which had suffered much flooding and damaged boats washed from their moorings as well as a brig from Wells, sinking with all hands in the Roads. Reports from overseas indicated that the destruction was felt all round the North Sea, so that this really was a storm to be reckoned with.

This type of widespread destruction, particularly for ships under sail, was just accepted, as one of the acts of God that had to be endured in coastal towns from time to time. It is also remarkable the way that the routine of the coastal North Sea vessels so quickly re-asserted itself after events like the disastrous summer storm of 1833. The RNLI was then in its infancy, having been formed in 1824 and MPs were pressing for stronger legislation for the better preparedness of vessels in the coasting trade of the East Coast.

References

The information for this account comes from the accounts in the *Norfolk Chronicle* for 7th September 1833 and the *Norwich Mercury* for 7th September 1833. Other dates consulted for the *Norfolk Chronicle* include: 7/9/1816; 14/6/1816; 12/01/1833; 26/01/1833; 23/02/1833; 13/04/1833; 20/04/1833; 4/05/1833; 18/05/1833; 16/06/1833; 22/06/1833; 6/07/1833; 3/08/1833; 24/08/1833; 14/09/1833; 5/10/1833; 12/10/1833; 2/11/1833; 16/11/1833; 7/12/1833; 12/12/1833; 15/03/1834.

For the New Year's Gale 1779 see M. Bird (ed.), *The Diary of Mary Hardy 1773-1809*, Vol. 1, Public house and waterway (Burnham Press, 2013) pp. 306-12.

The Pier Harbour at Blakeney

Jonathan Hooton

This is a note of contemporary newspaper accounts of a proposal to build a Pier Harbour at Blakeney in 1835, which was never carried out. It first appeared in the BAHS Digital Newsletter *7 (November 2021).*

The following account is taken from the *Norwich Mercury*, published on 21st March 1835 and comes from the paragraph headed BLAKENEY & CLEY March 19th. Unfortunately I have not found out anything else to do with this so I would be delighted if anyone else could supply more information about either the Pier Harbour Project or Lieutenant Howes R. N.

> "On Wednesday se'nnight a meeting of merchants, ship-owners, and others, was held at the Fishmonger's Arms Inn, in this town, when a plan of a Pier Harbour was submitted to their inspection by Lieut. Howes, RN. who in the most satisfactory manner answered any doubts as to the practicability of the measure. A document sanctioning the plan was signed by those present and will be sent to the various merchants and ship owners along the coast for their signature prior to its being transmitted to Lord Calthorpe, by whom an engineer will probably be sent down and if his report be favourable, steps will be taken to procure an Act of Parliament for carrying the object into effect. No place on this coast presents such advantages for a harbour of refuge, there being a greater flow of water here than at any point between Harwich and the Humber, and considering the great loss of life within the last three years, humanity demands such a measure."

The *Norfolk Chronicle* for 14th March had a very similar account, dated Cley 14th March.

> "Yesterday a meeting took pace at the Fishmonger's Arms Inn, in this town, of Merchants, Shipowners, Shipmasters, and others interested in the Port of Blakeney and Cley, when a plan of a Pier Harbour was submitted to their inspection and opinion by Lieut. G. Howes, R. N. Mr J. Temple was called to the chair, who, after stating the object of the meeting, proceeded to show the dangerous state of the present harbour. Lieut. H. at the same time, and in the most satisfactory manner, answering any doubts that existed as to the practicability of his scheme. We believe Lieut. H.'s plan to be quite practical and from the time and trouble he has devoted to the object, and likewise he manner in which the meeting received his report it is likely to be brought to a favourable issue. A document was signed by those present and will be sent for signature to the various merchants, shipowners, & along the coast sanctioning the plan; prior to its remittal to Lord Calthorpe who will no doubt send down an Engineer to make a report, should which (and scarcely a doubt exists) be favourable, immediate steps will be taken to procure an Act of Parliament to carry it into effect. It is almost needless to add, no place on this coast presents such advantages for a harbour of refuge, humanity loudly demands it from the great loss of life during the last three years. There is the greatest flow of water at this coast of any place between the Humber and Harwich."

One assumes that the Pier Harbour would resemble the later plans of the Lynn & Fakenham Railway in 1882 when they wanted to run a line out over the marshes to a new quay on the south side of deeper water of the Pit. Maybe the Pier would have done the same, particularly since emphasis was made of Blakeney being a harbour of refuge and that is the area where ships would have sheltered during a storm. The recent loss of life that was mentioned would have referred to the disastrous effects of the 1833 summer storm (see this journal). It is also interesting to note that the date of 1835 coincides with the production of Palmer's map of the harbour, with depth soundings, that accompanied the 2nd Report of the Tidal Harbour's Commission, although there is no mention of a pier on the map. That report, of course, highlighted the damage that had been done to the Pit by the embanking of the marshes which had been carried out as part of the 1824 Enclosure Act. James Spooner who had been a pilot for 21 years at Blakeney said that in the past "he has known 140 sail take refuge in one tide; they used to lie in the pit afloat, where were then 10 or 11 feet at low water, now there are not more than three or four feet, and two vessels are the greatest number that could now be there." He felt the harbour wanted more backwater to improve it. Richard Mays, another pilot, reported that he had seen as many as 140 vessels anchored in the Pit, taking refuge from a northerly gale. He also added that that was impossible by 1845 because the Pit had narrowed and silted up so much that it would only hold 4 vessels. He concluded that "there is now five hours' flood and six hours' ebb, but the last quarter ebb had no scour in it, as it used to have before the Cley embankment and sluice were put up." (Tidal Harbours Commission Appendix B p. 467, Evidence taken on the 28th Oct., 1845). The lack of scour would certainly have reduced the effectiveness of the Pier Harbour and may have been one of the reasons why they did not proceed. Lord Calthorpe was one of the beneficiaries of the Embankment Act and may have not been as in favour of the scheme as the mariners had hoped. It was also not clear where the finance for such a scheme would have come from. Whatever the reasons, the scheme was not proceeded with. However it would be of immense interest to find out the details of what was actually proposed.

The Brereton dynasty: a family of 19th century engineers and the Blakeney connection

John Wright [1]

Synopsis.
A note on the distinguished Victorian engineer Richard Pearson Brereton (1818-94), assistant to I. K. Brunel, who was born at the Red House, Blakeney, and about two other members of the Brereton dynasty, also engineers and also from Blakeney: Cuthbert Arthur Brereton (1851-1910) and Robert Maitland Brereton (1834-1911).

A few years ago, the Society was asked for information about someone who became Brunel's chief assistant and who took charge after Brunel's death. This associate of Brunel was also the subject of a recent enquiry from the Tamar Bridge Centre, an organization looking for information about the construction of the Royal Albert Bridge over the River Tamar which separates Plymouth in Devon from Saltash in Cornwall.

This 'someone' came from a family with property in a number of Norfolk villages and who produced no fewer than three prominent civil engineers. Readers who are familiar with Blakeney church will know of the brass plaque on the south wall of the nave. That and a ledger slab in the churchyard both carry the name of **Robert Pearson Brereton**. He was born in Blakeney on 4th April 1818 and was baptised there the following day. His parents were Robert John Brereton and Sarah whose maiden name was Sarah Pearson Walton. It was common in the Brereton family, as in many others, for a mother's surname to be used later as a forename.

As a merchant living in the Red House, Robert John Brereton was an influential resident of Blakeney. Randle Brereton, a corn merchant who lived in the Merchant House off Blakeney High St, was one of his cousins. When the Blakeney Harbour Company was formed in 1817, two of the five directors were Robert John Brereton and his father, also Robert John.

The young Robert Pearson Brereton (RPB) was taken on to Brunel's staff in 1836 as one of seven engineers supervising the building of the Great Western Railway. Once that was completed he transferred to other railways that Brunel was building, including the Cheltenham and Great Western Union Railway. Later he was sent to Italy to resolve problems with the Turin to Genoa railway. While still in his twenties he became Brunel's chief assistant and remained so until Brunel's death in September 1859.

One of Brunel's long-running projects was the construction of the Royal Albert Bridge over the Tamar to carry the Cornwall railway (Fig. 3). The bridge was a massive structure for its day, over 160 years ago. A line of seven Blakeney churches, towers and all, could just about fit under its two spans. In 1854 RPB was sent to assist the resident engineer on what was a difficult project, and he subsequently supervised the raising of

Figs 1 and 2. The Brereton plot in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Blakeney and R. P. Brereton's ledger slab.

the first span some 100 ft to the top of the piers. It required five naval vessels and 500 men - no wonder some 20,000 people turned out to watch!

When Brunel's poor health prevented him from working on the bridge, RPB took over the project and completed it in May 1859. Thereafter he took over Brunel's work as chief engineer for many railway companies, designing new works and alterations. He ran his business from Brunel's old office in London, with Brunel's widow, Mary, living in the rooms above.

In 2006 seven stamps were issued to mark the bicentenary of Brunel's birth. The Royal Albert Bridge was chosen for the 1st class stamp and other images included the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Great Eastern paddle steamer. Impressive company, indeed, but deserved. More recently, a Channel 5 TV programme featured the restored 'Statesman' train running on the Devon-Cornwall line. The attractive scenery was to be expected but the Bridge was the most striking feature

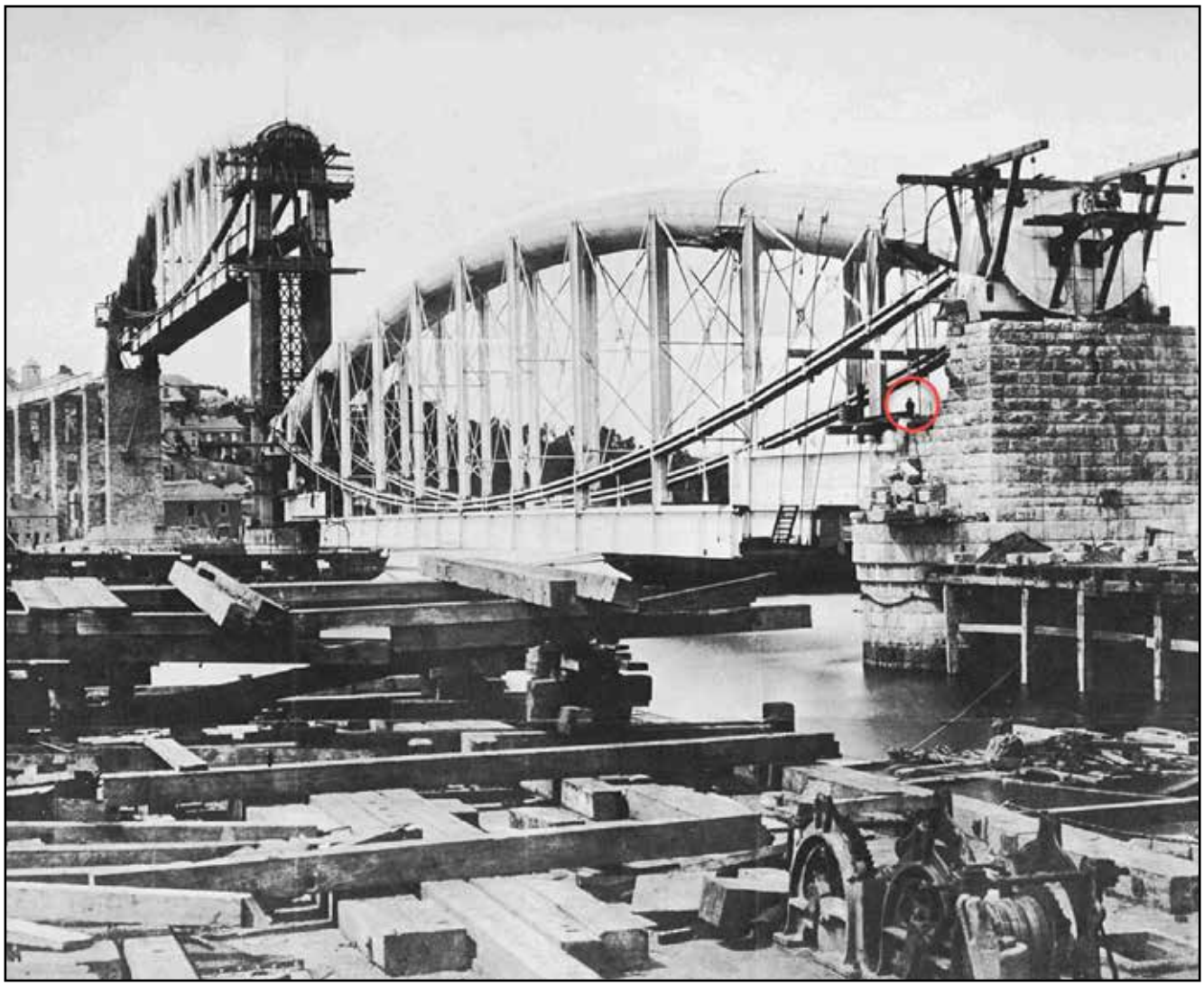


Fig. 3. The Royal Albert bridge over the river Tamar under construction. The scale is indicated by the person ringed in red.

on the line itself and must have made quite an impression on viewers unfamiliar with it.

Brunel described RPB as 'a peculiarly energetic persevering young man' and another tribute read 'always ready, always able, always full of energy'. He lost an eye in an explosion while working on the Great Western Railway and a portrait of him with Brunel in a mural in the SS Great Britain shows RPB wearing a black eyepatch (Fig. 4).

At the time of the 1861 census, he was living in Marylebone with his wife, his sister and one of her sons. In 1842 RPB had married Anna Margaretta Brereton, his second cousin; they had no children. His sister Elizabeth Ann had married Anna's brother, John Brereton.

John and Elizabeth's children included John Lloyd Brereton, who, at the time of the 1851 census, was in Blakeney with his grandparents Robert and Sarah. Another son, **Cuthbert Arthur Brereton**, had the good fortune, when he was ten years old, to be living with his Uncle Robert Pearson Brereton. Cuthbert was also to become a prominent civil engineer. He had been born in Brinton Hall, his father John being a brewer and seed merchant. Cuthbert was educated at Clifton College and placed as a pupil with RPB. In 1872 he was appointed engineer to the Llynvi and Ogmore Railways and the Porthcawl Docks; later he worked at Waterford in Ireland, and on other projects including the Inner Circle Railway. For some time, he was in partnership with Sir John Wolfe Barry, working on the construction of docks at Barry, Middlesbrough and the new bridge at Kew, as well as on many other projects. Just before his death he had been elected Vice President of the Institute of Civil Engineering.

The family tree (Fig. 5) has been taken from the extensive Brereton pedigree set out in Norfolk Genealogy (Vol. 6) and tallies with the 1851 census records for Blakeney. The tree is highly condensed to show just the relationship between the three engineers and those members of the family associated with Blakeney (outlined in red). The principal residence of this section of the Brereton clan was Brinton Hall, which had been rebuilt by them in 1822 and remained in the family, passed down to eldest sons, until it was sold by Cuthbert's son. The families at Brinton are outlined in green. Some references to the early members of the family can be found in Mary Hardy's diary, ably presented by Margaret Bird[2]. Mary Hardy's spelling was usually 'Breerton' following the local pronunciation. John Brereton, uncle of the first John shown on the tree, was the initial maltster, brewer and miller at Letheringsett, the business subsequently acquired by William Hardy.

The last member of the Brereton family to be mentioned here is **Robert Maitland Brereton** (1834-1911). He had a more illustrious career than either RPB or

Fig. 4. Richard Pearson Brereton with Brunel, from a mural in the SS Great Britain.

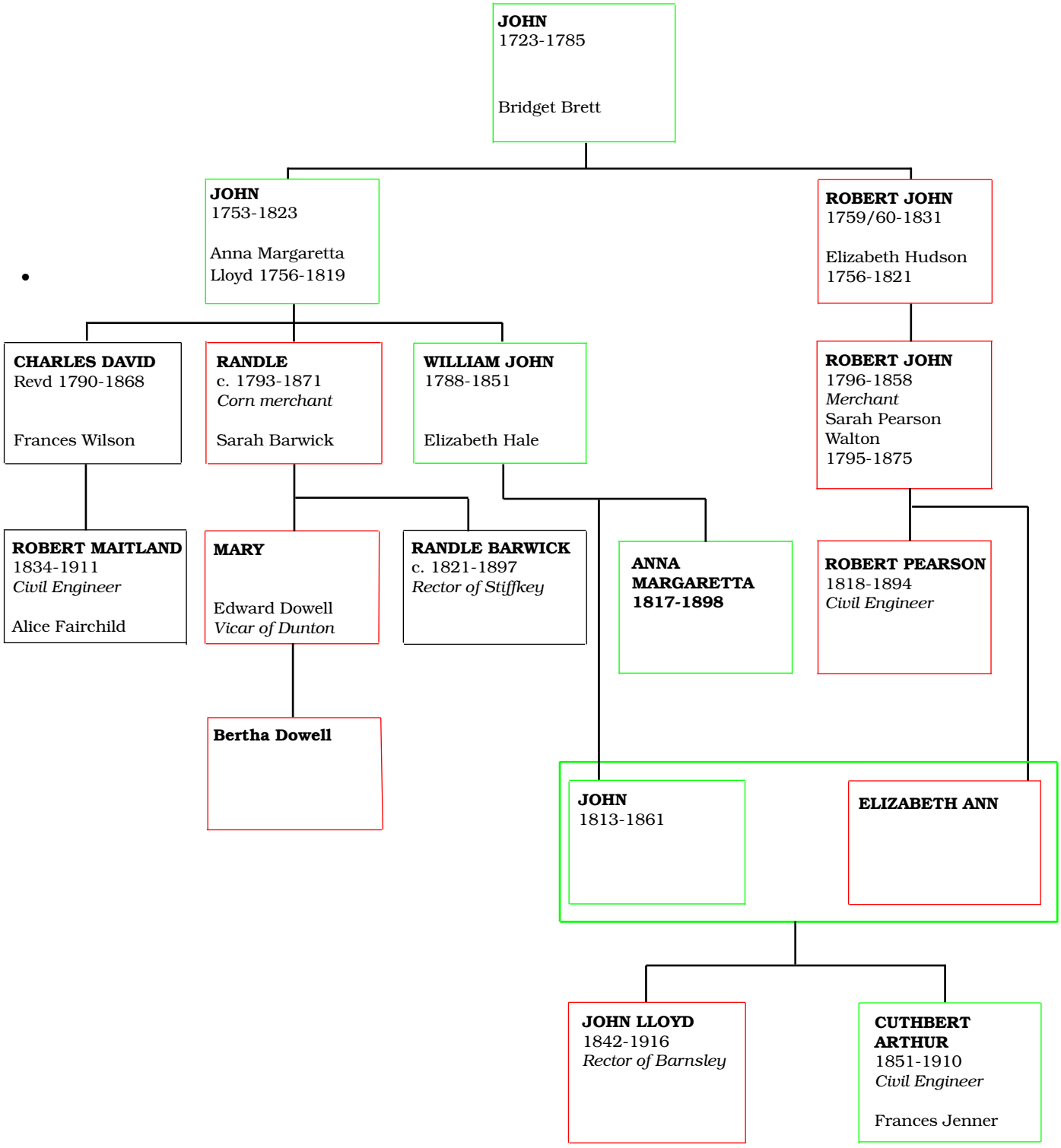
Cuthbert, and this short note cannot do justice to it. Born in Little Massingham, where his father was Rector, he was nephew to Randle Brereton, corn merchant in Blakeney, and cousin to Randle, Rector of Stiffkey. After studying at King's College, London, he joined Brunel's team and also worked on the Tamar bridge. In 1857 he went to India, started work on the Bombay to Calcutta railway, and eventually became chief engineer for the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, completing the connection across the sub-continent in 1870 – ahead of schedule. He was then called to work in California on various irrigation schemes and other projects. He returned to Norfolk for a while, as County Surveyor of roads and bridges, then went back to work in the USA and died in Oregon in 1911.

Robert Pearson Brereton died in Paddington and his body was brought back to Blakeney for burial in September 1894. His ledger slab, close by the chancel, also commemorates Anna Margaretta his wife (1817-1898). It is one of three for the family which cover a vault in which five other family members lie. They include RPB's father Robert and his mother Sarah, who died in 1875 aged 80. His grandfather Robert (1759/60 -1831) also lies there. The full text on the two earlier stones, on one of which heraldic arms are incised, is included in Walton Dew's list of the monumental inscriptions of Holt Hundred.

Robert Pearson Brereton probably spent little time in Blakeney during his working life but, in view of his family's close association with this village, it is no surprise that he chose to come back to the place of his birth.

1 This article is a combination of two articles in the Society's *Digital Newsletters* 3 & 4, with thanks to Diana Cooke for editing them for publication.

2 Margaret Bird, *The Diary of Mary Hardy*, 1773-1809, 4 vols., Burnham Press, 2013; and *Mary Hardy and her World*, 4 vols, Burnham Press, 2020.



Notes

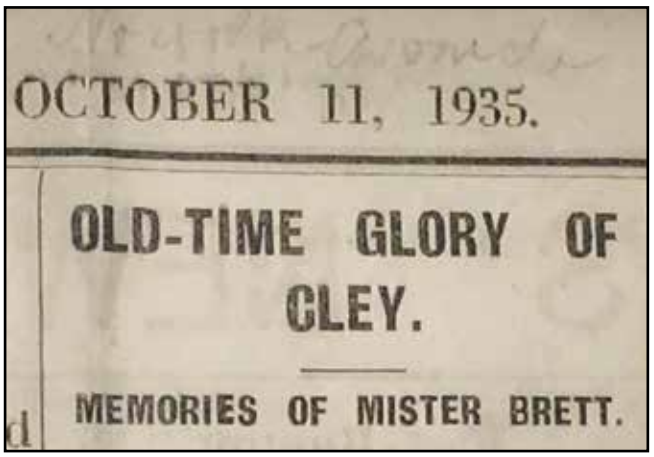
- The surname Brereton should follow every name shown in capitals.
- The tree is complicated by the need to show that siblings John and Anna Margaretta married their second cousins Elizabeth and Robert Pearson Brereton.
- Green boxes denote ownership of Brinton Hall.
- Red boxes show who lived in Blakeney or were there at the 1851 census.

Fig. 5. Simplified version of the Brereton family tree (after Norfolk Genealogy 6)

Two men united through heroism: Howard Brett, Cley Rocket Company and Commissioned Boatman William Hibbert, H.M.Coast Guard

Richard Jefferson

Howard Brett (1850-1941)
His parents William and Maria were both Cley people, whose first three children were baptised in St Margaret's Church, but the family then moved to Letheringsett where William worked as a carpenter and wheelwright. Six more children were born, all baptised in Letheringsett Church. Howard Edwin was number six out of the nine, baptised on 14th April 1850. He started work on a farm at the age of five, when "I could hardly carry the pails". At the age of 84 Howard Brett was interviewed for a fascinating article that appeared in the *Norfolk Chronicle* on 11th October 1935 (Fig. 1).


OCTOBER 11, 1935.

OLD-TIME GLORY OF CLEY.

MEMORIES OF MISTER BRETT.

Fig. 1. Howard Brett's memories in the* Norfolk Chroncle *11th October 1935.

He had the awful experience of being frozen at the age of eight. He was keeping sheep in bitterly cold weather, colder than we are accustomed to now, and only remembers falling into a dirt-heap. Farm workers found him and carried him to his home unconscious, and a doctor stayed with him all day before he sufficiently recovered from his terrifying experiences.

The family moved back to Cley when Howard was ten years old and he lived the rest of his extraordinarily long life in the village. It is not surprising that he followed his father and became a carpenter, and a ships' carpenter, most likely being apprenticed to him. In his early years at Cley, Mr Brett heard a lot about the smuggling that was carried on, but he came in contact with the smugglers very little. "There was always someone to guard the place where they stored the stuff," he said, "and they looked out that you didn't see too much". He remembers seeing a quantity of cases in a pit hole on Cley allotments once, and when the next morning he and some of the other boys went to pry into the matter they found the cases gone and strange marks through the snow. The horses' hooves had been bound over with sacks by the cautious smugglers!

Early in 1871 Brett married Ellen Proudfoot, a Cley girl, in St Margaret's Church and later that year a son, Howard William John, the first of ten children, was born. By 1876 he had three children and that year the Angerona, a 40 ton 'billy boy', was the second last sea going ship to make its way up to the quay at Cley to discharge its coal. The last was a Norwegian vessel which grounded half way up the channel and remained there some days until the tides were higher. The *Angerona* is portrayed in the epic photograph (Fig. 2), and Brett is among those present, so too his older brother William Benjamin Brett.

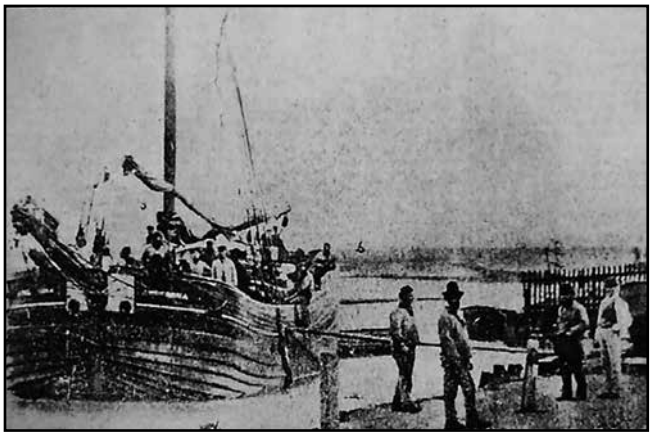


***Fig. 2. The* Angerona.**

Before this time bigger vessels had anchored in the Pit, with their coal being transferred into lighters and poled up to Cley. To the beginning of the 20th century this trade continued using the lighters, but from the mid-1880s when the railway came to Holt, the end was in sight. Brett has left us a wonderful description of this back breaking work. Mr Brett has helped to push lighters to the Pit laden with 45 tons of corn which had to be substituted for 45 tons of coal and brought back to Cley. Four men manned these lighters, which were pushed along with long poles. It took about 14 hours to get to Blakeney Pit and back again to Cley and shift 90 tons of corn and coal. Mr Brett is rather proud of this feat.

As a young man Brett joined the Cley Rocket Company. Henry Trengrouse (1772-1854) had been the inventor of the 'Rocket' life-saving apparatus, the rock-

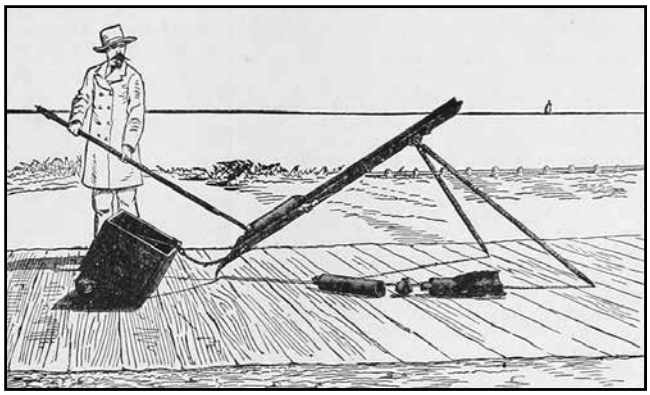


Fig. 3. Henry Trengrouse demonstrating his rocket apparatus.

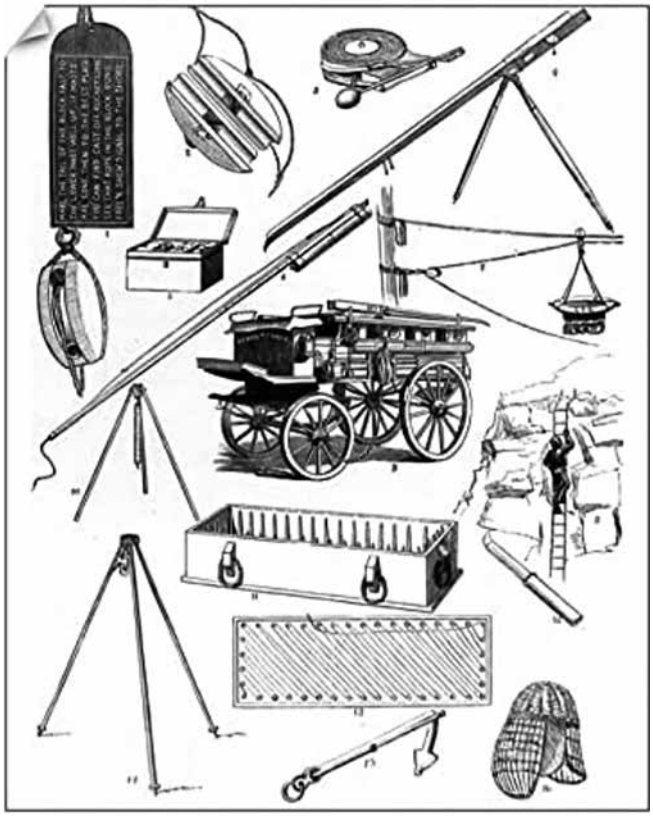


Fig. 4. The rocket apparatus.

et and line (Fig. 3). This was used when vessels went aground close to the shore in atrocious weather. Next to the lifeboat, it became the most important means of saving lives from shipwrecks and thousands of lives were saved in this way. Rocket House in Cley High Street was the headquarters, while the equipment (Fig. 4) was housed in a building across the road.

Brett was 30 years old in November 1880 when the joint act of heroism took place.

William Hibbert (1838-1888)

It is entirely through the local medal collector purchasing Hibbert's medals at auction, and then using a researcher to produce printed copies of original documents, mainly from the National Archives, that his life story can be told in considerable detail.

Hibbert was born in May 1838 at Clerkenwell, Middlesex. In the 1851 Census his father's occupation is listed as 'Silver Smith', so a family of some standing. The lure of the sea saw the nineteen year old Hibbert sign on in the Royal Navy on 29th September 1857. He was assigned to HMS *Ganges*, an 84-gun second-rate ship of the line, launched in 1821 (Fig. 5), as an Ordinary Seaman. He joined just before HMS *Ganges* sailed to be flagship of the Pacific Station, based in Valparaiso, Chile. On 1st August 1860 Hibbert signed on for ten more years in the Royal Navy. The 1861 Census on 7th April found HMS *Ganges*, and its ship's crew listed, at Latitude 34 50N and Longitude 35 47W in the North Atlantic, returning home, to be decommissioned and converted into a training ship.

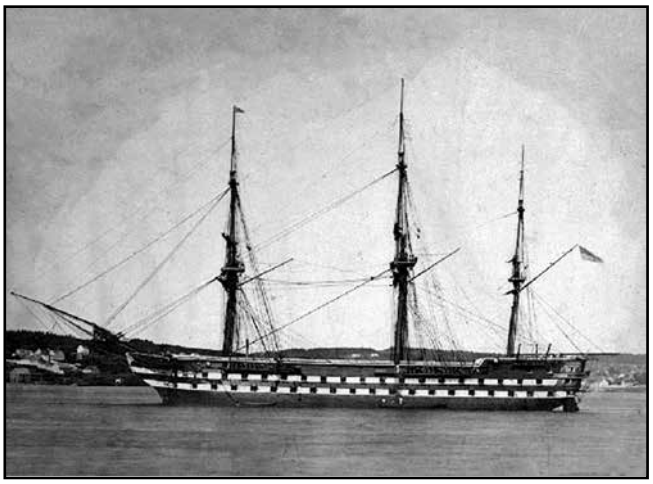


***Fig. 5. HMS* Ganges.**

Fig. 6. HMS* Warrior, *now in Portsmouth Harbour.

On return Hibbert joined HMS *Warrior*, a 40-gun steam-powered armoured frigate, now a museum ship in Portsmouth Harbour (Fig. 6), and served on her for two and a half years. Built for the Royal Navy in 1859-61 she was the first armour-plated, iron-hulled warship.

On 20th November 1868, after serving on several more warships, Hibbert transferred to the Coast Guard Service, borne on the roll of HMS *Dauntless*. He was still in the Royal Navy, and although he never went to sea again, he was always assigned to a ship. So Boatman William Hibbert found himself based at Brancaster Staithe in Norfolk. On 1st August 1870 he signed on in the Royal Navy for another ten years, and then in 1874 he was promoted to Commissioned Boatman, the following year moving to Coastguard, Wells-next-the-Sea.

A bit of a mystery now follows. In 1875 a son, William Thomas, was born, baptised privately on 20th October.

On 6th February 1876 in Wells Church the marriage took place between William Hibbert Coastguardsman, aged 36, a widower, and Susannah Musset, a spinster of Wells, aged 24. Can one presume that Hibbert's first wife died in childbirth?

In 1878 Hibbert moved to Coastguard, Weybourne and then to Cley. And so to the early morning of 19th November 1880 and the moment of joint heroism.

Before coming to the rescue itself, a few words of explanation: the Board of Trade owned the rocket apparatus which was held at Coastguard Stations. Users could claim expenses from the Board. The rocket apparatus was used to fire a line to a ship in distress close in shore. The line was then used to haul over hawsers and block, to be affixed to the mast. Once fixed, a breeches buoy could be used, hauled on a continuous whip line to take off passengers and crew one by one. Coastguards trained the volunteers in the use of the rocket apparatus. With news of a vessel in distress, a signal would be fired to notify and summon the team to assist. Horses would be fetched to pull the equipment to the scene of distress.

After the rescue, all those who had assisted were given a medallion, which could be redeemed for cash or kept. As late as 1895 the Cley Rocket Company had twenty-five registered volunteers. After the rescue, all those who has assisted were given a medallion, which could be redeemed for cash or kept.

The *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette,* 27th November 1880

> "A most distressing shipwreck occurred at Cley-next-the-Sea on Friday morning last, in which six out of the seven of the crew of the St Joseph, from Dunkirk, lost their lives. The mate was saved by a line attached to a chair which was cast ashore and then seized by willing hands on the beach.; the other end of the line being round the man's waist he was pulled through the surf and saved. Another line was thrown on board and two men attached themselves to it, but it broke and they were lost. Three others were either washed or jumped overboard; although two rocket lines, with praiseworthy precision, were thrown directly over their heads, they seemed to be either paralysed with fear or ignorant of their use. A poor lad, now the sole occupant of the ill-fated ship, was gallantly rescued by one of the life-saving brigade. This brave fellow, named Howard Brett, at the risk of his own life (aided by Coast Guard Hibbard (sic) and the rest of the brigade, who held the life-line attached to him) scaled the vessel's side by means of the main sheet hanging over her quarter, got on board, and, in danger of being washed overboard, got to the poor boy, now half dead with cold and fright, and rescued him from a watery grave, but only, alas! to die some minutes after from cold and exposure. Had the rocket cart and life-saving apparatus been able to get to the wreck fifteen minutes sooner, and the poor Frenchmen could have been persuaded to stick to their ship until trustworthy ropes had been thrown on board, the whole might have been, by God's providence, saved. A good road to the beach, and a shelter shed on wheels, furnished with a stove, blankets and creature comforts, are indeed badly wanted here."

Below is the Royal Humane Society report from the meeting when both Howard Brett and William Hibbert were awarded R.H.S. bronze medals for their rescue.

> R.H.S. Case no. 21,156: 'At 8.15 a.m. on 19 November 1880 the Brigantine St Joseph, of Dunkirk, was driven on shore at Salthouse Beach, near Weybourne, Norfolk, in a strong gale. Five of the crew were drowned. William Hibbert, Commissioned Boatman, H.M. Coast Guard, with a line around his body, rushed into the sea and, at great risk of being killed by the broken wreckage, threw a line to one of the surviving crew, who was, however much too exhausted to use it. Mr Howard Brett, with the same risk, got on board the brig and, together with Hibbert, they succeeded in getting the man ashore. He was, however, in an exhausted state, and expired soon after his rescue.'

It will be noted in the press report that Hibbert only played a minor role in the rescue. The R.H.S. Committee report must be the true account because Hibbert would not have been awarded his medal unless he had shown great courage. It looks as though the local volunteers were trying to take all the glory. This is supported by the 1935 article, below, when there is no mention of Hibbert. (And Brett's medal was given to him by the French Government the *Norfolk Chronicle* goes on to report).

> "Mr Brett belonged to the Cley Rocket Company for over 30 years, and has a medal for 25 years' service. But more than that, he treasures the bronze medal given him by the French Government for rescuing a lad of 19 from the St Joseph Dunkerque (of Dunkirk) which was wrecked off Cley in the morning of November 19th 1880."

Fig. 7. Mr and Mrs Brett in later life.

"Mr Brett remembers the circumstances vividly. It was a bitterly cold morning when the two-masted schooner came ashore, and the marshes were frozen and covered with snow. The ship was laden with gasometers and lamp-posts and had a crew of five. The men of the Cley Rocket Company set to work, but the crew of the French vessel did not understand the working of the breeches buoy. Three were drowned and two taken off, but one alone survived. Brett's brave rescue work is best described in his own words:-"There was a French boy on the deck and I could hear him crying for help. I couldn't stand it. I went out to him, and the water froze like a knife and froze over me. I got onto the ship by climbing up a rope, and put the poor boy in the breeches buoy and they pulled him ashore." It appears that the lad was taken to the King's Head (in Cley, now The Harnser) in a frozen condition, and he died. The four Frenchmen lie in Cley churchyard".

No descendants of the Brett family know of the whereabouts of Howard Brett's Royal Humane Society medal. The best that can be offered is a photograph of him and his wife, in later life (Fig. 7).

Fig. 8. (Left) Hibbert's Royal Humane Society medal.
Fig. 9. (Right) Hibbert's Royal Navy Long Service and Good Conduct medal.

Figs. 10 and 11. Board of Trade Rocket Apparatus 'Proof of Service at a Wreck' medallion.

The medal collector has Hibbert's Royal Humane Society bronze medal (Fig. 8) and his Royal Navy Long Service and Good Conduct medal (Fig. 9). Also there is his bronze Board of Trade Rocket Apparatus 'Proof of Service at a Wreck' Medallion: obverse (Fig. 10) and reverse (Fig. 11).

William Hibbert

The responsibilities of the Victorian coastguard were considerable as has been shown. The *Norwich Mercury* for 12th February 1881 in a report before the local magistrates W. H. Cozens-Hardy, E. B. Sparkes and John Rogers at the Holt Petty Sessions has Hibbert appearing for the prosecution:

James Grimes of Cley-next-the Sea, labourer, was charged by James Randall, master of the vessel *Alert*, with stealing a clock. Complainant said on January 6th, the ship went ashore at Cley, and became a total wreck. He went to the beach next morning, and found he had lost several things from the ship, and among them the clock. William Hibbert, commission boatman, of the Cley Volunteer Life Saving Apparatus Company, said, as was his duty, he went on the beach to protect the wreck.

The outcome of the case saw Grimes fined 10s, and costs of £1. 0s. 3d.

The 1881 Census has Hibbert (aged 41) resident at the Coastguard Station, Hillside (Hill Top), Cley, with his wife Susannah (30) and three small children: William J (6), Robert (3) born in Wells, and Blanche Edith (1) (baptised in Cley Church on 25th April 1880). In April 1882 he was promoted to Chief Boatman. Another daughter, Grace Violet, was also baptised in Cley Church on 18th May 1882.

It cannot have been long after this that Hibbert was posted to Whitstable in Kent. (In the 1891 Census Susannah, a widow, was back in Wells with her family, with a youngest son Ernest C (7), baptised in Whitstable Church, so born no later than 1884).

On 20th May 1887 Hibbert was paid off from the Royal Navy, and recorded as a 'shore pensioner' with the rank of Able Seaman. On 17th February 1888 he was down as 'Pensioner Able Seaman' on HMS Pembroke, a shore establishment. On 15th June 1888 he died, at 8.15am. The cause of death was given as 'retention of urine' (being unable to pee). An agonising condition and an agonising death. Poor man. He was 49 years old.

Howard Brett

The joint morning of heroism was near the end of Hibbert's life, the *Norfolk Chronicle* reports, whereas Brett lived for another sixty years. Twelve children Mr Brett had to bring up (modern family research has the number at ten!), and this necessitated his "drawing the shore" at night (fishing) to earn a few extra shillings. His boat *Chance* had been his sole companion for many a long night. Often Mr Brett would snatch about two hours' sleep and then hurry off to his carpenter's shop for his day's work.....The best stroke of fishing business Mr Brett ever did took place at Cromer. He and a mate caught some salmon, which they took to Cromer in their boat. A gentleman hailed them and offered them 1s. 6d a pound for their catch. Mr Brett and his mate, who had almost given up hope of selling the fish, gladly accepted and left Cromer with a sum of £10. 6s. 0d!"

Most likely Brett was involved with poling the lighters up to the quay at Cley until the end of the shipping trade by the turn of the century, but his main employment had been, and would remain, his carpentry. In *White's Norfolk* 1883, in the Cley section, he is listed as a carpenter and wheelwright. 'He was also an undertaker ... and made many coffins for about 10/- (50p). But even

***Fig 12. The fishing smack* LN164.**

Fig. 13. The* Gypsy Lass *houseboat.

at that price many people were so poor they could barely afford to pay' (Freda Starr, *Cley Village Memories*, 1989).

In about 1908 he had a commission to convert the fishing smack *LN164* (Fig. 12) into the houseboat *Gipsy Lass* (Fig. 13) (BAHS *Digital Newsletter* 5, May 2021). Is Brett's assistant working with him on the *Gipsy Lass* his son Ernest, who was also a carpenter (Fig. 14)?

There is a splendid photograph of Brett mending his fishing nets (Fig. 15) The location? Bernard Bishop, a great grandson of Brett, has stated that it is Howe's Yard, - Rattle Alley Highway - one of Cley's 'red light' districts, frequented by visiting sailors in earlier times.

Ellen, Brett's wife, died in 1923 aged 73 and was buried in Cley churchyard. By the time of his own death Brett had seen one son and five daughters-in-law buried there as well. His funeral took place on 4th June 1941 in St Margaret's Church and he too was laid to rest in the churchyard.

***Fig. 14. Brett and assistant working on the* Gypsy Lass.**

Fig. 15. Brett mending fishing nets.

The 1935 *Norfolk Chronicle* article has given us a wonderful insight into the life of a remarkable man. In mature life Howard Brett saw the advent of the motor car and the aeroplane. He lived through the madness of the 1914-1918 War when so many sons of the parish were killed. His funeral service in Cley Church in June 1941 was at about the lowest point of the Allies' fortunes in the 1939-1945 War: the Battle of Crete and the evacuation from the island had just been completed; the siege of Tobruk in North Africa was in its second month.

BOOM!

Eric Hotblack

The author describes a piece of sandstone found while field-walking at Field Dalling. This may have been deposited by a drilling rig carrying out a seismic survey in the 1960s searching for oil and natural gas, later found in the North Sea.

Project

The writer is carrying out an intensive field walking project in the Parish of Field Dalling, and to date 38.26 ha (94.5 acres) have been walked in 25m squares in a block of adjacent fields spanning the valley floor (fig, 1)

Site

When the Chapel Meadow (HER no 4988) was ploughed up for re-seeding, permission was gained to field walk this meadow which is adjacent to arable fields already walked. It provided a very rare opportunity to find what use man has made of this area between arable fields (fig 1). To the north is the road to Binham and adjacent to it within the meadow is a small stream flowing west to join the River Stiffkey.

Very few finds were made either of prehistoric worked flints or of pottery. While the conditions in January and February 2006 were not ideal, as good as on arable fields, it does indicate that this grassland has not been used as intensively as the adjacent arable land, though one significant find, a plough pebble has already been published in the *Glaven Historian* 17.

Find

In square D1 by the south boundary adjacent to the arable field a piece of sandstone was found. The late Professor Peter Robins of Norfolk Museum Service described it as "segment of cylinder, split longitudinally? Core from diamond drilling? Or natural". There then followed a period of trying to think how the core from a diamond drill could have been present in this location.

Survey

It was eventually recalled that in the 1960s a seismic survey was carried out about 4 miles inland from the North Norfolk coast, crossing Field Dalling. Oil and natural gas had been discovered off the Norfolk coast, and it was wondered if the same deposits existed under land which would be easier to access than offshore. The survey was carried out by drilling holes for explosives to be detonated underground, and the resulting shock waves being detected by geophones. The results indicating the rock strata beneath.

The drilling was done by drilling rigs fitted on Fordson Power Major tractors for access to difficult areas and by rigs fitted to 4 x 4 ex Army trucks. This equipment was for use in many places around the world so may have been fitted with diamond drills which would leave a cylindrical core if fortuitously hitting a piece of sandstone. At the time it was thought that the results showed that there was very unlikely to be any fossil fuels accessible on land, but there have been later explorative wells drilled in Norfolk, the nearest one being in Saxthorpe in October 1970 which was found to be dry, and as a consequence was plugged and abandoned.

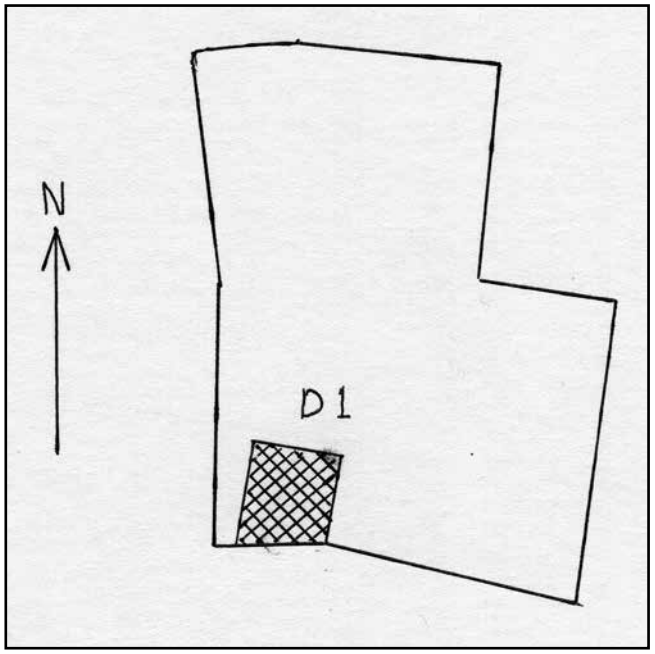


Fig. 1. The area field-walked.

Oil and natural gas were found further up the North Sea, consequently the business migrated further up the coast, Great Yarmouth losing its importance and Aberdeen becoming more important. So the fossil fuel boom fizzled out in Norfolk, but now we are in a renewables boom with offshore wind farms off the Norfolk coast.

Conclusion

If we could find the actual route of the seismic survey across Field Dalling we would make it more likely to be a piece of sandstone from this survey, but it could still be natural as Professor Peter Robins commented.

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- The late Mr John Holden.
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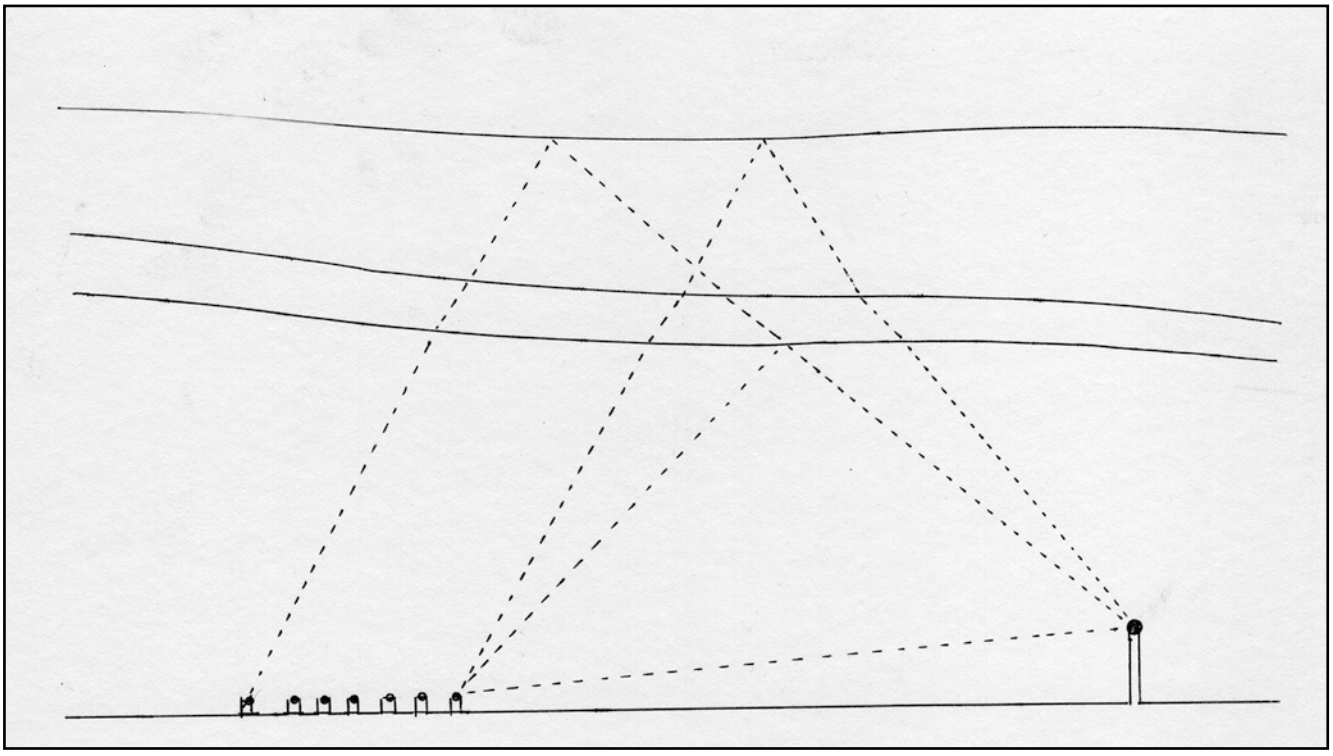

Fig. 2. The method used for the seismic survey

Contributors

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