

THORPE HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter - Summer 2021

Coronavirus update

In view of the current uncertainty about when we may be able to safely organise

Indoor events and the possibility of further restrictions this autumn we have decided reluctantly not to organise any indoor talks this year. We hope to re-start our talks early next year.

In the meantime we are holding outdoor events including a guided walk on the anniversary of the Thorpe rail disaster and how the railway came to Thorpe.

This will be on Sunday 19th September at 2pm and again at 3pm. Booking is necessary – contact Nick Williams (details below).

The Griffin

Demolition of this former public house is now well under way pending re-development of the site.

Boat Yards

This edition contains the first of four articles on the boat yards and boat builders of Thorpe.

Blue Plaque for Thorpe

The town has its first blue plaque under Broadland District Council's scheme for honouring men and women who have made a contribution to the district.

Poppy Trail

A trail to remember those who died serving in World War Two who are commemorated on the war memorial at river green is being developed.

Getting in contact

If you would like 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

You can also find the Thorpe History Group on Facebook - Google Thorpe History Group to find information and photographs.

We have a website at <http://www.thorpe-history-group.org/> so do take a look.

End of the Griffin

By the time this newsletter comes out, The Griffin on Yarmouth Road will have been demolished with the future of the site subject to consultation.



Demolition under way in May this year.

There has been a Griffin public house in Thorpe for about 300 years, albeit at three different locations. The original site was north of the Yarmouth Road where number 25 now stands. It took its name from the griffin, the badge of the Paston family who occupied the nearby Thorpe Hall. In 1800 it was recorded as a substantial building with two projecting arms set back from the road with gardens and a yard containing a large outbuilding. About 1825 the Griffin was re-located to a one acre plot immediately to the east of the Norfolk County Asylum. The public house was on the eastern boundary facing a large courtyard. The landlord, George Grant, was a local farmer.

The building appears to have been demolished about 1846 as part of the expansion of the County Asylum and a new pub built adjacent to Griffin Lane. The tenant at the 'new' Griffin was also a farmer - Henry Southgate, who ran the pub with his wife Sarah. It was well patronised, particularly during public holidays. In June 1865 it was reported to be the only pub in Thorpe which put on amusements, including foot races, 'jingling matches', and a 'greasy pole', with dancing during the evening. It also provided a venue for clubs and societies to meet, such as the Oddfellows who for many years held their annual dinner there and for political parties – both Liberals and Conservatives held their meetings there. The Griffin also served a more sombre purpose; as a venue for inquests such as the one held in September 1885 on William Bacon whose body was discovered near the asylum with his throat cut.

The Griffin was owned by Robert Harvey who leased it to Steward and Patteson who in turn sub-let it to a tenant. At this period you could expect to

find up to eight different beers of different strengths on sale at an S&P public house and mineral waters which were becoming increasingly popular. Bottled beer may also have been available but was not then produced in large quantities.

In 1916 the Griffin had a new landlord with an unusual background. Charles Edward Fox had been the chief attendant at the Thorpe Asylum but in 1915 was recruited into the Royal Army Medical Corp as a Regimental Sergeant-Major when it became a war hospital. Charles was also an accomplished singer and comedian, in demand for his comic songs. His son Cecil took over in 1924 when Charles retired and ran the Griffin until his death there in 1956.



The Griffin in 1997

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a slow decline of the Griffin, despite several attempts to re-launch it. In 1984 it was renamed 'Gunga Din's with what was described as an 'old colonial theme'. It was not well received, with residents bemoaning the loss of the Griffin name. It was re-launched two years later as an American style burger restaurant and renamed the 'Hungry Fox'. Thorpe wasn't receptive to this approach either and within 18 months it had reverted to the original name and an emphasis on more traditional pub food. In 2015 it closed for the last time. It was put for sale two years later but after steadily decaying and being vandalised it was demolished in May.

If you want to learn more about the history of the Griffin and other Thorpe public houses you may be interested in 'The Public Houses and Pleasure Gardens of Thorpe St Andrew'. Well illustrated, it is available at £8.50 from Nick Williams who will deliver in Thorpe.

Boat Builders and Boatyards of Thorpe St Andrew Part 1

The river Yare has played an important role of the life of Thorpe St Andrew for centuries – providing a highway for the movement of goods and passengers, a place for recreation and relaxation, and a place where boats were built. Boat building was taking place by the mid nineteenth century and it can be claimed that the modern Broads pleasure boat industry began at Thorpe.

This is the first of four articles on the boat builders and boat yards of Thorpe by Malcolm Martins. It introduces some of the pioneers of the boat building and hire industry. Malcolm has a life long interest and involvement in boating and boatbuilding and his father designed and built the first glass reinforced plastic glass hulls to be produced. We are most grateful to Malcolm for these articles.

Stephen Field

Stephen Field is one of the first boat builders we know much about. The Field family were from Norwich and were reputed to have been involved in boat building at Carrow for about 200 years. Stephen was born in 1827 and lived in what was then known as New Lakenham. His father Benjamin was a patten maker, probably working in the shoe trade, but by his early 20s Stephen was working at Carrow as a boat builder – possibly with other family members, or for one of the other Norwich boat builders such as John Britcher.

After his marriage to Sophia Wright he moved to King Street where his seven children were born. When Sophia died in 1860, Field moved to Thorpe to live opposite the river green and go in business by himself. By 1881 he was living at Water Lane where there was a slipway, employing two men to assist him. The lane still exists as a right of way from the Yarmouth Road to the river, passing under a block of flats. It was here that Field built the 48 ton wherry Empress – the only one he was known to have built. His son Stephen also worked as a boat builder in Thorpe, probably with his father, and lived at Old Post Office Yard. Stephen Field senior subsequently moved to a site off what is now known as Girlings Lane. It was sold in 1888 to John Hart, the landlord of the Thorpe Gardens, but Field continued to work there until his death in 1904. In September 1874 it had a more macabre use as a temporary mortuary to accommodate victims of the Thorpe railway accident.

James Hobrough

During the same period Stephen Field was working as a boat builder James Hobrough had a contracting business in Norwich. In 1854 He established a dredging, piling and lighterage business based at the Bridge House Inn, close to Bishop Bridge, where he lived and was also the licensee. The firm carried out dredging and other work across Norfolk and as the work increased looked for larger and more convenient premises. In 1878 Hobrough purchased several acres of river side land at Griffin Lane in Thorpe and opened an extensive dockyard. With wherries finding trade hard to come by as goods were increasingly transported by rail many were available cheaply. Hobrough bought a number of them, converting them into mud lighters and dredgers to use in his business. When they were no longer useable he sank them at Rockland Broad, and in the dykes at Griffin Lane to support the banks.



James Hobrough died in 1901 and was succeeded by his son James Samuel Hobrough who continued to run the business until it was sold to May Gurney in 1938. The site at Griffin Lane became a small self contained community known as 'Tin Town' due to the nature of the buildings where dockyard workers lived.. The 1939 Register, which provides details of the civil population just after the outbreak of the Second World War, recorded 20 families living there. Part of the site is now owned by the Broads Authority. James Samuel Hobrough was a keen photographer and left many photographs recording the firms activities. These can be viewed at Norfolk County Council's Picture Norfolk website.

John Hart

John Hart was the licensee of the Thorpe Gardens from 1869 until 1879 where he also hired out boats. After leaving the pub he purchased Field's boatyard which was adjacent to the Thorpe Gardens, just across the railway line. As his hire fleet expanded he moved the business to Thorpe island where two large timber boat sheds with slipways were built. He lived there in a wooden bungalow with his wife Harriett and their eight children. Following his death in 1898 aged 69 his son George took over; he also had eight children through his wife Emma. By the early twentieth century the Hart fleet included motor boats. The motor age was just beginning and a new form of propulsion for boats was available – the petrol engine. The 'Christina', a 27 foot four berth motor cruiser, was available for hire from George's yard for £7 per week – about double the cost of a sailing boat.

Two of George's sons, Geoffrey and Gilbert, enlisted during Word War One. Sadly, Gilbert was killed in action. Geoffrey survived and returned to work in the yard with his father and two other brothers, Fred and Norman. After George's death by drowning when he was 64, and his burial at Thorpe cemetery, the brothers inherited the business. Subsequently Geoffrey bought out Fred and Norman and the business became know as G. Hart and Son – Geoffrey having brought his son Richard into the business. He had trained as a naval architect and his skills enabled the yard to build larger more luxurious boats for hire. All of Hart's boats had self-starting engines, Valor gas stoves, lavatories, sinks and self generating lighting – these features were considered

a real luxury. Some of the boats were named after playing cards in a play on the Hart name – Ace of Hearts, 5,6,7,8 of Hearts etc.

George Hazell

George Hazell hired out cruisers and rowing boats. He started his boatyard in 1885 opposite the Thorpe Gardens, between the bridge and Hart's premises. He began by hiring out skiffs and small yachts from the island and could be summoned by ringing a bell on the river green. In 1904 he claimed to have the largest fleet of craft in the district and his advertisements pointed out that his boat yard was only three minutes walk from Whitlingham Station. In 1901 he was living on Clarence Road but by 1911 had moved to 20 Chalk Hill Road (now known as Rosary Road) He had six children and his sons Basil, Clifford and Reggie also worked at the yard.

The 1916 Blakes catalogue listed Hazell's yacht houseboat "Test" which weighed 21 tons, was 50 feet in length, and slept eight comfortably. It had a piano and the men's quarters were fitted with an oil stove and all necessary cooking utensils. It cost seven guineas a week to hire at peak season with the use of a centreboard sailing dinghy. When George went bankrupt he moved from Chalk Hill to live in an old wherry moored at the river green at Thorpe. When holes appeared in his wherry, he used concrete to seal the leaks, but in 1939 the bottom fell out and it sank.

Henry Chaston

Henry Chaston was the licensee of the Thorpe Gardens(now The Rushcutters) from 1889 to 1912. In 1888 a sale document described the property as having "large boat builders shops with slips to the river" Henry built boats and yachts which he hired out. He appears to have been successful because when he died in November 1911 he left £4,455 which was a large sum for those days.



George Mollet

George was living at Brundall but in 1898 moved his home and business to Thorpe where he lived in Swiss Cottage on Chapel Lane. In the 1901 Census he was described as a boat builder and also as a collector of Tolls for the river commissioners. His yard was on Girling's Lane – the only yard in Thorpe downstream of the railway bridges. A sale catalogue of 1907 describes his boatyard and shed as having a river frontage of 212 feet. Before his move to Thorpe, George had built many famous racing yachts like Castanet, Gossip and Zingara in Brundall. He also built early steam launches. The motor boat pictured above was built by him in teak and oak in 1911 while he lived in Thorpe. George died on 15/1/1913 leaving £464 to his widow Lucy Elizabeth.

First Blue Plaque for Thorpe

Thorpe recently had its first blue plaque installed under Broadland District Council's Blue Plaque scheme which commemorates notable men and women from the district.

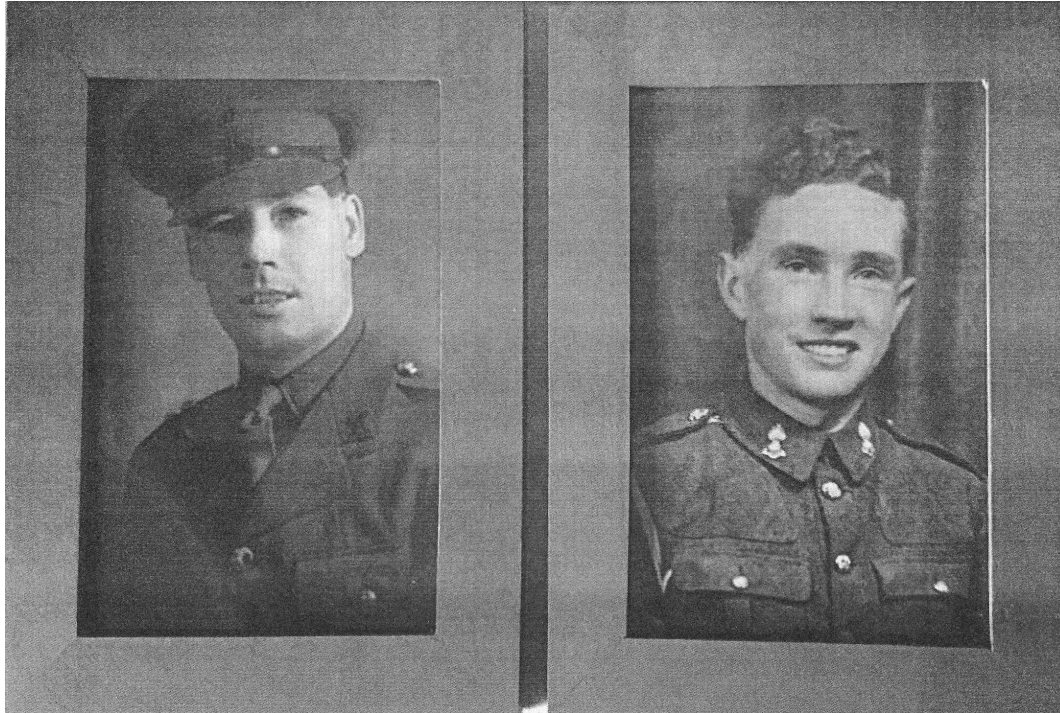
The plaque, on the wall outside Guild House on Yarmouth Road, features John and Henry Patteson who were prominent in Thorpe during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Henry was a partner in the Norwich brewers Steward and Patteson and lived at Guild House for some years. His brother John was the Vicar of the parish and lived at the rectory which was then at 53 Yarmouth Road.

The nomination for the plaque was made by Thorpe History Group member Dale Wiseman (pictured below outside the Guild House).



The Poppy Trail Project 2021

The Poppy Trail project 2021 is going really well. We are researching all of the names on the World War Two memorial on the river green to discover their connection to Thorpe. We are now in communication with six families and this is producing some great family stories, photographs and paperwork.



Two of our men are Lt. Cecil Ernest Yallop (on left in photograph) and Sgt. Clifford Oxbury (on right). Lt Yallop is one of several Norfolk Regiment men listed and he was killed in May 1940, the day prior to the massacre at le Paradis in Northern France. Yallop's widow Betsy lived on Furze Road. Sgt. Clifford was in the Royal Artillery and was killed in Italy. His parents lived on Plumstead Road East. Oxbury is remembered here in Thorpe as well as in the Minturno War Cemetery in Italy.

These are just two of the stories coming forward and we would urge any family members or friends of these Norfolk men to come forward if they can help with this project. Thanks to Paul Oxbury for the photo of his grandad Clifford. Below are the names of those we are seeking information on

Kenneth Arnold, William Artis, Albert Chance, Thomas Cutler, Jack Hindle, Edwin Kerridge, Leonard Moore.

If you can help please contact Dale Wiseman at dale.wiseman@ntlworld.com

We would like to credit the following for information and the photographs of Lt. Yallop

[Hell in Paradise - Massacre at Le Paradis - THE MASSACRE AT LE PARADIS - HELL IN PARADISE - MAY 1940. \(leparadismassacre.com\)](http://leparadismassacre.com)