

THORPE HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter - Autumn 2023

**Our next talk:
The Polish community in Norfolk and at St Andrew's
Hospital**

Adrian O'Dell

**Thursday 26th October 2023
St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane**

Beginning at 7.30pm.

Admission £4 per head – please bring exact money.

Update

Our programme of guided walks during the summer was well attended and featured the River Green during the late 19th century, the Thorpe woods, and the Red Cross hospitals in Thorpe during the first world war. We also took part in the Heritage Open Day event where Dale Wisemans' guided tour on the former Thorpe asylum proved very popular – so popular in fact that we have put on a separate tour to cope with the demand.

We are currently compiling next year's programme which will include four talks and a number of guided walks – details will be in the next newsletter.

Our last event of the year is a talk by Adrian O'Dell on the Polish community in Norfolk and their links with the former St Andrew's hospital. Many of you will be aware of the burial ground on the business park where patients from the hospital are buried.

Details of the talk are above – you are welcome to stay on afterwards for a cup of tea and a biscuit. Hope to see you on 26th October.

Our Last talk

'Thorpe Wood and the growth of the parish'

The subject of our April talk by local historian and author Frank Meeres was 'Thorpe Wood and the growth of the parish.' Frank began by explaining the origin of the name Thorpe. His opinion, which seems to be widely accepted, is that it is of Viking origin, meaning a small settlement adjacent to a larger one as in Thorpe-next-Norwich, as Thorpe St Andrew was formerly known. He went on to explain how, in the medieval period, the manor of Thorpe encompassed a large area stretching from Norwich eastwards, taking in what is now Thorpe Hamlet and Thorpe St Andrew.

Much of what is known of the early history of Thorpe is based on the Domesday Book - a record of the value of all landed property, and the resources in land, manpower, and livestock from which the value derived - compiled in 1087 at the behest of William the Conqueror. A secondary book, known as the little Domesday Book, provides considerable detail for Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. In it Thorpe Wood was described as being able to accommodate 1,200 pigs - a rudimentary device used to demonstrate its value and extent. It is hard to equate it to modern values but it indicates that at the time Thorpe Wood was the largest wood in Norfolk.

Illustrating his comments with images of historic maps Frank went on to explain how, in 1100 the wood covered most of what is now north Thorpe and the slopes running down to the river. A century later a charter divided Thorpe between the Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral and the Bishop of Norwich. The Dean and Chapter was awarded the land extending east from Norwich, including what is now Mousehold heath and Thorpe Hamlet, while the Bishop was awarded the current Thorpe St Andrew from where the manor house, Thorpe Hall, stood - including much woodland. It was a prize worth having; as it contained within it natural resources important to the local economy and put wealth into the Bishop's coffers. Wood was cut for timber to be used in building, bark from trees was used for tanning leather, pigs could forage there and it was also used as a warren where small animals were trapped for food and the Bishop and his friends could hunt deer. It was also a source of flint, providing building material for Norwich's churches and the Guildhall.

Over the centuries much of the woodland was chopped down and became heath land - particularly in north Thorpe which became an extension of Mousehold heath which, until 1800, stretched from Norwich almost to South Walsham. Before this, in 1535, as Henry VIII confiscated the monasteries and other religious property the Bishop of Norwich was forced to relinquish his Thorpe estates, including the wood, to the king. Later monarchs sold it off to their favourites such as the Paston family

It was a fascinating talk that was well received and Frank asked that his fee be donated to the East Anglian Air Ambulance, based at Norwich Airport..

Thorpe People – Thomas Vere (C1681-1766)

MP and owner of Thorpe Hall

Thomas Vere is commemorated in two different ways here in Thorpe. There is a road named after him and a plaque in the porch of the parish church. The elaborate style of the plaque, and the Latin text of the inscription on it, suggests someone of importance but what do we know about Thomas Vere?



He was born about 1681 (no birth or baptism record could be found) in Norwich, the son of George Vere, who was described as a merchant – usually a term used to indicate someone involved in the city's flourishing textile trade. Thomas followed his father's trade with some success. He has been

described both as a worsted weaver and as an exporter of worsted cloth but the likelihood is that he was one of the city's textile manufacturers – putting work out to weavers in their homes and probably having his own weaving sheds. He may also have had drying and dyeing rooms. His wealth and his standing in the city enabled Vere to enter politics, his first step was to get himself elected to the Norwich Town Council. Vere was a Whig and his party was in the ascendancy – both in Norwich and nationally. In 1713 he was elected as one of the city's two Sheriffs – taking on a leading role in the management of the council and sitting as a magistrate. In 1722 became an Alderman for the South Conisford ward that took in the southern end of King Street. The following year he stood for election as Mayor but was unsuccessful. But Thomas Vere was clearly a coming man, combining ambition with determination and having the wealth to pursue that ambition. He bided his time and in 1734 an unexpected opportunity arose. Waller Bacon, one of the city's two Whig Members of Parliament, died in the November. At the by-election held the following February Vere comfortably defeated his fellow Whig, Miles Branthwayte, to win the seat.

In Parliament Vere was a steadfast supporter of the prime minister Robert Walpole, his fellow Norfolk MP. He consistently proposed legislation that protected the weaving trade of his native city; he also instituted prosecutions against the wearing of fustian, which was not woven in Norwich, and which he claimed had been banned by Parliament. However, political support for him in his Norwich constituency was not secure; it was said of him that he had neglected opportunities of making himself acceptable. In 1739 he survived an attempt to oust him and was returned to Parliament in the election of 1741. But that was his swan song. The Whigs were in decline; Robert Walpole left office in 1742 and Vere left Parliament in 1747 – having failed to be renominated by his Whig colleagues in Norwich.

In contrast to his success in business and politics his personal life was overshadowed by the tragic deaths of his two wives. In 1708 he married Elizabeth Day at the church of St Michael at Plea in Norwich. They had a son in 1710 but Elizabeth died four years later. Three years after this Thomas married Frances Seaman at the church of St Mary in the Marsh. She died 12 years later to leave Thomas grieving yet again but with a teenage son to look after. He moved to Thorpe next Norwich in about 1733 where he bought Thorpe Hall. It was his home until his death. He later bought the Lordship of the Manor of Thorpe and the advowson (the right to appoint the clergyman to the parish church). Vere took an active interest in the village, supporting the church and providing charity for the poor. The Churchwarden's Accounts record that he donated 'plate for the service of Holy Communion,' and had 'erected a new altar-piece in the church.' But perhaps the most striking example of his generosity was in 1760 when he paid for a new schoolroom for the parish.

Thomas Vere died on 28th June 1766 aged 86 and was buried in the parish church where his son erected a memorial plaque. A century later when the new church was built the plaque was installed in the porch. Following his death his estate passed to his only child John, but his will was not without complications. In 1757 when he first made his will Thomas left all his property and possessions to John and his heirs, apart from bequests to the Bethel Hospital, to his daughter in law Mary, his servants, his godson Thomas Wiggett Chute and the poor of Thorpe. Unfortunately, John and Mary had no children then and it didn't seem likely they would have any. Thomas was clearly concerned about what would happen to his wealth after his death. So

in 1766 he amended his will by adding a codicil. In it he increased the amount he left to the Bethel Hospital from £100 to £1,000 and also increased the amount left to the Rector of Thorpe to £350 for distribution to the poor and others. These bequests were substantial and although it is difficult to compare monetary values then with now the bequest of £1,000 to the Bethel would be in the region of over £80,000 now. But the main change was a stipulation that should his son have no heirs, then Thomas's estate would still go to him but at John's death it would pass to Thomas Lobb Chute of South Pickenham who Thomas described as 'my much esteemed friend.' Lobb Chute was the father of Thomas's godson.



And that's what happened. John Vere lived at Thorpe Hall until his death in March 1790, Mary died in the autumn of that year and the Chute family became the owner of Thorpe Hall, the other Vere properties in Thorpe and the lordship of the manor. Both John and Mary were buried at the church in Thorpe.

Memories of Woodland Lodge

Many of you will be aware that Woodland Lodge on Pound Lane, featured in previous newsletters, was demolished last year. Samantha Podmore who is one of the History Group committee recalls below her memories of visiting the lodge that was latterly known as Beech Lodge



My recollections of the lodge house on Pound Lane:

As you entered the front door via several steps up you entered the hallway - a long corridor with rooms leading off left & right.

The first door on the left led to the front sitting room with the two windows to the left of the front door. The door on the right led down into what could have been the original dining room but was being used at the time (4-5yrs ago c2017/8) as an office the first & second windows to the right of the front door.

Further along the corridor on the left I vaguely recall 2-3 other door ways (I can't recall seeing the stairs); the next door on the right led down 2-3 steps into a large sunken kitchen with a stone tiled floor, large enough for an island and a 6-8 seater table, there was a door in the far left corner which led out to the back garden which looked on towards the Woodlands/Oasis buildings. Opposite the back door on the right of the kitchen was a door leading into another room - boot room/utility/store room the last window to the right of the front door.

The family, I believe, still live locally. Perhaps if they see these notes they may like to correct my memories or provide further images for the Thorpe History Group.

We are grateful to Samantha for sharing her memories with us.

Programme for 2023

There is a modest charge of £4 per head for the talk below..

Date	Title	Venue	Time
Thursday 26 th October	Talk: The Polish community in Norfolk and at St Andrew's Hospital'. Adrian O'Dell	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm

Booking is not necessary for the talk at the St Andrew's Centre – just turn up.

Getting in contact

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

You can find the Thorpe History Group on Facebook - Google Thorpe History Group to find information and photographs and on our website at <http://www.thorpe-history-group.org/>