



IN TIME

Ely U3A History Group Members' Newsletter



Edition 22

27 August 2020

Welcome to Edition 22 of IN TIME. We start the newsletter with a report on the successful walk around Castle Acre which a number of members enjoyed in early August, while our varied topics this week include a tennis player from 100 years ago, a fascinating article on Ramsey Heights, some tales from old inns and an earthquake in Portugal that affected parts of England

Please keep on writing for the newsletter. Send your articles to Maggie Haverson (email address supplied in the email containing this newsletter).

Castle Acre Historic Walk – Peter Lee



The History Group had planned this walk, which was in aid of the Friends of Castle Acre Church, long before the Covid-19 lockdown. After an email exchange with our guide Anthony Wright, the walk went ahead on 6th August with reduced numbers, ‘social distancing’ etc. We met at the parish church of St James The Great, where he showed us one of the giant ditches and banks dug to form the fortified village near where the Peddars Way crossed the River Nar. This was on the Roman road between Colchester and Brancaster, and the villages of Castle (or East) Acre, West Acre and South Acre share the Saxon word ‘acra’ for a stream or running water, referring to the Nar, which although not large still flows freely.



Anthony arranged for us to visit the church was unusually light and airy, with the 15th century paintings of the lower rood screen and around the wine-glass pulpit still intact. The picture is of St Augustine holding a service book, on the north side of the pulpit. Our guide and Sarah, the church warden, raised the extraordinary cover to the hexagonal font using the original 15th century mechanism for us.



After that we used a shortcut across a sunken lane and through a hedge to access the vast precinct of the 11th century Clunaic priory founded by William de Warenne soon after the Conquest. Anthony is particularly interested in the construction of the buildings in Castle Acre and the use of materials, mostly local flint in lime mortar, occasionally clunch on interior walls, and limestone and later, brick hauled up the Nar, in the arches and quoins (corners). We saw an early use of brick in the three-centred arches of the priory gatehouse built shortly before the priory’s suppression in 1537, after which it passed to the Sir Edward Coke and the Holkham Estate which owns much of Castle Acre today.



Brick and slate became more generally used in Castle Acre after the railways reached nearby Swaffham in 1869, and we paused to admire Anthony's own house on the green opposite The Ostrich Inn, where most of us later had lunch. Before that we visited the huge earthworks and remains of the castle on the south-eastern corner of the village, we passed through the town's bailey gate and ended our tour in the beautiful private gardens of the Tudor Lodgings perched right on the edge of the Norman ramparts.

The weather was perfect and we all had a wonderful day out. The Tudor House gardens and the church are definitely worth a second visit, and it is only a short drive away.

[A tennis player from 100 years ago - Cassandra Rogers](#)



This headline appeared in The Daily Express, 4 October 1993.....'Neighbours stunned as Nancy, 97, leaves £8million'

The article goes on to say that '*a reclusive spinster has shocked neighbours by leaving more than £8m in her will. Nancy Platt died seven months ago aged 97. But the full extent of her wealth emerged only yesterday. Nancy, who played tennis at Wimbledon in the 1920s spent the last 20 years of her life a virtual recluse*'.

Nancy Quenelda Platt played tennis throughout the UK and the French Riviera in the 1920s and early 1930s. She played the Woman's no 1 and very popular French woman Suzanne Lenglen (considered to be among the best 5 players of all time) several times both in singles and doubles

In her will she left £250,000 to charity and an £80,000 cottage to her gardener and handyman Derek Chivers and his wife Diane, who acted as housekeeper. The remainder goes to a relative. Nancy, who came from a Lancashire engineering family, made her fortune when the business was taken over.

She moved to Harpsden Hill House set in 100 acres, with lifelong companion Miss Radcliffe, who she often referred to as her sister, 50 years ago. But the two friends would often return north, arriving at Miss Platt,s favourite Lake District church in the village of Witherslack, chauffeured by Mr. Chivers.

Her solicitor Martin Riley said last night "She was a wonderfully kind lady who gave lots of gifts to charity, always anonymously". Asked why she never married, Mr. Riley said he suspected she was "a victim of the first world war".

Ramsey Heights, Fenland Chronicle and me - Helen Moore

As a child growing up in Worcester, a book about medieval Worcester captured my imagination. I must have bored my family as we were out shopping with phrases like “The Butts – that’s where they practised archery”. It sparked an interest in social history which all but disappeared at grammar school as I veered towards science. But then sometime in the 1980s I attended an event at the Wildlife Trust’s Countryside Classroom at Ramsey Heights with Jenny, the Wildlife Trust’s education manager. When



The firing trenches – the remains of the kiln.



The Wildlife Trust’s Countryside Classroom

I questioned her about the building, she suggested I read *Fenland Chronicle* by Sybil Marshall. You may wonder why Jenny suggested I read what is essentially a social history? To fill in some detail here- the building was intriguing – a large room with arches at one end leading to a series of small walls with channels in between. It had been a brickworks up until about 1920 and then over the years become derelict until the Wildlife Trust bought it and renovated it in the 1970s. The arches and small walls were the remains of the kiln and the classroom had been the hopper or fuel store. *Fenland Chronicle* with the by-line “Recollections of William Henry and Kate Mary Edwards collected and edited by their daughter” was about life in Ramsey Heights during the heyday of the brickworks. At that stage I didn’t know how much this place and this book would become part of my life!

In 2000 I was appointed to the post of Education Officer at Ramsey Heights. The job entailed leading school visits to enthuse children about wildlife, helping the volunteer warden maintain the site (and cleaning the toilets) – quite a change from teaching Biology! I re-read *Fenland Chronicle* which was a mine of information including detailed information about digging clay, moulding bricks and tiles, and loading and firing the kiln. The fuel used was mainly turves (the fenland name for blocks of peat) dug locally and again the book gives a detailed account. I decided to find out more about the brickworks and the people who lived there and entered new territory: archives in Huntingdon, Victoria County History and then various directories online as well as old maps. One map showed a bridge across the Catchwater. I assumed it was a plank until I found a photograph of the bridge in “Huntingdonshire in old postcards”. The location was confirmed when a rookie digger driver clearing the Catchwater uncovered the brick foundations!

I also contacted Sybil Marshall and spent an afternoon listening to her at her home in Ely talking about her childhood on Lotting Fen and other aspects of life in Ramsey Heights. She told me that she knew the brickworks as her best friend was the daughter of Mr Summers, the brickyard owner, and that she was often there. One snippet of the conversation went “Every cottage had white poppies. **You do know about white poppies?**”

Following a course about developing and leading “story walks” my colleague, Judith and I organised an event with a Victorian theme. I became Mrs Summers, the wife of the brickyard owner, and invited visitors to join me on a walk to find out about the brickworks. Part way round we met the wife of one of the workers (Judith) who told us about her cottage and its garden and offered fruit she’d just picked. We then continued around in conversation about life at the brickworks including digging clay, the fuel being brought in by boat along the Catchwater and how the road was impassable when it

rained, all based on Fenland Chronicle. The afternoon concluded with games including bowling and hoopla and tea in china cups with cake.

On two occasions I was pleased to meet descendants of previous brickyard owners. The first arrived at an event with a photograph of one of the first owners, Mr Beazley Summers, who he had discovered was his great, great, great, great grandfather. The second was the grandson of Fred Summers, the last owner. He remembered going with his grandfather to collect rent from the four or five cottages on the site after the brickyard had closed. I only knew of 2 cottages where the foundations and garden were visible so I studied old plans, asked an elderly resident and then looked for signs of habitation and sure enough there were mature apple trees and a few bricks where other cottages had stood, one of which had been home to one of Sybil Marshall's uncles.

I was an education officer at Ramsey Heights for 13 years. For the first 8 years I was running school visits and community events with the help of volunteers and colleagues based at other centres. Things changed in 2007-8 when the Great fen Project obtained funding to tastefully renovate the classroom, while retaining the remnants of the kiln, so it could be used all year and shortly afterwards to employ more staff and I became part of a team using the history and wildlife of the Great Fen, including Ramsey Heights in school visits and public engagement. Since my retirement it is still part of my life visiting the Great Fen when I can and helping with wildlife surveys and events.

You can find out more about Sybil Marshall at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sybil_Marshall and the Great Fen at <https://www.greatfen.org.uk/>

INN TIME - Wendy Rolph

Seen through romantic eyes the traditional inn is a sanctuary of the weary, the lonely and the hungry. Seen through more prosaic eyes the inn could be a dark and squalid tavern, the resort of smugglers and highwaymen, where the price of welcome was gold and death the penalty of a word out of season.

For both types their memories linger in local anecdote and time has woven round them a halo of colour and story. The stories that can be told of inns are legion here are just a few



THE ROEBUCK INN at Stevenage claims that Dick Turpin on his lunch famous ride from London to York ate his there, or stopped off for a brief respite for his horse. The highwayman, riding with the very best reason in the world - the safety of his neck - covered the distance of 200 miles in a little under twelve hours. If he had really stopped at every inn that makes such claims then he wouldn't have had time to ride anywhere.

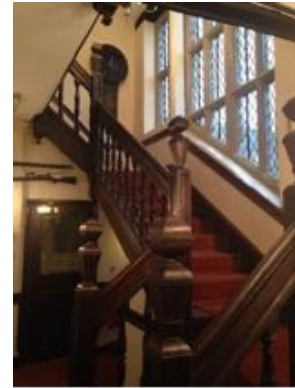
THE PILCHARD INN on Burgh Island, South Devon was the headquarters of Tom Crocker a smuggler and pirate. Legend has it that up to the second world war his own skull and crossbones flag, said to be the only genuine pirate's emblem in existence was on display behind the bar.





THE OLD GEORGE SALISBURY The diarist Samuel Pepys booked in for a night where he "*lay in a silke bed and had very good diet*". But he found the bill so exorbitant that he became "*mad*" and had a row with the landlady and moved to a cheaper inn the next morning. In 1645 Oliver Cromwell stopped off at the Old George for bed and breakfast on his way to joining the army and it also crops up in Charles's Dickens's novel "*Martin Chuzzlewit*".

THE TALBOT HOTEL The staircase at the Talbot Hotel in Oundle is thought to have come from Fotheringhay castle, along with the stonework. It's said that Mary walked to her execution down those stairs and she left her mark by gripping on the staircase to keep her balance. Her ring, in the shape of a crown, apparently left an indentation in the shape of a crown on the staircase. Mary's ghost has apparently been seen on numerous occasions walking down the staircase. Furniture has also been moved around the hotel and the picture of Mary's execution has been known to suddenly jump off the wall on which it hangs. A large amount of paranormal activity has also been felt in the room named after Mary, with one guest in particular feeling a clammy hand pushing them against the bed



THE SPEECH HOUSE in the Forest of Dean was originally built as a hunting lodge for King Charles II in 1669. It was here that Verderers court, for the protection of vert and venison was held. In the days preceding the passing of offences to the magistrate's courts, The Verderers had powers to deal with misdemeanours in the Forest. They could even sentence people to hanging on the gibbet located outside the building. In

addition, they could order the transportation of offenders and floggings, the whipping beam still exists in one of the bedrooms.

THE ANGEL at Grantham has been a hostelry since 1203 making it one of the oldest inns in the world. In 1706 the then land lord Michael Soloman, a man with a quirky sense of humour, left in his will a "*rent charge of 40 shillings per annum to be paid out of ye Angelle Inne that every Michaelmas Day some able divine preach a sermon wherein the subject shall be chiefly against drunkenness*"



Lisbon Earthquake causes an English Tsunami. – Heather Carruth

On November 1, 1755, one of Europe's most powerful earthquakes struck Lisbon, Portugal. The earthquake and resulting tsunamis took the lives of an estimated 100,000 people worldwide, making it one of the most deadly natural disasters in history.



The Quake was caused by a slip of the Azores-Gibraltar transform fault and struck at approximately 10am on the catholic feast day of All Saints', when an estimated 200,000 people were gathered in local churches for mass. As part of the celebrations, churchgoers had lit candles and when it struck, tearing down structures that weren't designed to withstand the tremors; the candles started fires that raged for 5 days, further compounding the destruction.

Those who survived the crashing rubble ran down to the relatively open areas of the docklands, near the Tagus River. As a tsunami prepared to hit the coast, the water of the river retreated, revealing sunken shipwrecks full of treasures. The excited Lisboaetas ran towards the water to plunder the wrecks, wading in the shallow river. Suddenly, a nine-meter-high wave pummelled its way through the Tagus estuary, then continued up river, flooding all low-lying areas. During the following three hours two additional tsunamis hit Lisbon.

Shocks from the earthquake were felt throughout Europe, Finland, North Africa, even in Greenland. Tsunamis as tall as 20 metres swept along the coast of North Africa, and struck across the Atlantic in Martinique, Barbados and Brazil. In Spain, the tsunamis swept the Andalusian Atlantic Coast, nearly destroying the city of Cadiz, rolling on, now about 10 metre high, to hit Cornwall and England's south coast at around 2pm. The huge waves could be seen along the river Thames and contemporary writer recorded a great loss of life. Ireland suffered next.

The widespread thinking at the time was that the earthquake was caused by God's wrath.

[Petty's Pick of the Week](#)

Every day Mike Petty posts on his Facebook group "Fenland History on Facebook" a number of newspaper clips from his massive archive of local events reported "on this day" <https://www.facebook.com/groups//102684982076955>

Obscure headlights - Cambridgeshire Daily News August 24th 1939

Should lighting regulations be brought into force motor car side and rear lamps must have electric light bulbs not exceeding seven watts, acetylene lamp burners must not consume more than 14 litres per hour and in oil lamps only one burner must be used.

Light may be emitted only through a single aperture facing to the front or rear of the car of not more than two inch diameter.

Front glasses must be obscured with white tissue paper or paint. Head lamps may be used provided the whole of the reflector is blackened. 39 08 24, a *This story appeared in a Cambridge newspaper on this date.*

