

# THORPE HISTORY GROUP

## Newsletter - Autumn 2024

Our next talk:

**John Harvey and Thorpe Lodge  
Nick Williams**

**Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 7.30pm.  
St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane**

**Admission £4 per head.**

### Update

It has been a busy summer and autumn. The guided walks proved very popular – especially Dale Wiseman's tour of the former County Asylum site during the Heritage Open Day event.

There were two river trips that focused on the historical sites visible from a boat but perhaps not from land. Unfortunately, the boat can only hold a limited number so we were not able to accommodate all of those who wanted to take part.

During September, as part of the commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thorpe Railway Disaster, we put on an additional talk by local author Phyllida Scrivens whose book on the crash will be well known to many. We also put on a display covering the disaster at the parish church: we are most grateful to Father James for his support. There were also two guided walks covering sites associated with the crash that again were well attended.

Our final event of the year is a talk by Nick Williams on 'John Harvey and Thorpe Lodge'. This will be on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October at the St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane.

We are currently finalising our programme of events for next year. Details will be circulated by email and will be on our website early in the new year.

## Family memories of St Andrew's Hospital

These family memories and the photographs have been provided by Sue Tibbenham and paint a vivid picture of work at the former St Andrew's Mental Hospital during the First World War and after. We are grateful to Sue for allowing us to use them.

I have some family memories revolving round St Andrew's Hospital as my grandfather, father and uncle worked there,. My mother's name was Alice Clarke (née Bussey) I am her daughter Susan Tibbenham. Her brother was Henry Bussey (junior) who gives a good account of life between the wars in Thorpe St Andrew and the prevalent poverty, on your website. Her younger brother, William, also worked there.

I have in my possession two postcard images taken during the First World War of Norfolk County Asylum's farm workers. One is of Henry Bussey, my grandfather, who is driving two horses and a cart. The other is of him and hospital farm workers ploughing. (Henry third from left) The peaked cap is recognisable as part of the hospital uniform. I have no idea why these were taken, but by a process of elimination it must have been during the First World War. If you squint hard enough the, then tall, spire of Thorpe church can be seen in the background.



During the war Alice Bussey's father, Henry Bussey, could not enlist due to the loss of two fingers on his right hand due to an agricultural accident, so took work at the Great Hospital in the place of another military enlistee. Henry was very good with horses and this was probably due to having to sleep with them in nearby stables in his youth, along with his brothers, due to appalling overcrowding at home in Great Plumstead. He was one of nine siblings in a two up and two down cottage. His main job was transporting coal by horse and cart from Whitlingham Station to St Andrews, then a War Hospital, to fuel

the steam generator to make electricity. The hospital was locally known as 'The Building' as it looked so grim and foreboding. The tall chimney belched black smoke day and night. At this time screams could be heard on the north side from shell shocked patients - casualties of the war.

The Bussey family lived in a semi detached tied cottage (still there) immediately east of the railway bridge and owned by the hospital. It was here Alice came into the world in 1916, all two and a half pounds of her, followed by her two brothers, Henry and William.



Alice's first memory is of sitting under the kitchen table knowing something dreadful was happening.....the soldier had returned from the war and wanted his job back so Henry was out of a job and the family a home. The bailiffs came and all their possessions were stacked under the railway arch and the family split up and spread throughout Thorpe amongst kind friends and relatives. William Bussey, Alice's younger brother, went on to do clerical work at the hospital.

My father was Percy Clarke who worked as a Mental Nurse and later, Charge Nurse from the mid 1930s until 1966, at North side. My mother said whenever a physical job needed doing at the hospital, my father was always summoned, probably because he was quite a large framed man. I have heard from an ex patient that he was excellent at his job, but it was no bed of roses working there during the Second World War. He worked nights for three years. When a bombing raid came, as there were no air raid shelters for patients, it was a case of being locked in with a ward of ninety plus patients with one young and one elderly assistant and hoping for the best. There were no tranquillisers to subdue patients then and they were really mad. I remember dad showed me the padded cell and straight jacket when he left my birthday present at work and we had to go back and get it. There was an occasion in the fifties, when he was stabbed by a patient, also he had his foot crushed also by a patient. Minimal compensation, no counselling then. My mother said he was never the same afterwards. Shift work had taken its toll on him, contributing to his strokes and decline in health. Towards the end, when my father knew he was dying, as a favour even though he was not mentally ill, he requested to go and be nursed by those work colleagues he knew and trusted, and so it was, in 1981, he passed away at St Andrew's.

## Recent talks

There have been three talks since our last newsletter – one in April on the facilities and information available at the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) and the other in May on Sister Monica, a nurse at one of the war time hospitals in Thorpe. We also had the talk by Phyllida Scrivens referred to above.

Exploring Thorpe history at the Norfolk Record Office was given by Karen Gaffney, an archivist there. She described the archives available, which include over ten million documents, the oldest of which dates from 1090. Of interest to local historians and genealogists are the parish registers dating from 1642, marriage licence bonds, records of the poor and probate records of wills and inventories. There are also tithe, enclosure, estate and OS maps and aerial photos from the First World war and later. Of interest to those seeking information on their house are building control plans and sales particulars that can be used in conjunction with tithe and estate maps. There are also manorial records and records deposited by a number of local businesses. Further details are available on the online catalogue NROCAT and the Record Office also run courses for beginners and for more experienced researchers – details can be found on their website. All in all a most enjoyable and interesting talk. We are most grateful to Karen.

In May Dale Wiseman gave a talk on 'Sister Monica and her time at Coonoor' based upon extensive material donated to the Thorpe History Group. The talk painted a picture of her time there as a nurse during the First World War dealing with military casualties. It was accompanied by some very emotive illustrations of the casualties ( some of the nurses are pictured below). After Dale's talk there was an opportunity to look at some of the material relating to Sister Monica and Coonoor that had been put together by Dale and Samatha Podmore.



## Pine Banks – A Personal reflection

Mike Denham has kindly contributed his reflections on his enjoyable times at Pine Banks during his time at Norwich Union. We are grateful to Mike for permitting us to include them in this newsletter.

'When I joined the Norwich Union as a 16-year-old in 1957, I had no idea that my lodgings on Harvey Lane were a short walk from the company's social club and sports ground. What a piece of luck!

The social club, called Pinebanks (off White Farm Lane), quickly became a second home to me and the sports ground, where I was soon playing hockey and tennis and in time umpiring cricket, became as equally important in my life.

A few years later when, by now living elsewhere in Thorpe, I was caught by the local policeman riding my bicycle down White Farm Lane without lights. I defended myself at Blofield Magistrates Court and was given an absolute discharge on payment of four shillings costs!

Pinebanks (below) was an imposing looking private house owned by the Jarrold family, with its nearby tower called The Folly, and bought by the Norwich Union in the late 1940s.



In 1957 it was still largely unaltered with its large fireplace and imposing panelled staircase its most impressive internal features. By now, a bar had been added and part of the house occupied by a member of staff whose role included ensuring the security of the premises.

Upstairs consisted of a large television room, table tennis and snooker rooms and the women's toilets.

Downstairs, in addition to the reception room and bar, were the men's toilets, a darts room and a large lounge/meeting room looking out on to the gardens and The Folly which was strictly out of bounds due to safety concerns.

The club was particularly popular with the younger members and where many lifelong partnerships and friendships were forged.

Over the years, the facilities were further improved with the addition of a badminton/table tennis hall, a conference/entertainment hall, a squash court and an outdoor bowling green. These additional facilities contributed to a big increase in the use of the club.

The club was used for squash, table tennis, badminton, snooker, darts and chess matches. It was also used for dances, parties, conferences, pre-retirement courses and a host of other purposes.

Meanwhile, the adjoining and inextricably linked outdoor sports facilities (called School Lane after the lane leading down to Thorpe Road) included hockey, football and rugby pitches together with a cricket ground, hard and grass tennis courts and two pavilions. Later an artificial grass hockey pitch was added. These facilities, including the bowling green, were maintained to a high standard by a team of groundsmen. The head groundsman lived in a house in the grounds. After matches we more often than not headed to Pinebanks on our way home.

The various Norwich Union indoor and outdoor sports clubs, comprising the Norwich Union Athletic Association, played in regional and local leagues. The Association was run by a small full-time staff.

Norwich Union later merged with other companies to become Aviva in 2002 and very sadly the decision was made in 2008 to close down the indoor and outdoor facilities; something unthinkable way back in 1957.'

Mike Denham



# Programme for 2024

There is a charge of £4 per head for each event..

Date	Title	Venue	Time
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.**

## 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/>