



Blakeney Area Historical Society Electronic Newsletter

October 2025

“Studying the History of Blakeney Haven and its Hinterland”



The derelict Blakeney Windmill in the 1930s. The mill, built in 1769 and part of the Friary Farm estate, is now minus sails, Grade II listed, and in the safe hands of the National Trust. Photo from a half-plate glass negative in the Hamond Family Archive.

The BAHS are on **Facebook** tiny.cc/yfo3001
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and Instagram [historybahs](https://www.instagram.com/historybahs) or visit our website at
www.bahs.uk



BAHS Events:

BAHS lecture Programme

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

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

The full programme will be published on the website www.bahs.uk with a monthly preview in this Newsletter.

October Lecture

Tuesday 28th October 2025

at 7:30 pm at Cley Village Hall

Introduction to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Nik Chapman

The general public in Britain struggled to comprehend the nature and scale of death during the Great War. Even the authorities were not prepared for the practicalities of dealing with the dead: there was no formal process of ordering or recording burials, resulting in many isolated graves and small makeshift cemeteries with temporary markers. Furthermore, at the outset of the war no official organisation oversaw burials or the search for missing men and women. This talk is an introduction to the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917 and the key characters involved. It will make the argument that this was a revolutionary approach to commemoration. It was not without considerable controversy. It will also point to the significant logistical, technical, financial and social challenges that it faced. It will also include some stories of the Fallen to remind us all that each headstone and each name on a memorial had a story to tell and deserves to be remembered for who they were. The presentation will conclude with its work today in maintaining and preserving our historic estate around the World.

Nik Chapman enlisted into the Army as an Infantry soldier from School and spent 36 years in uniform. He served around the world including a three year period in the Far East in Hong Kong where he met and married his wonderful wife Caroline. His military career took him to all but one continent. He deployed on operations into conflict zones throughout his service and was appointed CBE in 2013 for service in Afghanistan.

He left the Army in late 2013 to join Babcock International Group and in 2016 was appointed Managing Director of Holdfast Training Services which provides training and training services to the Royal Engineers. In 2021 he was appointed Chief Executive of the Charles Burrell Community Centre in Thetford.

Nik has served the in the Public, Private and Third Sectors which has given him an excellent education. He has a wide range of interests and is currently a speaker and tour guide with Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Coming Later...

Tuesday 25th November 2025
at 2:30pm at Cley Village Hall

German Prisoners of War in Norfolk: A forgotten history from the Great War

Brendon Chester Cadwell



In the early years of the Great War German combatant prisoners of war were held in large internment camps run by the Army. However, none of these were in Norfolk because of the fear of invasion or large-scale raids along the East Anglian coast. By the end of 1916 the threat of invasion had receded, but there was grave concern instead around food security. As the German U-boat campaign continued to menace the Transatlantic trade routes and labour was drained from agriculture and sent to the Front the fear was that food shortages would do what the German army had failed to do on the battlefield.

Clearing the river

As a response, it was decided to draft in labour using German POWs and from 1917 Agricultural Working Camps were set up throughout Norfolk (as elsewhere) to help boost food production. This talk explores how these camps were setup and organised, what work the prisoners who volunteered undertook, and how they were received by the civilian population.

Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell is a landscape historian specialising in the historical development of rural settlement, particularly those associated with coastal wetlands. He has published on settlement in the Eastern High Weald, an area that includes the Rother Upper Levels and has researched the development of High Weald wood pastures in the context of early settlement. His PhD thesis (University of East Anglia 2010) was on 'A Sense of Place in Rural Settlement'.

Brendan also has a background in medieval theology and church history and has undertaken post-graduate research at Birmingham University in ecclesiology. He is currently researching the impact of developments in ecclesiology on medieval church design and is in the process of compiling a compendium of angel roofs in Somerset.

In 2019 he edited and co-authored a book on the Carmelite Friary at Burnham Norton, Norfolk. The existence of a Great War German prisoners of war camp on the friary site at Burnham has inspired the writing of a forthcoming book on such camps in Norfolk with Pat Kadwell.

Tuesday 27th January 2026
at 2:30pm at Cley Village Hall

In January two members share the stage and give a short talk. We have lined up:

Caroline Holland whose talk is: Did the Hotblacks get too big for their boots?

We are awaiting confirmation of the second speaker.

Tuesday 24th February 2026
at 2:30pm at Cley Village Hall

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

Alison Dow

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

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

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

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



Tuesday 31st March 2026

at 7:30pm at Cley Village Hall

George Skipper in Cromer

Paul Dickson

The talk celebrates George Skipper's architectural legacy in Cromer. He worked on projects there from the late 1880s through to the 1930s. Skipper designed seven hotels, notably the Hotel de Paris and the Cliftonville and Sandcliff on Runton Road.

He was also architect for a range of residential properties on Bernard Road and Vicarage Road, along with Cromer's first Town Hall and Kingston House, comprising striking residential and business premises



September Lecture follow-up

Dr Ian Hinton's talk on Pilgrim Hostels in Walsingham raised so many interesting questions – not least “what were the sanitary arrangements for all those people crammed into their dormitories?” – for which no answers were forthcoming.

Anyone interested in following up the human aspects of this subject may be interested in the talk to be given by Andy Bull at Binham Memorial Hall on the 21 November. Early booking via the Wells Maltings is advised.

There is also a book available from Andy Bull tiny.cc/x4at001. And of course, don't forget your Chaucer!



November 21st Binham Memorial Hall

We are pleased to introduce our autumn speaker

ANDY BULL

whose talk, "Discovering Norfolk's Pilgrim Routes", is a must for walkers and lovers of the area's past.

In the late middle ages, pilgrims criss-crossed the county, some using entry points like Cley, Wells and Hunstanton, treading their way to Binham, Walsingham and beyond. Andy's talk is based on his new book, *Norfolk's Pilgrim Routes: A history of paths, places and people* which will be available, signed, on the night - perfect timing for Christmas.

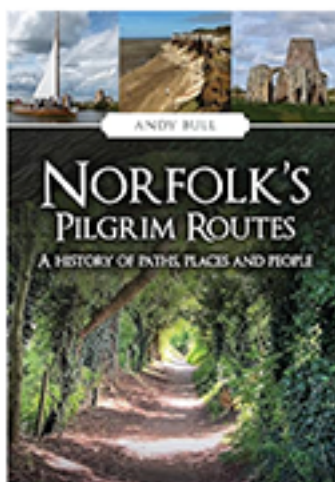
Tickets £10, including a glass of wine/soft drink will be available from Wells Maltings

(wellsmaltings.org.uk/ 01328710885)

Members can buy theirs from October 3rd.

Tickets go on sale to the general public on October 24th.

Limited seating. Booking essential.



[Read sample](#)

Follow the author



Andy Bull

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Norfolk's Pilgrim Routes: A History of Paths, Places and People

Paperback – 15 Aug. 2025

by [Andy Bull](#) (Author)

[See all formats and editions](#)

In the late Middle Ages, Walsingham in Norfolk was the most important pilgrim destination in England. Pilgrims travelled here to the shrine to the Virgin Mary from all over the British Isles and Europe, often via Norfolk's two other great pilgrim places, Norwich and King's Lynn. Other routes ran within the county, linking other significant pilgrim points including Bromholm Priory, St Benet's Abbey and Binham Priory. There were also paths from pilgrim ports such as Great Yarmouth, Cromer, Wells and Hunstanton. Along these routes were numerous hermitages, wayside crosses and hostleries catering to pilgrims. When Henry VIII banned pilgrimage and outlawed the veneration of saints, the pilgrims stopped coming and the paths they used were forgotten. Now those paths are being re-established, the pilgrim places rediscovered, and increasing numbers of pilgrims are walking those routes.

This book describes those pilgrim paths and places, including the main feeder routes that pilgrims would have taken across the country to reach Norfolk. It features priories and abbeys, pilgrim churches, hostleries and crosses, holy wells, chapels and hermitages as well as stories of historic figures such as the mystics Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. *Norfolk's Pilgrim Routes: A History of Paths, Places and People* will appeal to all those who enjoy walking and exploring Britain's heritage. Through this book readers and walkers today can explore the full breadth of Norfolk's rich pilgrim history and the fascinating history to be discovered en route.

[Read less](#)

Other Events

Stiffkey History Group

22 October 2025

at 7:30 pm in Stiffkey Village Hall

A talk on local finds

Dr Roger Bland CBE

Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group

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

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

18 October 2025

The Medieval War Horse: Romance and Reality

Rob Liddiard (Professor of History, UEA)

15 November

The Roman Catholic Churches of East Anglia

Matthew Champion (Freelance Heritage Consultant)

Other Groups

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

50 Years of Discovery: A reminder that this Norfolk Heritage Environment Service two-day conference takes place over the weekend of 1&2 November. Details, with a booking link, are at <https://ln.run/1IduH>.

The lost settlement of Guton (within the present-day Norfolk parish of Brandiston) is the subject of a short video by Norfolk history student Jakob Reid, to be found here. Jakob would welcome any feedback or discussion and his email address is warwickrewindeditor@gmail.com.

The Mendlesham Armoury Research Project is staging an all-day conference on its findings on Saturday 11 October in Mendlesham Primary School and church. Details are https://ln.run/E_jXB. The cost is £40.00 (including lunch).

Musseling

John Wallace

We were given some old copies of the East Anglian magazine dating from the early 1960s, one of which contained this article on mussel fishing by Blakeney's own John Wallace which really cried out to be included in a BAHS Newsletter. So here it is, verbatim.

I DON'T suppose that many people who read this or eat them, being landlubbers, realise what a lot of work there is in getting mussels.

I load my boat with a bucket, nets, rake, whim and shovel. Then I wind my way down the channel, past mud and sandbanks with their beacons for the 44 mile row, past the Walls Back, Tibbies Head, Horn Sands, into the Pit, past the Point with its old boat-house where the lifeboat once lived, and down to my mussel bed. It is marked with buoys and stakes, for all mussels are private — they have to be cultivated and added to annually.

The tide is still rather too high so I sit in the boat and eat and drink. Cocoa is best. It's warmer than tea in a Thermos, I say. Then I get the whim out and rake with it in the deep water, lifting mussels on board. (A whim is an 8/10 ft. shafted, 'D' shaped, 4 inch toothed rake, with a net, the kell, in the 'D'. One rakes and turns it over, and the mussels fall in the kell.)

By now the tide has dropped and I can climb over-board in waders and use the small rake with a 1 ft shaft and 3 inch teeth. You rake, pulling with the current, into a net fastened to a bucket handle, wash each netful and tip it on board.

It is lonesome down there. One feels alone in the world but for the Saddleback gulls eating the star-fish and gilly crabs, the Curlews, and the Oyster Catchers trying to eat the mussels. Brent geese arrive in the cold weather. They goggle and walk about on the salt marsh.

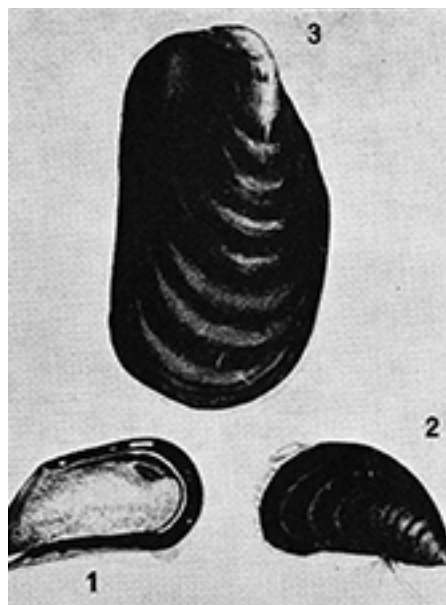
The tide turns and it is time to return, often in the dark in winter. But water always shines, though one is grateful for the beacons. It makes one think of years ago when the main beacons were lit for cargo vessels by boys for a penny or two. The beacons had little oil lamps on their tops, in a kind of basket.

Early the following day one walks down before the tide has left the boat and shovels all the mussels out into the water, 'to give them a drink'. Then one sorts the large from the small. Most chaps these days use a sifter (like a potato one) — it saves a lot of time. One man has a motor on his but I prefer to turn a handle.

The baskets are today made of metal but like the old wooden fish basket in shape and size. One twists and shakes them in the water to wash the mussels and fetch many barnacles off, then leaves them under water for the night. The following morning one picks the 'clocks' out — empty shells or ones with mud inside, which rattle like a cheap clock. One tips the metal basket into a measuring one and from that into a sack. Finally one 'Shoots sitting' — tipping from the old sacks into new ones which are labelled ready for the railway lorry to collect.

All the young mussels which went through the sifter (some as small as one's little finger nail) have to be taken back to the bed and resown. After another long row one takes up the shovel and Swings it out so that the mussels scatter well where one knows there's a bare place on the bed.

You can see what a heavy job musselling is and, sad to say, it seems the young of today won't take it up. People always like eating mussels ; but what's to happen in the future for them?



1. Inside of Mussel Shell. 2. The Mussel. 3. The Horse Mussel

Richard Kelham

Tackling it from the other end, the Leicester Records Office has account ledgers and notebooks belonging to Stephen Taylor & Son (1874-1929) under the reference DE3814. An advert in one of the trade directories gives a long list – which doesn't include Cley. I am hoping to be able to dig up more on the connection between Stephen Taylor and the Cley church organ.

Stephen Taylor & Son,

Nelson Street, LEICESTER.

ORGAN BUILDERS, VOICERS and TUNERS.

Builders of every important Organ in Leicester and neighbourhood, including the **GRAND CONCERT ORGAN IN THE NEW DE MONTFORT HALL, LEICESTER.** The greatest Organists pronounce this instrument to be the finest Organ in the Province.

Stephen Taylor & Son are the inventors of the **MOST PERFECT TUBULAR ACTION EXPANT**, superseding the electric system, being quite as prompt in reply, and more dependable and durable.

Organs built to suit any position, and voiced to suit the buildings in which they are placed. Tunings and repairs in any part of the kingdom promptly attended to. Easy terms of payment entertained. **SEND FOR PROSPECTUS.**

**The following Organs have been built by S. TAYLOR & SON.
Nearly all were carte blanche orders.**

MARSHALL.

- De Montfort Hall, Leicester.
- St. Peter's Church, Leicester.
- John the Baptist Church, Leicester.
- St. Leonard's Church, Leicester.
- St. Nicholas's Church, Leicester.
- Royal St. Cuthbert's Church, Leicester.
- Leonard Church, Loughborough.
- Victoria Church, Leicester (in-built).
- Margaret's Church, Leicester (in-built).
- Wigton Church, Leicester.
- St. Basil's Church, Leicester.
- New College Street Chapel, Leicester.
- R. W. Kemp, Esq., Great Glen.
- St. Michael & All Angels, Loughborough.
- Saint Church, Leicester.
- All Saints Church, Leicester.
- St. Andrew's Church, Leicester.
- Leadenhall Church, Leicester.
- Thimbleby Church, Leicester.
- Ashby Church, Leicestershire.
- Elmwood Church, Leicestershire.
- Weston Church, Leicestershire.
- Swadlowgate Church, near Burton-on-Trent.
- T. F. Harding, Esq., Gorseway Mansions, Lill.
- All Saints Church, Harley, Hants.
- Wedmore Church, Gloucestershire.
- Nymon Church, Leicestershire.
- Barby Church, Leicestershire.
- Christ Church, Mountsorrel, Leicestershire.
- T. J. Thorneley, Esq., Leicester.

RESCALLO.

- Church of Christ, Leicester.
- Hinchley Road Prim. Meth. Chapel, Leicestershire.
- Hill Street Chapel, Leicester.
- St. Peter's Church, Boston Hill, Leicester.
- St. Peter's Church, Mountsorrel, Leicestershire.
- Calverton Parish Church, Leicestershire.
- Tugby Church, Leicestershire.
- Overton Church, Leicestershire.
- Carly Church (Gift of Rectory).
- Roman Catholic Church, Loughborough.
- Highgate Church, Leicestershire.
- Kilmorck Church, Leicestershire.
- St. Thomas Church, Wigton, Leicestershire.
- Wigton Wesleyan Chapel, Leicestershire.
- Methodist Church, Leicestershire.
- Halden Church, Leicestershire.
- St. Michael Church, Market Harborough.
- Walsby Church, Leicestershire.
- Goudry Church, Burton-on-Trent.
- Goudry Primitive Methodist Chapel, Leicestershire.
- Newby Street Chapel, Leicester.
- Astonby Church, Leicestershire.
- Great Barton Church, Leicestershire.
- Leicestershire Parish Church, Leicestershire.
- Great Glen Parish Church, Leicestershire.
- County Arthing, Northamptonshire.
- Wymondley Parish Church, Leicestershire.
- St. Michael and All Angels, Leicestershire.
- St. Margaret's Church, Leicestershire.

100 OTHERS.

Stephen Taylor & Son,
Nelson Street, LEICESTER.



In Search of Bessie Starling

The BAHS received an enquiry recently concerning Bessie Starling of 'Priory Farm', Blakeney: *"I'm researching the history of Bess Starling, who I believe was the sister of Bodham Butcher Starling (my great great granddather) and lived at Priory Farm in Blakeney. I'm particularly interested in learning whether she may have gifted some property to the National Trust, or if there are any records or stories related to her life and legacy in the area."*

First things first. Bess(ie) was the **daughter** of Bodham Starling and can be found in both the 1911 and 1921 censuses. At some point not yet established, Priory Farm became Friary Farm and passed out of the hands of the Starling family, Bodham having died in 1920

Bessie was born 28 April 1906. There was a Bessie Starling who married Albert Varvell at St George's Hannover Square in London in 1923 but I've no idea if this is the same lady. The 1939 Register has Susannah and Bessie Starling living in (Horsham?) St Faiths with a couple of middle aged spinster teachers, and under the 'S'/'M'/'W' column she is marked as single, crossed out and widow substituted; but Varvell didn't die until 1943. Had the marriage failed?

BBS died 23 June 1920, leaving an estate that was (re)sworn at £3600. His widow carried on farming at Priory Farm as that is how she is described in the 1921 census, with the three sons working on the farm and the two daughters on 'home duties'. Susannah died in 1943, and Bessie followed in 2004 – aged 98.

The ownership of the farm becomes a bit hazy: an report in the *Lynn Times* 14 November 1950 details the estate of Francis Burroughes (died 28 July 1950, aged 82) "of Friary Farm, Blakeney" – so presumably the owner – in which he left an annuity to his housekeeper, £1000 to his wife and the balance to his daughter. If that seems a bit churlish, the wife was Monica, a young – five years younger than his daughter – widow he'd married two years earlier. Later reports in the *Birmingham Post* (29 December 1952) note that it had been bought by an Irish peer, Lord Decies, but as he'd also bought a property in Jersey where his business lay, I wonder how long he stayed.

The *Lynn Advertiser* (2 November 1957) reported that the Minister had dismissed the appeal of Mrs V S Williams of Friary Farm, Blakeney, against the local planners' refusal of permission for a holiday caravan site on Friars Hills [sic]. This must have caused a few problems since the *Birmingham Mail* of 6 September 1957 had offered a 4-berth luxury caravan to let, private seashore site, "apply Rowling, c/o Friary Farm, Blakeney".

The readily accessible documents get thinner the closer one comes to the present – privacy concerns and suchlike – so more recourse must be had to memories. This is clearly a work in progress.

Afterword

The press of the time carried scores of advertisements for 'Staff Wanted'. This one, from *The Morning Post* of the 20 September 1899, is typical: "Abstainer" I can just about understand, but "non-cyclist"?

GOVERNESS WANTED of refinement and good birth for three little girls of eight; thorough English, French, music; in exchange for comfortable, refined home, with laundry, own bed-room, and fire; must be evangelical, abstainer, and non-cyclist; kindly state age.—Address G. W., 7,045, "Morning Post" office, Strand, W.C.