

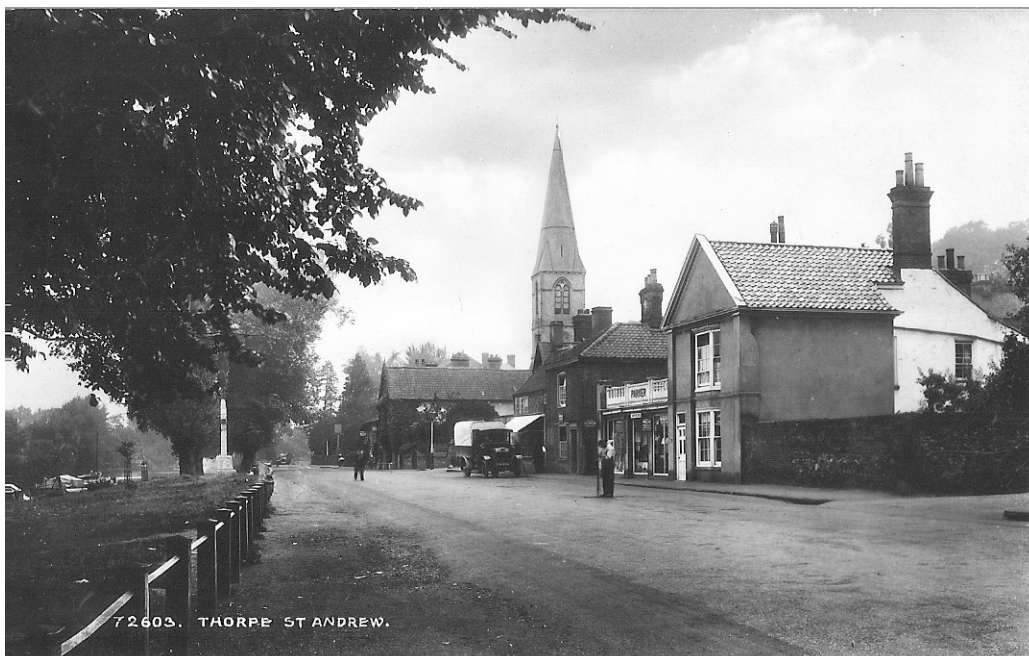
# THORPE HISTORY GROUP

## Newsletter - Spring 2016

Our next talk  
**'Shops and Streets of Thorpe'**  
by Dale Wiseman  
**Friday 29th April - 7.30pm**  
at the **St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane,**  
There will be a charge of £3 per person.

### Future Events

At our next talk on Friday 29th April Dale Wiseman will be explaining the background to the street names featured in his recent book and talking about the many and varied shops that have come and gone in the town such as the shops at River Green shown below in the 1920s.



Please note: if you wish to come on the Walk up Chapel Lane on Sunday 12th June or the Tour of the Rosary Cemetery on Sunday 24th July you must book as places are limited. You can book by contacting Nick Williams by email at [spinney72@aol.com](mailto:spinney72@aol.com) or phone at 01603 438766.

## Our Last Talk 'Thorpe from the River'

It was a bitterly cold evening in February but about 70 people still turned out to listen to Malcolm Martin's talk about 'Thorpe from the River'.

Inspired by the river trips which he had helped to organise for Thorpe History Group in summer 2015, during which many photos were taken, Malcolm shared his knowledge of the most historical buildings/landmarks which lined the river Yare from Carrow Bridge to Postwick starting with a movie filmed from The Regal Lady in 1971. The Regal Lady was owned by Neville Blake and it was used to run boat trips from Foundry Bridge in the city to Surlingham and back.

Malcolm began his talk with photos from the past and present of Carrow Bridge. The first bridge was built in 1810 but was replaced by a lifting bridge in 1833. This was originally further along the river opposite Carrow Hill. Today's bridge was opened in 1923 at a cost of £42,000. The medieval defence boom towers were later used to collect taxes from ships entering Norwich by river.

A brief history of Colman's and Laurence, Scott Electro motors was given as these factories were seen either side of the river. There was then a photo of Carrow Yacht Club which used to be Colman's yacht station and where the river Wensum meets the Yare. Following this were shots of the power station which supplied power to Norwich from 1921 to 1981. There are plans to build a Generation Park which will supply power to 88,000 homes which are still in the planning stages.

Other photos included Carey's Meadow, Thorpe Old Hall, one of the oldest buildings in Thorpe St Andrew, Jenner's boatyard, (now the Town House) with its observatory which used to be open to the public every Easter, Water Lane and the River Garden pub which dates from 1700, formerly known as the King's Head. Malcolm was able to give detailed history of all the boatyards which had existed in Thorpe St Andrew. He has a vast knowledge and we are hoping he will make this information available electronically.

There were photos of the Yare Rowing Club, formed in 1911 after disputes with CEYMS about rowing on Sundays, the Foundry site (which became the Santa Lucia Hotel), the Buck pub which is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Thorpe St Andrew, and the Rushcutters

The talk concluded with photos of Frostbite Sailing Club, so called as it was the only sailing club to sail through the winter as the water was warmer in this part of the Yare due to being downstream of Norwich Power Station, Nobby Clark who was a Ferryman and whose boat the Nutty Slack is currently on show at the Broads Museum, and John Fox's cottage which was built in 1861 as a Hobrough summer house. John Fox was a foreman for May Gurney and he was the last Fox to live in the summerhouse. He was also the last skipper of the Wherry Maud when it was used as a mud lighter.

Pam Harwood

## Thorpe People - Thomas Clarke

The Thorpe railway disaster in September was one of the worst in British railway history. Many of the local victims were buried in Norwich and elsewhere including John Prior and James Light, the driver and fireman respectively of the Yarmouth mail train who were interred at the Rosary. Also buried there is George Womack, a well known Norwich draper. However there is a Thorpe connection. The driver of the London express Thomas Clarke, who grew up in Thorpe, is buried in the cemetery on Yarmouth Road where his headstone is still legible (see below).

The 'worst head on collision in the history of British railways'<sup>1</sup> occurred about 9.45 on the evening of Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September 1874 when the Yarmouth mail and the London express ran into one another on the single track just east of Norwich at Thorpe between the bridge over the river Yare and the East Norfolk junction. In total 25 people were killed, some died immediately, others later succumbed to their injuries. A further 73 were injured, some seriously – 9 of those received at the hospital in the immediate aftermath of the accident had broken legs, others suffered skull fractures and less serious injuries.



The accident had been caused by a catastrophic misunderstanding at Thorpe station in Norwich when the express, which had been late arriving, was instructed to proceed to Great Yarmouth. Just prior to this the mail train-which had been waiting at Brundall-was instructed to proceed to Norwich by the telegraph clerk at Thorpe station. The confusion arose due to a

<sup>1</sup> Red for Danger, L.T.C. Holt, 1960

misunderstanding between John Robson the 17 year old telegraph clerk and Alfred Cooper the night inspector who had ignored the written procedures of the Great Eastern Railway.

The system in use specified that no train using a single track, such as that between Norwich and Brundall, was allowed to depart without a written instruction being handed to the driver. If a train was running late or there was an untimetabled train the arrangements had to be confirmed by telegraph message between the two stations concerned to ensure the line was clear. This system had been in use on the Norwich-Brundall line without mishap since the telegraph had been installed in 1848. All such messages, and the acknowledgements, had to be signed by the inspector and recorded.

On this occasion Robson telegraphed Brundall to send on the mail, without Cooper having signed the order, and unaware that Cooper had ordered the express on to Brundall. Once realisation dawned Robson instructed Brundall to stop the mail train – only to receive the brief but chilling response 'Mail Left'. The consequences were catastrophic. The trains collided at a combined speed of about 70 miles per hour. The noise of the collision was likened to a great clap of thunder by people living nearby. It seems likely that each of the train crews could see what was about to happen but had could do little about it, other than to shut down the regulators on the engines and apply the brake on the tenders.



The scene at the crash site was one of devastation. The two engines, each weighing around 30 tons, were 'reared up into an almost perpendicular position, and the carriages mounted one on the top of another, and gradually 'collapsed into an altogether inconceivable mass of rubbish and ruins'<sup>2</sup>. Five of the thirteen carriages on the Yarmouth mail were destroyed, and eight of the

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<sup>2</sup> Eastern Daily Press 11<sup>th</sup> September 1874

14 on the express. Some had been thrown upon their sides and rolled some distance.

Initial assistance was provided by passengers able to escape from the wreckage, including a prominent Norwich physician Dr Peter Eade, who survived almost completely unscathed. Within about 30 minutes aid arrived from Norwich where the station master had arranged for cabs to bring local doctors to the station before being taken by special train to the crash site. Some of the dead and injured were brought back to Norwich by train and taken to hospital or sent home. In the meantime Field's boat house close to the site of the crash was used as a mortuary to hold the dead while other survivors were accommodated in a room at the Thorpe Gardens public house where beds were put up for them. The scene at the Thorpe Gardens was a gruesome one 'There were several dead bodies lying in different parts of the room, hardly distinguishable, more than one apparently being without a whole bone, and with these were those, particularly one young woman, who calmly and consciously was "passing away".'<sup>3</sup>The search for survivors went on until 4am the following morning, aided by bonfires to light the area; fuelled by wood taken from the wreckage.

At the time of his death Thomas Clarke was 40 years of age and had worked for the Great Eastern Railway for many years. Born in Postwick where his father William was an agricultural labourer, he was one of six children, most of whom were agricultural labourers like their father. But by the 1871 census he was an engine driver, living with his wife and two young children in Bishopgate in Norwich. He had a demanding job, requiring physical strength, stamina and a detailed knowledge of the railway line he used. Although by the 1870s the engine crews were protected by a windscreen and cover the rear of the footplate remained open to the elements and in bad weather conditions could be dreadful. Clarke would have worked his way up to be a driver, probably starting as an engine cleaner – one of the filthiest jobs on the railway – before becoming a fireman and eventually a driver. The process could take many years.

At the inquest held at Thorpe station a few days after the crash Clarke's sister Elizabeth Brazier had the unenviable task of identifying his body. She lived on Yarmouth Road with her husband Edward who was also an engine driver with the GER. She commented that he left a widow and five children. His funeral took place on Monday 14th September at Thorpe cemetery attended by family, friends and fellow railwaymen. It was a mournful occasion marked by an unsettling incident which unnerved Clarke's widow Rosetta. In the midst of the service in the chapel the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of a train passing on the nearby line which 'seemed to awaken painful recollections in the afflicted widow who immediately became hysterical, and had to be removed from the building<sup>4</sup>.' It also appeared to unnerve the Rev. J S Patteson who was taking the service and who was so overcome he was unable to continue.

At the inquest that followed Cooper and Robson were held responsible, the inspector appointed by the Board of Trade declaring in his report that 'The blame as regards the immediate causes of the collision lies clearly between

<sup>3</sup> Norfolk Chronicle 12<sup>th</sup> September 1874

<sup>4</sup> Norfolk Chronicle 19<sup>th</sup> September 1874

Inspector Cooper and telegraph-clerk Robson. The evidence as to what passed between them rests mainly on their own statements and they contradict each other in important particulars.' Subsequently, in April 1875, Cooper and Robson were indicted at the Norwich Assizes for feloniously killing George Womack. Cooper was found guilty and sentenced to eight months imprisonment but Robson was acquitted.

In a rather poignant postscript to the accident it emerged that the GER had already laid a second line from Norwich to the East Norfolk junction which was to be brought into use during October 1874. The remaining section from the East Norfolk junction to Brundall was to continue being controlled by the existing single track arrangement.

## Alan Jones - memories of Thorpe

Alan, who now lives on Hillcrest Road has lived in Thorpe all his life and has strong recollections of the area as it was when he was younger.

His family lived on Bungalow Lane in an area known as 'Tin Town' due to the pre-war bungalows there (now long demolished) which were built of wood with corrugated iron roofs. They had no piped water, it had to be taken from individual or common boreholes. Alan was born at number 13 in November 1939 when his father was serving in the Royal Navy. After the war his father worked as a bricklayers labourer. Alan's paternal grandfather, who lived at number 8 had been a bricklayer's labourer. Due to the proximity of the river the bungalows were built on stilts to prevent flooding - although this wasn't always effective as in 1947 when the thaw after a long period of heavy snow caused extensive flooding. Alan's grandparents and their dogs and chickens had to be rescued by boat. In the early 1940s Alan's parents, along with other Bungalow Lane residents, moved to the newly built council houses on Primrose Crescent. During the war the houses were supplied with Morrison shelters and if things got desperate there was an Anderson shelter in a neighbour's garden.

Bungalow Lane was not solely residential, several businesses were based there. Next door to Alan's grandparent's house at number 9 was Thetford's boatyard from where the proprietor hired out sailing boats. At the far end was a marine engineers run by Peter Weeds - at the time Thorpe was the centre of the Broads boat hire industry so no doubt there was plenty of work for the business.

On nearby Griffin Lane were other boatyards including that of Hobroughs, dredging contractors, which was later sold to May Gurney. Until the 1970s Norwich was a port and the shallowness of the river meant it had to be dredged regularly to ensure the ships carrying coal, wood, scrap metal and corn could access the quays in the city.

One of the people who worked for Hobroughs was John Fox (pictured below). John lived and worked in the area all his life and knew the locations of the many wherries that were sunk in the area at the end of their working lives. The cottage John Fox lived in was demolished and a copy which can still be

seen from the river built further along Griffin Lane. Another Griffin Lane resident was Wally Morton a speedway rider with the Norwich Start during the 1950s. He was reportedly fined for riding his speedway bike up and down Griffin Lane.

On the Yarmouth as now was the Griffin public house which had a garage on the forecourt run by Cecil Hall where he sold petrol and paraffin and repaired motorcycles.

Alan has vivid memories of the former hospital, especially the farm on the north side of the Yarmouth Road with its horses and where corn and vegetables for the hospital were grown. There was also a piggery - the pigs were fed on the scraps from the hospital dining rooms. At harvest time the corn would be cut and bound and some of the supervised patients would help in putting up the stooks. There was also a cricket ground on the north side which was the site of the annual fete where patients and locals enjoyed things like climbing the greasy pole.



Alan's other memories include Kemp's Farm on Yarmouth Road and Dales dairy. Kemp's farm stood where the car park of the Raj of India is now and extended back up the hill. Later, a hall for the British Legion was built there before School Lane was developed during the 1950s. Dales dairy was in Dale's Loke, opposite what was then the St Lucia Hotel, and run by two brothers - Sidney and Fred. Sidney delivered milk in lower Thorpe while Fred covered upper Thorpe. In the immediate post-war period Alan worked with Sydney Dale delivering milk by horse and cart - later a van was acquired. One of their employees, a Mr Rump delivered milk using a trade bike with a dip can and a small churn in the front box where he also had some bottles of milk.

## Future Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Time</b>
Friday 29th April 2016	Talk 'Streets and Shops of Thorpe St Andrew'. Dale Wiseman	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm
Sunday 12th June	Walk 'Up Chapel Lane', Joanna Barker (booking necessary-contact Nick Williams)	Chapel Lane	2pm
Saturday 9th July	Archive Day	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	2-4pm
Sunday 24th July	Tour of the Rosary Cemetery (booking necessary-contact Nick Williams)	Rosary Cemetery	2pm
Thursday 8th September	Heritage Open Day - talk and tour of Thorpe Lodge(booking necessary)	Thorpe Lodge	2pm
Friday 9th September	Heritage Open Day - talk and tour of Thorpe Lodge(booking necessary)	Thorpe Lodge	2pm
Thursday 17th November	Talk 'The Norfolks on the Somme' by Stephen Smith	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	8pm

We hope to put on other activities during the summer, including river trips and guided walks. Further details will be in future editions of the newsletter.

### Getting in contact

If want to know more about the Thorpe History Group or have something interesting on the history of Thorpe you would like to share please contact Nick Williams on 01603 438766 or email him at [Spinney72@aol.com](mailto:Spinney72@aol.com)