

THORPE HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter - Spring 2026

**Our next talk:
Friday 10th April 7.30pm
The Geology and Landscape of Thorpe
Tim Holt-Wilson
St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane
Admission £4 per head.**

Update

Next talk

Our next talk – details above – will be by Tim Holt-Wilson. Tim works freelance in the field of environmental heritage interpretation and information management, including museums.

He is active in geological conservation in Norfolk, and has authored books and magazine articles about geology and landforms in East Anglia, notably 'Norfolk's Earth Heritage' (2010), 'Tides of Change – Two million years on the Suffolk Coast' (2014) and 'The Brecks Earth Heritage Trail' (2017).

He is a member of the Quaternary Research Association and the Geological Society of Norfolk and is passionate about communicating the value of the Earth as a record of environmental history.

The talk is a departure from our usual programme but it should be most interesting and provide an understanding of what's under our feet and how the landscape we see today has developed,

Later this year we will be putting together our programme of talks for next year. If you have any suggestions or have heard a talk that impressed you please get in touch. Any suggestions for talks should have a Thorpe bias.

Guided walks

We still have spaces on our guided walks this summer. As numbers are limited, booking is necessary. For details see our programme below.

Thorpe People – Charles Batley of Thorpe Grove



Born in the autumn of 1811, Charles Batley was the second son, and the fourth child, of Thomas and Susannah Batley of Thorpe Grove (now known as High House) pictured above.

His father was a wealthy timber merchant who had bought the Thorpe Grove estate a decade earlier. He also owned river side property at Carrow Abbey, where his business was based.

Charles followed his father into the timber trade. By the age of 25 he was trading from Thorpe, with his younger brother George. He was also married, having married Ann Riches, the daughter of a Norwich brewer, in 1835. But within two years he was in prison for debt. The public notice of his petition requesting release paints a picture of his position. It described him as having been a farmer in Thorpe, then a timber merchant at Great Yarmouth but 'in reality being only an agent' for a London firm of timber merchants. He subsequently lived at Bracondale in Norwich prior to being described as 'out of work'.

His father Thomas died in 1840, but left nothing to Charles. Perhaps he felt he had helped his son enough when he was alive. The relationship between Thomas and two of his sons, Richard and Charles, had been strained. In 1833 Thomas had inserted a notice in local newspapers stating 'Mr Thomas Batley of Thorpe Grove will not be accountable for any debts his sons may contract from the date hereof.' Richard, like his brother, had also been imprisoned for debt. Charles doesn't seem to have been deterred by his imprisonment.

By 1841 he was living at Carrow – he had a young son named Thomas - and again trading in timber. Carrow Abbey was still the base of the family business and where Thomas had built several sea going ships. His stay proved short lived. He and Ann led a rather nomadic life over the next few years. In 1848 they were living in Great Yarmouth in a rented cottage on North Quay. They subsequently spent some time in London where two more sons were born – Charles in 1849 and George in 1854 – before returning to Great Yarmouth.

In 1861 the family was lodging in a house on Nelson Road owned by a brewery manager. Charles still described himself as a timber merchant. But not a successful one. Later that decade the family returned to Norwich in what appeared to be straightened circumstances. For the next two decades they lived in a court off Wensum Street and Charles worked as a bill poster and distributor until his death in May 1882. Ann survived him until June 1897.

Our Last Talk

Our most recent talk was on the Thorpe Players where the speaker was David Watson, aided by his colleague Glenn Hewitt. David touched on the history of the Players before explaining the very detailed preparations that went into putting on a production.

The Players emerged from the Thorpe Occasional Players which began in 1972 as a church drama group that performed acts of worship in the church. They then began to put on a number of secular events each year. They now put on three productions each year and are a thriving group with a very active membership.

David explained in some detail how they went about mounting a play, from obtaining the licence, the appointment of a director – usually two years before the play is put on – and the process of what he called ‘Creating the Illusion’. Part of the preparation is the design and building of the set which needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the various scene changes which have to be carried out quickly and smoothly. David and Glenn provided a fascinating insight into the complex world of amateur dramatics and its long history here in Thorpe.

The first burial

I recently came across details of the first burial at the Yarmouth Road cemetery that took place in 1859. It was the sad death of a young boy and the report in the local press reads as follows:

‘Fatal Accident. —Some children were playing on Monday evening near the Thorpe railway station, when one of them, a little boy named Edgar Charles Fletcher, climbed over fence, and fell into reservoir for supplying the locomotives with water. The other children gave the alarm, but it was nearly a quarter of an hour before the boy was taken out, and then, of course, life was quite extinct. inquest was held on Tuesday before Mr. Wilde, coroner, when verdict accidentally drowned” returned’.

Polish Inhabitants of East Anglia

Phil Kirby, one of our supporters, has written an extensive research paper on the Polish inhabitants of East Anglia. It contains fascinating details, including some who lived locally – including the Haldinstein family of Thorpe Lodge. You can find it on the British Jewry website -<https://british-jewry.org.uk>

On the front page of the website, click on ‘new databases now here’. This link will open up on 3 separate data bases, one of which is the Polish research.

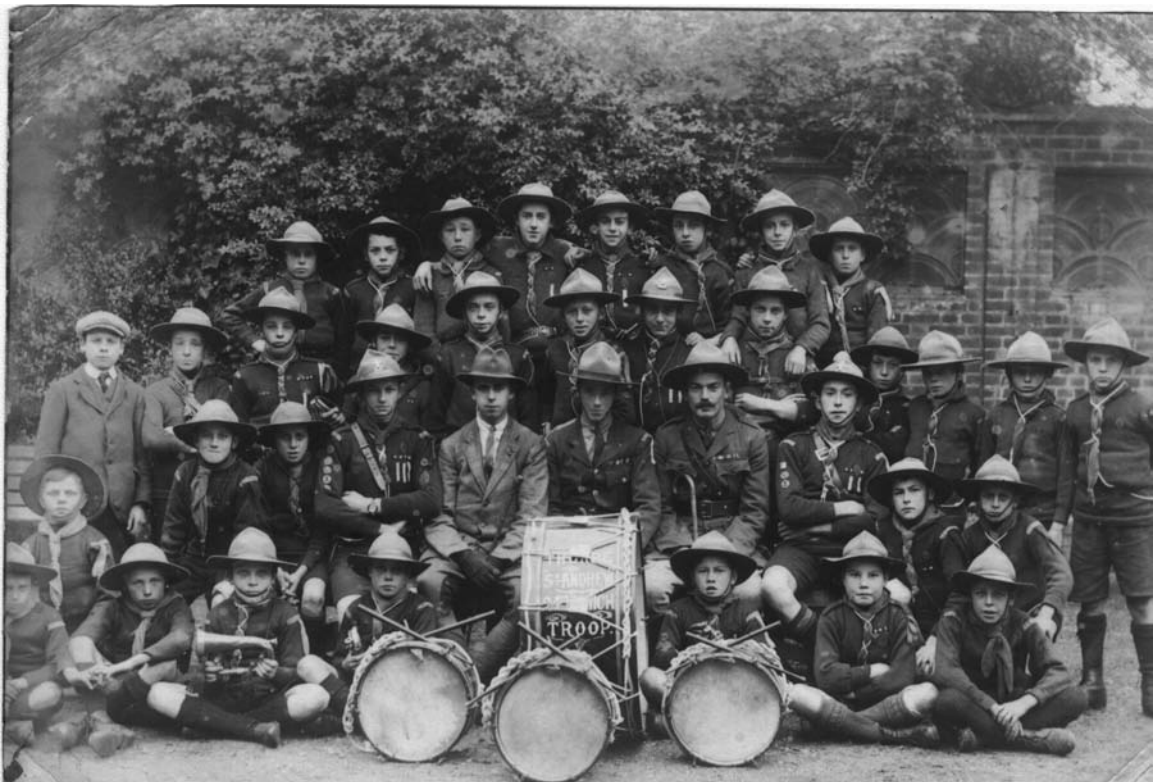
We are most grateful to Phil for sharing this with us.

Thorpe Scouts

The photograph below has been kindly provided by Mike Underwood and shows a Thorpe St Andrew, 24th Norwich Scout Troop taken between 1916-19.

Mike’s maternal grandparents were brought up in Thorpe and had strong links with the area. He was delighted to find reference to them in one of the articles on our website.

We are very grateful to Mike for permitting us to include the photograph. The background appears to be the wall at High House – what do others think?



Thorpe History Group Accounts January 2025 - December 2025

		Income	Expenditure
1/1/2025	Balance brought forward	£880.91	
	Insurance		£77.80
	Hire of hall		£176.00
	Fees to speakers		£100.00
	Charge for stall at fairs		£15.00
	Floor cable cover		£22.00
	Gowise Print		£264.00
	Boat trip	£27.00	
	Walks	£164.50	
	Income from talks	£734.00	
	Sales of Thorpe People book	£10.00	
	Other donations	£25.00	
	Refreshments		£12.08
	Donations for tea and coffee	£90.34	
	Christmas tree (for Festival)		£10.99
	Water		£2.99
	Sale of books donated to group	£156.07	
	Wreath		£20.00
	Total Income 2025	£1,206.91	
	Total Income (Including balance brought forward)	£2,087.82	
	Total Expenditure 2025		£700.86
	Balance at 31st December 2025	£1,386.96	
	Joana Barker - Treasurer		

Programme for 2026

Friday 10th April 7.30pm

Talk: The Geology and Landscape of Thorpe

Tim Holt-Wilson

Venue: St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

Booking not required

Friday 22nd May 7.30pm

Talk: Lakenham to Lowry: The Life and Times of John Brighton, Dale Wiseman

Venue: St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

Booking not required

Saturday 20th June 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Archive and film day

A programme of historic films featuring aspects of life in Thorpe and material from the Janet Smith Archive on display, plus tea and cakes.

Free admission.

Venue: St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

Booking not required

Sunday 28th June 2.00pm

Talk: The View from the River Green in the late 19th Century

Joanna Barker

Venue: River Green

Booking required

Sunday 26th July 2.00pm

Walk: Pubs of the Yarmouth Road

Nick Williams

Venue: Outside the Town House

Booking required

Sunday 16th August 2.00pm

Walk: 100 Years of Primrose Crescent

Dale Wiseman

Venue: Cemetery gates, Yarmouth Road

Booking required

Friday 11th September 10.30am

Walk: Chapel Lane

Joanna Barker

Venue: River Green, Yarmouth Road

Booking required via Heritage Open Day website

Friday 23rd October 7.30pm

Talk: Shipwrecks, Sharks and Survival: Harold Higgs and the sinking of the Carnarvon Castle

Helen Murray

Venue: St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

Booking not required

Please note

There is a charge of £4 per head for our events, except the Archive and Film Day on 20th June and the Heritage Open Day walk on Friday 11th September which are free.

Booking is required for **some** events as numbers are limited see programme. Booking can be made by email to Nick Williams at spinney72@aol.com.

Booking for the guided walk on 11th September can be done via the Heritage Open Day website when bookings open in August.

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/>