

# THORPE HISTORY GROUP

## Newsletter - Spring 2024

Our next talk:

### Exploring Thorpe history at the Norfolk Record Office

Victoria Draper

Friday 12th April 7.30pm.  
St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

Admission £4 per head.

## Update

### Appeal for information

I am doing research into the history of Pine Banks and would be grateful for any information on the period when it was the Norwich Union Sports and Social Club. You can contact me at [spinney72@aol.com](mailto:spinney72@aol.com).

Nick Williams

### Forthcoming events

Events this summer include a talk by Dale Wiseman on 'Sister Monica and her time at Coonoor 1914-18', which includes a display of material related to the talk. This is an afternoon talk at 2pm on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May.

In July there is a guided walk of the Thorpe Woods and Plantations on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm.

In August there is a talk on 'The View from the River Green in the Late Nineteenth Century' by Joanna Barker. This is on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August at 2pm on the green.

Details of the above events and other activities are on the last page and on our website.

## **Thorpe People - Reginald Eric Pleasants (1913-1998)**

The PE Instructor from Thorpe who joined the German SS.

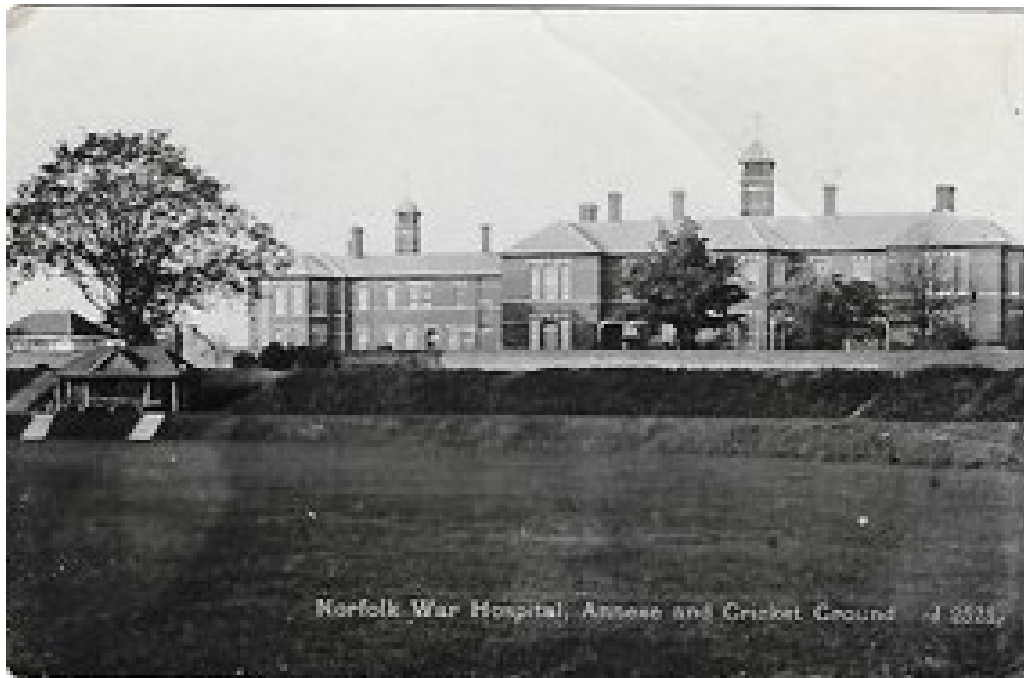


On the north site of the old St Andrews Hospital there used to be one of the finest cricket pitches in Norfolk. Today it is an overgrown field with only a few indicators of a fantastic sporting history of over 100 years. The latest story to appear is one about a World War Two conscientious objector/ SS member who on returning to these shores from Russia became a PE instructor for the patients who were here in the 1960s.

Reginald Eric Pleasants was born in the Norfolk village of Saxlingham Nethergate, the son of a gamekeeper. Pleasants attended school in Norwich to the age 14, then worked variously as trainee electrician, forester, boxer, wrestler and then showman weight-lifter in Britain and in continental Europe. In 1938 Eric, as he became known, was living on Mousehold Lane and the following year he married Eileen Hardingham. It appears that during his time in Norwich he was what was known as a petty thief. As war loomed Eric joined the Merchant Navy as a compromise between military call-up and his distaste for war. He was on the route between Jersey and Southampton and overstayed his welcome in Jersey and missed his boat. After being involved in a few illegal ventures he was caught in the Channel Islands which was now under the occupation of the Germans. This led to deportation, first to France, and then to a German internment camp.

Although Pleasant's was a prisoner it appears he was offered his part freedom by way of becoming a member of the Waffen SS. In his autobiography *Hitler's Bastard* Pleasants tells a weaved story of being in the British Free Corps and meeting the activists William Joyce and John Amery. His time in Germany appears to have been littered with trouble, and in August 1944 he demanded to be returned to his camp which resulted in a return to an SS Punishment camp where he spent his time either repairing roads or putting on boxing exhibitions for fellow inmates. Pleasants deserted from the SS camp in 1945 only to be captured by the Red Army and imprisoned in a Gulag Camp. He was repatriated to the Britain in 1954. No action was taken against him as it was thought that he had suffered enough.

Pleasants returned to his wife Eileen and the daughter who was born while he was in France. The family lived on Salhouse Road, Rackheath. On his return to Norfolk, he set himself up as a PE instructor and this is where he got the job at St Andrews Hospital teaching boxing and general fitness to those able and interested parties, including several Polish Airman who carried on at the hospital after WW2 through to the 1970s.



Pleasant's also taught Judo, boxing and wrestling in the Norwich area. He died in 1998 age 85. Another story of an interesting character who passed through the gates of St Andrews Hospital.

Dale Wiseman 2023

Sources:

*Hitler's Bastard* by Eric Pleasant's

I killed to live Eric Pleasants as told to Eddie Chapman

## Our last talk–Kett’s Heights

In February John and Vanessa Trevelyan gave a very well attended talk on Kett’s Heights, providing a history of the site and detailing the work that has been carried out by the Friends of Kett’s Heights since it was established in 2015.

Kett’s Heights, an open space owned by Norwich City Council, is one of Norwich’s best-kept secrets. It is steeply wooded and contains the remains of a medieval chapel, 19th century garden terraces and one of the three strategic viewpoints overlooking Norwich. It is from here where Robert Kett and his 10,000 followers besieged the city in 1549. Following transfer to the City Council there was substantial restoration work in the 1980s. Unfortunately, this was not maintained and Kett’s Heights became overgrown and unwelcoming again.

The oldest structure on the site is a wall that was once part of St Michael’s chapel, built by the Normans in compensation for a church in Tombland destroyed to make way for the cathedral. Around that wall now are remains of greenhouses built by the gas works in the 19th century when the site was developed as a garden with the terraces and steps that you follow today.

On the south side, overlooking where the gasworks were, the slopes are particularly steep as this area was quarried for chalk and flint.

In 1549 this was where Robert Kett and his 10,000 followers gathered to lay siege to the city, hence today’s name.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the chapel ruins, known as “Kett’s Castle”, were a popular destination and the subject of several works of art.

The site underwent much restoration in the 1980s after ownership transferred to the City Council. But subsequent maintenance has been largely reactive, which is why the site became rather overgrown.

Work by community payback teams in winter 2015/16 started the clearance, which is now ongoing.

You can find out more about Kett’s Heights and how you visit it on the Friend’s website [www.kettsheights.co.uk](http://www.kettsheights.co.uk)

### 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](mailto: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/>

## Auxiliary Hospitals in Thorpe 1914-18

The British Red Cross played an important role in setting up auxiliary hospitals and convalescent homes for wounded servicemen during the First World War. Preparations were in place well before the declaration of war and many large family homes were identified as possibly becoming auxiliary hospitals. These places of rest and recuperation became a critical part of a much larger provision for the walking wounded returning from France and Belgium.

In Thorpe the first point of contact for the injured men was the Norfolk War Hospital, at the County Asylum, where any major treatment or surgery would have taken place. As soon as possible those men who were on the road to recovery were then dispatched to the next level of care. This was where the auxiliary facilities played a vital role in patient recovery.

In total there were over three thousand of these auxiliary hospitals, which were administered under county directors. The War Office fixed and paid grants to hospitals for every patient they looked after, and the grant amount increased annually during the war. At the highest rate, the government paid £1 4s 6d per week, or £63 14s 0d per annum, for each patient. This covered full hospital treatment, food, and other costs.

The first auxiliary hospital in Thorpe was 'Larchwood' followed shortly by 'Sunnyhill,' both large domestic houses on Yarmouth Road. These hospitals would have been run by a Commandant who oversaw the hospital except for the medical and nursing services which would have been supervised by a matron. Local people would have been very involved including Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD), that were trained in first aid and home nursing. Records show that these two hospitals treated over 1600 patients. The Thorpe VAD was based at the Chapel Hall in Chapel Lane (pictured below) under the supervision of Dr Davidson and Dr Barradell.



The third hospital in Thorpe was another large detached house 'Coonor' a little further east of the other two on the Yarmouth Road. This was the closest of the three to the War Hospital. The Commandant here was Maud Supple, the wife of Rathbourne Supple, the Rector of Thorpe. The Matron here was a lady from Winchester Emma Butterworth who was known as Sister Monica. Sister Monica stayed for the full four years until Coonor was closed in the autumn of 1918.

Thorpe History Group will be commemorating the Red Cross on 30 May 2024 at the St Andrews Centre, with a special display of artefacts connected to the Red Cross in Thorpe 1914-1945 alongside a talk titled 'Sister Monica and her time at Thorpe.'

## The Maud Wherry Trust



April 2024 marks the start of the celebrations of the 125th anniversary of the historic Norfolk trading wherry, Maud, being built and the 25th anniversary of her successful renovation and re-commission. Maud is a very special wherry, the last of the typical clinker-built trading wherries to sail on the Norfolk Broads and Rivers.

The Wherry Maud Trust are holding a free talk and exhibition of photographs, in conjunction with Upton History Group, at Upton Village Hall on 20th April at 7.30pm. Maud will be available for viewing (weather dependent) in the afternoon from 2.30 to 4.30, at the river end of Upton Dyke.

# Programme for 2024

There is a charge of £4 per head for each event, **except** the walk on 6<sup>th</sup> September which is part of the Heritage Open Day.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Time</b>
Friday 12 <sup>th</sup> April	Talk: 'Exploring Thorpe St Andrew history at the Norfolk Record Office', Victoria Draper	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> May	Talk: 'Sister Monica and her time at Coonor 1914-1918' Dale Wiseman There will also be an exhibition of related material.	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	2.00pm
Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> July	Guided walk: 'Thorpe Woods and Plantations.' Nick Williams	Woodlands Crescent <b>Booking necessary</b>	2.00pm
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> August	Talk: 'The view from the River Green in the late 19 <sup>th</sup> century' Joanna Barker	River Green <b>Booking necessary</b>	2.00pm
Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> September	Guided walk: 'Dr Hills, the Thorpe Asylum and Beyond 1861-1915' Dale Wiseman	Northside <b>Booking needed via the Heritage Open Day website when bookings open.</b>	10.00am
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> September	Talk: 'The Thorpe Rail Disaster of 1874 -150 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary' Phyllida Scrivens	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30 pm
Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup> September	Guided walk: 'The Thorpe Rail Disaster 1874'	Meet at cemetery on Yarmouth Road <b>Booking necessary</b>	11.00 am and 2.00 pm
Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> October	Talk: 'John Harvey and Thorpe Lodge' Nick Williams	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	7.30pm

**Booking is not needed for talks at the St Andrew's Centre – just turn up.**

**Booking is needed on the guided walks as numbers are limited. Book by contacting Nick Williams. Payment will be collected on the day.**