

THORPE HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter - Winter 2022

This edition

Resumption of talks

The Thorpe History Group is re-starting its programme of talks and other events – a full list can be found on page 2.

Our first talk will be on the 'Public Houses of Thorpe' on Friday 18th February at the St Andrew Centre, Thunder Lane, beginning at 7.30pm.

Admission is £4 per head – please bring the exact money if you can.

We appreciate there is still concern about covid so please ensure you wear a mask and maintain a distance from others (the chairs will be well spaced out). We will not be serving teas at this meeting.

Poppy Trail

A commemoration of men from the World War II on the war memorial.

Demolition of the Griffin

This historic pub has finally been demolished prior to re-development.

Manifestations of Madness

Review of a new book by Julie Jakeway on the treatment of women at the Norfolk County Lunatic Asylum during the nineteenth century.

Boat Builders and Boat Yards of Thorpe

The third of our articles covers the period following World War 2.

The Great Thorpe Railway Disaster 1874

Details of a new book by Thorpe author Phyllida Scrivens.

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.

Programme for 2022

Below is our programme of events for 2022 There is a modest charge of £4 per head for the talks. The other events are free but donations are welcome.

Date	Title	Venue	Time
Friday 18th February	Talk: The Pubs of Thorpe St Andrew. Nick Williams	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm
Friday 8th April	Talk: Life and Times of Robert Caston. Dale Wiseman	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm
Sunday 12th June	Guided walk up Chapel Lane Joanna Barker	Meet Chapel Lane (at junction with Yarmouth Road)	2pm
Sunday 26 th June	River walk and display	Details to be confirmed	2pm
Saturday 2nd July	Archive Day: an opportunity to see material from the Janet Smith Archive	Roxley Hall, Yarmouth Road	2pm - 4pm
Sunday 24th July	Tour of Rosary cemetery	Rosary Cemetery, Rosary Road	2pm
Friday 28 th October	Talk: Thorpe Schools 1937-1997 John Balls, Joanna Barker, Phyll Hardy	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm
Saturday 5 th and Sunday 6 th November	Poppy Trails John Balls, Dale Wiseman	Details to be confirmed	2pm

Please note - the number of people we can accommodate on the walks is limited so booking is necessary for the Rosary tour, the Chapel Lane walk and the Poppy Trails. Book by contacting Nick Williams.

Appeal for help

The Thorpe History Group wants to improve its website and, in particular, we need assistance from someone with experience of website design and html, so it will display properly on mobile phones. If you can help, please contact Malcolm Martins on 01603 437693 or email him on martinsdirect@virginmedia.com

The Poppy Trail 2021

The History group has spent the best part of 2021 researching the 55 names connected to the Thorpe St Andrew War Memorial on River Green. Alongside this research, it was decided to have a Poppy Trail in Thorpe which connected the 55 names to addresses and buildings in the Thorpe area.

With the support of the Town Council and the Royal British Legion Thorpe branch, a trail was set up to run from November 1st through to November 14th (Remembrance Sunday) where 55 boards were put into place, 20 at private homes and the other 35 at public spaces including Thorpe (St Andrew's) Church, St William's School and the Town Hall.

Dale Wiseman and John Balls (pictured below) undertook a series of walks and talks over this two-week period to highlight the project. They did three successful walks which featured Yarmouth Road west, Yarmouth Road east and the Spinney estate area. These were well attended and over £75.00 was collected for the Poppy Appeal. We were able to feature 17 of our fallen and we also had 6 family members join us on these walks.

Dale and John also visited St William's School, Thorpe Explorers, Thorpe Brownies and the Yare Probus club. Our first visit was to The Warren Care home as a favour to a Lancaster Flight Engineer Ray Parke who we met this year. Ray was a school friend of David Dowe, another of our remembered personnel.

The project has been a great success and many people have become aware of some of the names and the sacrifices that a group of young men made in serving their country and their connection to this area.



Going Going Gone - The Griffin on Yarmouth Road has finally been demolished ready for the re-development of the site.



Manifestations of Madness

Subtitled 'Women's Voices from the Norfolk County Lunatic Asylum,' local author Julie Jakeway's recently published book 'Manifestations of Madness' records the experiences of female patients at the asylum in the period from 1851 to 1870, providing a compelling narrative amplified by detailed case studies drawn from asylum records.

Julie explains how the asylum changed from a place of confinement for people considered to be dangerous and threatening, to a hospital which viewed mental illness as something to be treated. In the words of William Hills, the Medical Superintendent at the asylum, 'an asylum is an hospital for the treatment of mental disease but adapted to meet the varied and special requirements on individual patients.'

Norfolk was one of the first counties to take advantage of legislation permitting counties to open asylums for pauper lunatics. In 1814 the Norfolk County Lunatic Asylum was opened to the west of Thorpe St Andrew. Initially only 70 female and male patients were accommodated, but by 1881 this had risen 10 fold and additional accommodation had been erected. A major reason for this was the higher number of paupers in Norfolk than elsewhere – in 1861 it was calculated at 7% of the population compared to a national average of 4.4%. It reflected the low wages in a predominately agricultural county and the grinding poverty and despair that accompanied it which accentuated mental health problems.

Julie's focus on the high incidence of female patients is borne out by the records. In the period covered by her study, of 2,322 patients 1,282 were female and 1,050 male. Many of the female patients were diagnosed upon admission as having gender specific causes of insanity. To modern eyes these diagnoses appear superficial but in the mid nineteenth century diagnoses were based upon the physical appearance of the patient, symptoms reported by family or friends and by the use of pseudoscience such as phrenology – the study of physical appearance to determine a person's character. What shines through from Julie's book is the benefits brought about by the regime instituted by Hills. The provision of rest, regular meals, comfortable accommodation and clean clothing ensured that for many a short stay at the asylum was of great benefit. The detailed case studies focus on what were termed 'women's problems' – often suggested as the reason behind insanity and mental illness – but in reality the consequences of desperate poverty, continued child bearing and the appalling living conditions endure by many.

'Manifestations of Madness' is an excellent addition to the material available on the former St Andrew's Hospital and will be of interest to those who wish to learn more about the history of Thorpe.

It is published by Poppyland Publishing at £9.99. Details can be found at <https://poppyland.co.uk/products/B79685>.

Boat Builders and Boatyards of Thorpe St Andrew Part 3

In the third of our articles on the boat builders and boat yards of Thorpe St Andrew, Malcolm Martins covers the period following the end of World War Two when the industry recovered from the effects of war time depredations and provided holidays afloat for a population that, increasingly, had money to spend. This was the period when the Norfolk Broads became the centre of a highly organised leisure industry.

Alfred Ward

Alfred Ward had been using the Thorpe Hall site as the base for their business since 1935. Immediately following the war the family made Thorpe Hall their home. Their business had survived the war better than Harts or Jenners because they had been able to retain staff by putting them on war work. Alfred Ward's hire fleet continued to prosper; older boats were sold and new ones built in the dry shed to replace them. Boats were also built for private owners. There were eight full time employees plus Saturday staff who included Alfred's grand daughters. In the Blake's catalogue of 1947 they advertised 12 boats. The largest was Sea Wolf, 42 feet long, providing accommodation for nine people with a professional skipper. By the time Alfred retired in 1963, his fleet had grown to 20 boats. He had a riverside bungalow built in the grounds of the Hall for his retirement but died in 1965 soon after moving in. The yard was bought by Geoffrey and David Millbank, who already owned Jenners. It was closed in September 1970.



The Ward hire fleet moored at Thorpe Hall

The Millbanks

George Millbank had bought Jenners at the end of the war. It was not in Blake's catalogue, but did its own bookings as had the Jenner family. George had two sons, David who ran the boat business, and Geoffrey, who ran the Town House Hotel. In 1958, the family paid for the village sign which used to be outside the Town House. In 1950 they built the Amethyst named after a Royal Navy sloop which had been involved in an incident on the Yangtze river, which was later the subject of a film starring Richard Todd, as well as the Black Swan and Consort. The Gay Grenadier, Gay Panther, and Gay

Pirateer were some of the first boats to have a full-size gas cooker. By 1960 the firm had started to build high speed boats in plywood – a sign outside the yard announced 'Jenner Sport Boats' One was the Red Bandit which was a reverse clinker boat where the lower planks overlapped the upper ones rather than the usual way of upper planks overlapping lower ones. This was never likely to succeed - when it reached speed it suddenly sheered off line and turned over.

Development of the island



The canopy covering the island yacht basin

The Millbank brothers had big plans. Having bought Jenners, they acquired Alfred Ward's yard when he retired in 1963, and subsequently acquired Heart's Cruisers. In one year alone it was reported that the brothers had bought eight businesses. All their boats were soon run under the Jenner name. Their plans centred on a huge marina on Thorpe island, to be developed around a large basin they excavated facing the Town House Hotel. It would have moorings for 250 craft. There were also plans for a massive development between Thorpe Hall and the Town House which would have included shops, a filling station, an underground car park, additional bedrooms for the Town House, a three storey clubhouse, a bar, swimming pool and new houses. The scheme was very ambitious and their hire fleet too large for the Thorpe river which had previously accommodated about 60 hire craft. The bridge to the island was built; the basin was excavated and covered with a massive open sided canopy. Unfortunately for the Millbank brothers it was very costly and as costs soared money ran out, their bankers withdrew support, and the business ended up being sold to the Caister Group. The Caister Group closed the Thorpe business in 1970 but retained Hearts Cruisers as a separate entity. At the end of the 1970 season the hire fleet was transferred to Potter Heigham and many were sold off. In 1985 the housing development at Thorpe Old Hall Close was built on the site of Ward's former boatyard.

Post war expansion.

Following the end of the war as the Broads holiday industry began to recover the role of the booking agencies became more important - acting as the middle man between holiday makers looking for a boat or holiday home and the many yards that hired out boats. Blakes Agency was already well

established but faced competition from Hoseasons. James Hoseason took over the business from his father in the 1950s and oversaw massive expansion. He introduced telephone booking, used television advertising and placed Hoeseasons' brochures in high street travel agents. Their high standard of service and extensive advertising meant all the major boatyards wanted to be in their brochure. In 1999 James Hoeseason, by now the recipient of an OBE, sold his business for twenty-two million pounds in a management buyout.

The boom in Broad's holidays brought about by increasing prosperity and facilitated by centralised booking arrangements increased demand for larger and more luxurious. Boats. New yards opened to meet the demand. In 1961, civil engineering contractors May Gurney, who owned a large area of marshland at Griffin Lane decided to let or sell some of it. For a boat yard the advantage of the location was obvious; it could be accessed without having to cross the river or the railway line when coming from the Yarmouth Road. The first yard to be established at Griffin Lane was R M Martins', who took a 25 year lease on a one and a half acre site. The land was built up with wherry loads of paper waste from Jarrolds print works, topped off by soil from the newly dug slipway and yacht basin. This was delivered by a local character, John Fox, who lived on the May Gurney dockyard with his family. Poplar trees were planted to soak up the water. Other yards soon followed in Griffin Lane including Classic Cruisers, Harmony Boats, Forster Marine, Brian Blatch and Ferras Marine. Ferras Marine, owned by Brian Thwaites, specialised in marine diesel engines and would later take over Barnes and Brinkcraft and became one of the Broad's biggest boatyards.

These new yards provided extra trade for local shops; groceries were ordered from Kirby's or the Riverside Stores and put on board ready for the holidaymakers when they arrived to pick up the boat. New jobs were created with large numbers of extra staff needed on Saturdays, which was changeover day, for cleaning and maintenance, providing valuable extra income for local families.

Another new yard was created on Bungalow Lane by Jack Jenner and his brother Bill, who returned to boat building and hire some years after the family business had been sold. They did various jobs after the war until they were ready to open their new yard by 1960; Jack having bought a plot in Bungalow Lane for less than £100 a few years earlier. Their yard was originally called Jenner Brothers but was changed to Maidencraft to avoid being confused with the Jenner business at the Town House.

They got into the Hoseasons catalogue in 1968 and from then on, the bookings improved considerably. The yard was sold with 15 boats in 1988 and it finally closed in 1998.

The Great Thorpe Railway Disaster 1874

Thorpe author Phyllida Scrivens, whose previous publications include books on Joe Stirling and the female Mayors and Lord Mayors of Norwich, has published a new book on the railway accident. The book was launched on the 147th anniversary of the crash and provides a detailed account of that night in September 1874 when two trains collided head-on on the single track line near the Rushcutters. The casualties included 28 deaths and over 70 injured – some severely – and was the worst railway crash up till then.

Phyllida's extensive research reveals the human stories behind the names and in describing the events of that evening, she tells a story fittingly subtitled 'Heroes, Victims and Survivors' of those who died, those who survived and those who came to help on that stormy night.

The book is published by Pen and Sword Books at £19.99 and is in local bookshops.

Copies signed by the author are available at authors rate of £18 plus £4 p&p by contacting Phyllida.scrivens@icloud.com

