

‘History of Harleston’

This ‘History of Harleston’ originated from exploring the history of Harleston Common. Research into the history of the Common (and the activities and lives of its inhabitants) spread into researching parts of the town itself as the ‘Commoners’ drifted between the town and the Common. Eventually this became a history of the town itself as experienced by individuals and also within the context of what was then going on in the wider world.

Harleston’s very existence as a town in its own right is deeply rooted in trade. At the time of the Domesday Census, Harleston was a small hamlet. Although there may have previously been an unregulated market, it was when Harleston was granted a market charter almost eight centuries ago¹ that the foundations were laid for the bustling commercial centre it later became. Stied as it is in rich agricultural lands only 20 miles or so from Norwich, (for centuries one of the largest cities in England, second only to London) Harleston’s development and character have been significantly shaped by its commercial history as an agricultural hub with more specialised trades developing around this as the population grew.

Over the years, the marshy lands of the Waveney Valley, which were not ideal for arable crops, provided good forage for sheep and cattle. The higher areas north of the river have a mix of both clay and sandy soils providing fertile land ideal for growing both roots and corn. Sheep produced the wool upon which much of the early wealth of East Anglia was founded and which, in turn, supported weaving and allied trades such as spinning and fulling. As wool fell out of favour, the skills used in these trades were then transferred to the processing of flax into linen; flax being a plant that grew readily in the wet lowlands of the Waveney Valley and was often interchangeable with hemp. Hemp was also grown in this region, as part of both commercial and cottage economy to be manufactured into cloth; evidence shows this to have occurred from 500AD in East Anglia, with a marked increase in production in Diss at the end of the first millennium,² when it became a significant part of the local economy.

Protestant émigrés from the lowlands of Europe brought silk weaving skills into East Anglia (more locally, Bungay in particular³), but this had petered out by the end of the 19th C. We had produced bombazine in Harleston (a luxury blend of silk and wool) but this also fell out of fashion and production ended in the town by the mid 19thC. A little further afield, in 1839, Syleham Mill was converted to produce Drabbet, one of the coarser sorts of linen cloth. Production ceased at the outbreak of war in 1914; many locals may still remember its later re-incarnation as a clothing manufactory making jeans and workwear.

¹ Market charter granted in 1259, <http://www.harleston-norfolk.org.uk/harleston-overview>

² The East Anglian Hemp Industry - An Introduction. Tim Holt-Wilson

³ In April, 1838, the mills of the firm were inspected by James Mitchell, LLD, one Of H.M. Commissioners, who reported as follows : The great firm of Grout, Ringer, Martin and Co . have an establishment at Norwich in which at the time of my visit there were 970 hands employed. In the establishment belonging to this firm in Great Yarmouth, 1100 hands were employed, and 560 at their mills near Bungay. In September of the same year this number was much increased

As the medieval period receded into history, sheep and their by-products became less significant in the local economy, instead beef cattle started to fill the meadows with their diet supplemented by the turnips that also grew well in the area. By the late eighteenth century, in Harleston in particular, the trading of cattle coming down from Scotland for fattening before being sold on to London, supported much of the local economy. This brought immense amounts of money into the town but with the coming of the railways, the Scotch Cattle trade died at which point the malting of barley to be sent to thirsty London and converted to beer become more significant. With coal arriving quickly and in large quantities by train, fuel heavy processes such as steam driven mills and engineering works along with coal fired maltings became feasible; prior to the arrival of the railway coal had creaked its way from Bungay staithe in relatively small waggons. Like many similar communities, the town experienced an almost continuous cycle of prosperity and setbacks.

Shaping the Town and Around

The administration of the settlements of Redenhall and Harleston is irretrievably intertwined, but our town of Harleston has a long history of its own; it appears in the Domesday book as a hamlet, whilst Redenhall, now a small village clustered about the foot of the splendid church of St Mary, always had greater administrative status. Looking at the two settlements now, one can only wonder why Redenhall has always been the pre-eminent settlement (even today the town council is known as Redenhall with Harleston, not the other way around) when Redenhall has long been both physically and economically overshadowed by Harleston.

To answer this, one must approach the question from two directions: - physical and cultural.

Physically, there is nothing remarkable about the settlement of Redenhall, only slightly raised above the marshy lands around the Beck and the other small watercourses that meander along the valley floor between Starston and Homersfield until they join the marshes of the Waveney Valley. Redenhall itself is separated from these marshes, both on the Norfolk and Suffolk sides of the Waveney by a pear-shaped mound of a hill, stalk end at Homersfield, blossom end at Shotford. Heading south-east from Redenhall the land rises gently before plunging steeply down to the Mendham marshes, now largely drained but historically a treacherous barrier to the south. The most striking feature of Redenhall is the impressive church of St Mary, distinctively perched on a buxom mound of its own and towering over the village.

Without any proof of such, I suspect it is this mound that brought about the founding of Redenhall on this site. It is claimed that when central heating was installed in the late Victorian Period, the workmen found traces of an earlier, Saxon Church. Pagan man could be drawn to this motherly bosom as a centre of worship long before Christian missionaries, in a pincer movement between the Celtic Christianity of Ireland and the Roman Christianity of Europe, endeavoured to convert Britain to the way of the Cross. It is generally accepted that early British churches were often built on sites sacred to the pre-Christian population, allowing those sacred sites to maintain their status but with the adherents redirected to the Christian faith and this may well have been what happened at Redenhall – a Christian place of worship being founded on a formerly pagan site.

Sometime before 1895, the ‘Redenhall Hoard’ consisting of some 144 coins was discovered in the vicinity of Redenhall Unfortunately we do not have a precise location; "Found in brickfield within a 5 mile radius of Wortwell, probably in Redenhall though possibly Alburgh or Starston. Donor says name of brickmaker was Aldis but this name cannot be traced"⁴ this hoard being believed at the time to consist largely of Roman Coins from the 3rd and 4th C CE although mid 5th C coins were later identified within the hoard, putting its burial post Roman and early Anglo Saxon. This hoard is held in Norwich and is an intriguing indication of very early trade in the area.

So, working on the assumption that the Church was placed on a former pagan site and the presence of the Church lent status to Redenhall, why, when and how did Harleston, a mere hamlet at the time of the Domesday census, overtake Redenhall in terms of population and economic activity?

In medieval times, Norfolk was one of the most densely populated areas of the country, perfect for supporting trading markets that would generate both income and influence. These markets were strictly regulated by charters to ensure that one market did not impinge upon another. In this area, the powerful and influential Roger Bigod had strong vested interests and was granted the charter to profit from the market and annual fairs in the Parish of Redenhall – but not necessarily in the settlement of Redenhall itself.

this town (*Harleston*) hath a weekly market on Wednesday; and two fairs in a year; one is held on Midsummer day, being the nativity of St. John the Baptist, to whom the chapel is dedicated; so that this is the feast, wake, or dedication day; and the other was granted by King Henry III. in the year 1259, to Roger le Bigod Earl of Norfolk, and Marshal of England, to last eight days, namely, the vigil, and day of the decollation of St. John the Baptist, and six days after: and the said Earl had a hundred court held here every three weeks, and the toll of the market and fairs, assise of bread and ale, free-warren and weyf.⁵

Quick diversion here – if you don’t want a potted history of the Dukes and Earls of Norfolk who held such power in this region, skip to the next paragraph! The original Earls of Norfolk descended from a member of Edward the Confessor’s court who survived the Conquest and was granted the title of Earl, a title forfeited in 1074 following an ill-judged revolt against William the Conqueror by the first Earl’s son. The title was revived for a second time in 1141 when it was given to Hugh Bigod. It was Hugh’s great-grandson Roger Bigod, the 4th Earl of Norfolk, who was granted Harleston’s Market Charter in 1259. When his son, Roger Bigod the 5th Earl, died childless in 1306 the title became extinct until revived in 1312 by Edward II who gave the title and much that went with it to his younger brother, Thomas Brotherton the first Plantagenet Earl of Norfolk. In 1338 the Harleston Market Charter, along with the Earsham half-hundred, passed directly to John de Segrave (IV Baron Segrave) via his marriage to Margaret the daughter of Thomas Brotherton, 1st Plantagenet Earl⁶; on the Earl’s death in 1338

⁴ This is as reported when the hoard was sold to the Museum -in 1946?

⁵ An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 5. Originally published by W Miller, London, 1806.

⁶ Berkeley Castle Muniments cf. BCM/D/5

Margaret, his sole heir, became the Duchess of Norfolk. John de Seagrave and Margaret's third child, and the only one who survived to adulthood, Elizabeth, became the 5th Baroness Seagrave and in turn married John the 4th Baron Mowbray (he died in Constantinople during the Crusades) and it was their 5th child, Thomas de Mowbray who became the first Duke of Norfolk, inheriting the title from his grandmother via his mother. Thomas de Mowbray was then beheaded for treason in 1405 so the Dukedom passed to his younger brother John, the second Duke of Norfolk. The market and half hundred eventually passed to the Duchess Elizabeth, widow of the 4th (Plantagenet) Duke of Norfolk in 1476⁷ but with no male heirs the title died out until recreated, briefly, in 1481 for the benefit of one of the Princes in the Tower. With their mysterious disappearance (commonly believed to be at the behest of that uncle in his successful bid to become king) the title was up for grabs until the Howard family pledged allegiance to the Princes' Uncle, Richard III and were rewarded by the dukedom in 1483. You might assume that after this very chequered history of extinct lineages, premature death, treason and treachery the dukedom may have been viewed as a bit of a poison chalice, however the Howards have retained the title for over half a millennium, up to and including today although they too, particularly in Tudor times sailed very close to treasonable winds, not all the family survived the experience!



ARCHI MAPS LIDAR: Digital Terrain Map (DTM)

Digitally generated map clearly showing the raised spit of land at Shotford all be it eaten away by gravel pits, and London Road and The Throughfare running along the valley between two hills.

Back to Markets – the raison d'être of the town; within the long thin parish of Redenhall, the best place for a market was not, as was the convention, under the shadow of the mother church, but instead at the small hamlet of Harleston, sited at the southernmost limit of the parish, butted hard against the parish of Mendham and in a wide flat gently sloping plateau between two gently rising hills – a natural trading forum. What we now know as The Throughfare, ran through the floor of this valley and on to the coast in one direction and to the other to a crossing over the Waveney at the spit of land at Shotford, which in turn led the traveller safely over the marshes and to the south.

The evolution of the market is dealt with in a later chapter, but it is important to remember that Harleston, which thrived as a trading centre, was embedded in a rural setting dependent upon agriculture. At the time the Market was founded this would have still been very much a feudal society led by the aristocracy and administered by the

church, which, locally, was based at Redenhall. Don't forget that Mendham's parish boundary, until

⁷ Berkeley Castle Muniments BCM/D/1/1/22-3 [GC 4409-10]

the 1880's, came up to the marketplace and ran all along the London/Needham Road. If the Market had extended any further to the south it would have benefitted Mendham Priory, not the Bigods or their successors.

*'Mendham in Norfolk'
becomes part of Redenhall
with Harleston 1883*

To understand the early years and evolution of a market town such as Harleston we need to understand this feudal society that existed in its early years and the subsequent collapse of this way of life.

Now therefore, We, the Local Government Board, in pursuance of the powers given to Us by the Statutes in that behalf, hereby Order as follows:—

Article I. All that part of the said Parish of Mendham which is situated in the said County of Norfolk shall cease to be part of that Parish, and shall be 30
amalgamated with the said Parish of Redenhall with Harleston.

Article II. All that part of the said Parish of Mendham which is situated in the said County of Norfolk shall cease to be a place separately maintaining its own highways as aforesaid, and shall be included in the said Parish of Redenhall with Harleston for Highway purposes. 35

Article III. This Order shall take effect on the Twenty-fourth day of March, One thousand eight hundred and eighty-four, unless the same should in the meantime become Provisional in pursuance of Section 2 of the said Divided Parishes and Poor Law Amendment Act, 1876.

Given under the Seal of Office of the Local Government Board, this 40
Seventeenth day of December, in the year One thousand eight hundred and eighty-three.

(L.S.) CHARLES W. DILKE, President.
S. B. PROVIS, Assistant Secretary.

Feudal society (a term coined in the 16thC) was based on a strictly delineated hierarchy with rights and obligations understood by all with the king at the apex of the triangle of power. The nobility and landowners held sway over peasants who owed their lord varying amounts of their labour. During the 14th C waves of Plague or Black Death devastated the remnants of a population already vastly depleted by two years of famine some 30 years before – this led to an acute shortage of labour that eventually resulted in the release of the lowly worker from feudal obligation. Much to the impotent fury of the establishment, the labourer was now able to hire his strong muscles to the highest bidder and to take his chances in the open market. Society became more cash based with a man exchanging his labour for money rather than a roof over his head and the protection of the Lord of the Manor – a change that would benefit Markets and the towns arising around them. The working man may have then escaped from being ‘owned’ by the aristocracy, but his life was still very much controlled and guided by the church.

The Church had a literate and numerate work force and were, to all intents and purposes, the equivalent of today’s civil servants, administering and enforcing the grassroots government and, more significantly, taxation. Beyond merely recording transactions, there may also have been an element of solemnity about a transaction undertaken under the eyes of God in a religious place, such as the one between a man of Norwich and one of Eye that occurred in Harleston Chapel in 1590.

Acknowledgement by Thomas Crowe, Morningthorpe, Norfolk, yeoman, of receipt from John Colbye, Eye, glover, at the chapel or preaching place in Harleston of £4 for a messuage or tenement, cottage & shop in Eye: with release & quit claim to the property⁸

Much as today’s Councils levy rates, so the Church raised huge funds with its system of tithes, or taxes

⁸ EE2/M1/1/19 Suffolk Archives

and others were defendants, grounded on a feigned action directed by the Barons of the Court of Exchequer in consequence of a hearing before them at the fittings previous to last Michaelmas term, on a bill filed by the plaintiff, as vicar of the vicarage and parish church of Mendham, in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, claiming a right to tithes in kind of hay, clover, hemp, turnips, agistment of barren and unprofitable cattle, and of all other vicarial tithes arising and increasing in the said parish and titheable places thereof. The issue was whether the plaintiff was endowed with the several species of tithes demanded by his bill? and a verdict was given for the defendants without a single witness being called on their behalfs, as their case and defence at law and in equity was clearly proved by the plaintiffs own witnesses, to the entire satisfaction of the court, and the Judge in pursuance of a liberty given him by the decretal order, certified on the *poslea*, that it appeared in evidence, that the plaintiff was entitled by usage only to tithes of turnips to be taken in kind, and that the vicars for the time being had immemorially received and taken a pecuniary payment called herbage in lieu and full satisfaction of all other vicarial tithes. Counsel for the plaintiff, were

and was closely tied in with the administration of pre-industrial land rights as well as being a large landowner in its own right.

Norfolk Chronicle
4 Apr 1778

Originally, tithes (which strictly speaking mean a tenth part), would have been physically taken in the form of stock and crops but as time went on money was substituted as a more practical form of taxation. Apparently the Vicar at Diss stacked his hemp tithe in the church porch!⁹ This article of 1778 describes what might well have been a test case when the Vicar of the parish church of Mendham was clearly supported in claiming that Turnips, and Turnips only, were to be tithed 'in kind' whilst the tithes of hay, clover, hemp, barren and unprofitable cattle and all other vicarial tithes were to be met by a 'pecuniary payment called herbage in lieu' – i.e. paid in cash not kind!

1801. Names of persons who went the bounds of the parish 16 May, 1801 :—

Farmers.
Thos. Lingwood Sam' Chambers
Geo. Fisk Wm. Cole
Thos. Walne John Theobald
John Coleby
Labourers and others, 18.
[Among them Jonas Ellis.]

It cost 2 4 6

We can clearly see the differentiation between the named landowners and the generic labourers in the 1801 Starston Accounts. In 1798 there were 96 adult men in the parish – 25 was a good turn out

'Beating' or 'going' of the bounds, when churchmen and residents toured the parish to physically confirm

boundaries in the mind of illiterate locals, was part of the annual ecclesiastical calendar; another example of the church's involvement in the administration of the parish. Also known as the Perambulation, we have records in the early mid-17th C of dinners being provided for the participants.

This combined parade and social event was eventually replaced by the more legally accessible and enforceable 'tithe maps' largely surveyed and completed between 1837 and 1840. These formal legal documents were based on surveys funded by the largest landowners in the community (owning together a quarter or more of the lands in the parish) and were supervised by the Tithe Commission whose mission was to commute all tithes into monetary form. These Tithe Maps can be particularly useful for the researcher as each portion of land is ascribed to both a tenant and an owner.

Norwich Mercury, 16 Dec 1837

To Land-surveyors and Others,

WE the undersigned being Land-owners, or duly authorized Agents of Land-owners, within the Parish of REDENHALL with HARLESTON, in the County of Norfolk, whose interest is not less than one fourth part of the whole value of the Lands subject to Tithes in the said Parish, do by this notice in writing, under our hands, call a Parochial Meeting of Land-owners within the limits of the said parish, for the purpose of appointing some competent Person or Persons to Survey, Map, and Plan the said parish, pursuant to the provisions of an act passed in the 6th and 7th years of the reign of his late Majesty, intituled "an act for the Commutation of Tithes in England and Wales." And we do hereby also give notice, that such Meeting will be held at the Swan Inn, in the said Parish, on Thursday, the 21st day of December instant, at the hour of Twelve at noon. At which meeting Surveyors willing to contract are invited and requested to attend. Given under our hands this 14th day of December, 1837. (5855)

James Aldous	John Gedney
John Aldous	William Hazard
Benj. John Crisp	Thomas Hunter
Pelham Corbould	James Meen
Charles Etheridge	Richard Priest

⁹ ecohustler.com/technology/the-uks-compulsory-cannabis-law-grow-hemp-or-else

Hopping back to half a millennium before tithe maps formalised land ownership, occupation and modern taxation in the parish we find evidence of another income stream for the Church which existed way back in 1349.¹⁰

(the) Rectory house which was very large and moated in, with a great portal at the entrance, was then parted, and the south side assigned to the vicar (he was to have various sources of income including) a right of commonage on all the commons in Redenhall.

The locations of those commons are now lost and whilst, by 1693, it was stated that there are no commons to Redenhall,¹¹ this was purely a church accounting matter whereby income was no longer gathered from the Commons formerly assigned to the Redenhall vicar, not an indication that there were no commons in the parish. One of these 'Commons' may well have become the Bullock Fair; the Church appears to have had a controlling interest in the lands whether as an income generator solely for the church or possibly administered on behalf of the Lord of the Manor for a commission or fee.

With a Rector, must come a Rectory although the earliest one we know of, as described above, may have been imposing but was probably less than comfortable as well as inconvenient. The precise site of this old rectory, demolished in the early 19th C, and from which the parish had long been administered is debateable. However, in 1894¹², it was claimed that that the rectory had stood on a field or meadow in Wortwell Low Street and that

In 1883 the engineer engaged on the Ordnance Survey noticed there a "faint track of the moat" and that "on referring to old maps the site of the building was shown, surrounded by a moat and occupied as a rectory"

I would very much like to see such a map showing the moat and rectory which may be possible one day as we now know (courtesy of Charles Candler – see below) that local schoolmaster Mr Tilney prepared the old map, giving us a search start point with a precise survey date of May 1773!

as to the old parsonage, the residence of so many of the parsons of Redenhall, . . . The house stood on the south side of the Low Street in Wortwell. In the 14th century it was, as Blomefield says, "very large, and moated in with a great portal at the entrance." In a plan of the Redenhall glebe prepared by H. Tilney, from a survey made in May 1773, the house and buildings are shewn enclosed by a broad moat, with a causeway opposite the road, and the outline of this moat, which has been long since filled in, may still be traced by a growth of rough sedges upon the meadow. The situation of the house, remote from the church and upon a low wet marsh must have been at all times a most inconvenient and indeed scarcely habitable residence. The

¹⁰ Francis Blomefield, 'Hundred of Earsham: Redenhall', in *An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 5* (London, 1806), pp. 358-372. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-hist-norfolk/vol5/pp358-372> [accessed 30 December 2022].

¹¹ History and antiquities of the county of Norfolk 1781, <https://archive.org/details/historyantiquiti02norwiala/page/72>

¹² Norfolk Chronicle 6 Oct 1894

tradition is that Henry Mingay, instituted 1672, was the last rector who occupied the building where in all probability he died. In the Terrier of 17th June 1784, the house is described as being the “Parsonage House situate in the Hamlet of Wortwell, a common lain Building two Stories high, having its walls of clay covered in thatch, the foundation whereof is 54 feet in length and 19feet in breadth.”



Possible location of the old rectory – the slightly darker green area may indicate the location of the old moat. A Track or ‘Causeway’ still exists beside the North-eastern boundary of this field.

Candler reports that the house was finally taken down in 1804 with the materials being used to construct buildings near the ‘present rectory’. This demolition took place when the final traces of the old feudal system of land use were rapidly disappearing as enclosures

changed the face of the countryside to an extent that would be unequalled until during and post WW2 when hedges were grubbed up and fields melded to allow increased mechanisation.

Evidence of the old feudal system of shared commons for grazing and narrow strips of arable or ‘garden’ land existed to the north of The Common in the form of a single strip of pasture belonging, in 1839, to Mr. Lillistone; this anomaly remained until the 1970's when most of it was sold to adjacent

dwellings. John Ambrose, the only house owner who did not buy the section adjacent to their grounds, informed me of this!



Nearby, the Needham parish boundary runs roughly parallel to the path leading from the western corner of The Common to the Needham Road but some yards into an otherwise featureless field, surely also following old field boundaries.

The Red Section shows the narrow strip to the North of The Common, the Blue Section shows the area bounded by The Common, the now redirected, footpath to Gunshaw’s and the Needham Parish Boundary

We have mentioned above how the feudal system of labour died out due to the shortage of labour following 14thC Europe-wide famine and the Black Death. It would take several hundred more years before the physical apportionment and working of land was to experience a change of equal magnitude;

the advent of the Agrarian Revolution which preceded and enabled the Industrial Revolution.

'Industrial' and 'Agrarian' Revolution are terms used by people looking back on (rather than those living through) those times of immense social and cultural upheaval. In England these social earthquakes took place relatively early, largely in the 18th and early 19th Centuries. Essentially, the Agrarian Revolution was enabled by a series of enclosure acts, each one particular to a proscribed, limited and closely detailed area. These acts, driven by larger landowners, deprived villagers of rights held since time immemorial over common grazing land and shared strip farming. One man might well hold rights to several strips scattered in various places. In exchange for these rights, and only if they could be proven, neatly unified parcels of land were allocated. This rationalisation promoted more efficient farming but, on the negative side, reduced the average labourer's ability to be, to some extent, self-sufficient, and made him very much dependant on waged employment by landowners.

This in turn would have had further impact on market towns, as the rural working classes became a further stage removed from living off the land and more dependent upon earning a wage on that land. This wage would then have been spent in both the village shops and at the weekly markets which also offered a fine opportunity for socialising. Society was becoming more money based than in any previous time.

Although Redenhall Parish may have long lost its Commons (or at least the income from them), I did find evidence of enclosures of 'Common Fields' somewhere at a Harleston in the 1760s, this could have been in Suffolk, or Norfolk, or Northants, or Cambridgeshire, or even Devon!¹³ Acts of Parliament were required before enclosures could be enforced, periods of local consultation also had to be held before bills could be submitted. False hopes of having found records of Harleston enclosures were raised when I discovered

6^o Geo. III. Parl. 6. *Scff.*: 5. A. 1765 & 1766.

HALIFAX, Petition from, 17 Jan. Vide *America*. — 22. Vide *Corn*.

———— Road. Vide *Rochdale*.

Hanging Bridge Roads. Vide *High Bridges*.

Harbury, Common Fields, Petition for a Bill to inclose; Bill ordered; 13 Feb. Presented, and read, 14 Apr. Committed, 22. Petition against it; referred; Counsel ordered on both Sides; 24. Committees added, 28. All to have Voices, *ibid*. *Harleston*, Common Fields, Petition for a Bill to inclose; Bill ordered; 12 Feb. Presented, and read, 10 Apr. Committed, 14. Reported, to be ingrossed; 25. Palled, 1 May. Agreed to by the Lords, 9. Royal Assent, 14.

'An Inclosure notice that the Commissioners intend meeting at the Swan Inn, Harleston, Norfolk, at 11 a.m. on 28 Sept 1801'¹⁴

However, this turned out to be a red herring; when I sourced the original notice in its entirety, it became plain that the meeting was to deal with the matters arising from the proposed enclosure and allotment of land in the neighbouring district of Alburgh and Wortwell. As was normal at the time the meetings took place in the handiest large pub, in this case The Swan, Harleston.

A TABLE of the STATUTES,

47. An act for dividing, allotting, and inclosing the commonable fen lands, commons, and waste grounds, within the parish of *Alburgh*, and hamlet of *Wortwell*, in the county of *Norfolk*.

A Table of the Statutes

41 George III

¹³ Parliamentary reports 1766

¹⁴ NORCAT SF 351/6, 304X1 - To hear objections to claims re inclosure in Alburgh and Wortwell.

These early 19th C¹⁵ Alburgh enclosures are typical of numerous others during the late 18thC and early 19thC. With larger plots of land under single ownership, new and more efficient practises could be introduced, along with consistent application of crop rotation creating a major impact on the whole country. Norfolk very much led the way in new and innovative farming practices. In early days, these larger fields were more convenient for broadcast sowing, ploughing, and harvesting; in later years increasing mechanisation, initially in the form of steam driven stationary engines, then steam driven vehicles and finally petrol and diesel driven vehicles, could never have been applied to the earlier, narrow strips of land.

Most significantly of all, the conversion of communal fields comprising individual strips of land (worked in combination with grazing upon Commons) to large, unified fields promoted more efficient, less labour-intensive cultivation of crops and animals. This in turn created a dispossessed rural workforce which migrated to the new industrial hubs to work in the centralised, power-driven factories that characterised the industrial revolution. Without the agrarian revolution there would have been neither the dispossessed labour to man the factories, mines and foundries nor the food to support the cities that mushroomed around the new centres of industry. In the late 18th and 19th C, the surplus of labour produced by using more efficient farming techniques resulted in countrymen leaving the land in large numbers to become wage slaves in the new factories springing up to replace the small workshops of the pre-industrial era. This mass exodus off the land and away from a farming system that could no longer support them led to the extra-ordinary situation whereby at one point in the Victorian period there were more Norfolk born men living out of the County than were living in it!

Wealthy East Anglian landowners, such as Coke at Holkham Hall and ‘Turnip’ Townshend at Raynham, became world leaders in the matter of devising and applying new, more efficient agricultural practices. Previously, land would have been cropped for two years then left to go fallow for one year to allow it to recover. Coke promoted a 6-year cycle with no fallow years whilst Turnip Townsend was in favour of a slightly simpler 4-year rotation known as the Norfolk System. This involved a year each growing clover and turnips (excellent cattle fattening fodder) interspersed with a year of growing wheat (for bread) and a year of growing barley – for beer.

We had our very own local (Starston Hall) agricultural innovator, Robert Paul who designed Turnip Fly Traps with prototypes constructed by Harleston carpenter John Vipond - one time owner of the building on the Thoroughfare now next the Clock Tower, then next the old Chapel. I have read the

¹⁵ The solicitor to the Commissioners, Samuel Copping Jnr was also the Bristol Fire Office (Insurers) agent for Harleston in 1793. Bury and Norwich Post 16 Oct 1793. Five years earlier Samuel Copping jun. Gent, attorney at law at Harlepton had married well to Miss Bloss, only daughter of Thomas Bloss, Gent of Alburghan agreeable young lady with a handsome fortune. The Ipswich Journal 26 Apr 1788. I think it safe to assume that Ensign Samuel Bloss Copping appearing in the 1814 Military List when being commissioned as a Lieutenant was their son! Mrs Copping nee Bloss died at Alburgh in 1817, her death announced one line above that of Mrs Bloss, also of Alburgh. (The Suffolk Chronicle 20 Dec 1817). Samuel’s mother died in 1819, leaving his father, Samuel Copping, Gent of Bungay a widower. This Samuel Copping Gent late of Bungay died in London aged 81, (Bury and Norwich Post 6 Jun 1821) possibly at the house of his son Samuel Copping Esq, formerly an eminent Solicitor at Harleston (*died*) at his house in Great Surrey-street, London. (The Suffolk Chronicle 20 Feb 1830). The last in the line that I could find was the Samuel Bloss Copping, naval Lieutenant whose childless widow, Caroline, became the second wife of naval Captain Peter M’Quhae in 1831– they actually went on to have issue (children)!
en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:A_Naval_Biographical_Dictionary.djvu/722

whole article printed in 1810 describing these traps and, beyond planting an early decoy crop then attacking the resulting infestation with the machine, I am none the wiser as to how this cunning, possibly slightly Heath Robinson device capable of collecting a pint and ½ of these minute but destructive insects worked!

If what I have said above should induce my brother agriculturists to bring the Fly-Trap into general use, I shall have great satisfaction in the reflection that the trouble and expence I have been at in bringing the machine to the state in which it now is, have not been uselessly employed, and I shall feel happy if any one more capable than myself should bring it to a still greater state of perfection. For the making of my own machines I have always employed Mr. Vipond, carpenter, of Harleston, Norfolk, who has given me great satisfaction, and to whom all the profits arising from the sale of them belong.

ROBERT PAUL.

* It will be proper to mention that in the heat of noobday, when the sun is shining (and only then); the insect is most active and capable of flying out of the trap—I have found the most proper time for using the machine to be from the hour of six to nine or ten in the morning, and four or five to eight in the evening, except when the atmosphere is cloudy.

† I could bring forward many instances of the utility of the machine in fecucating the turnip crop, but I shall content myself with mentioning the circumstance of Mr. Wm. Copland, of Saxthorpe, Norfolk, who last year PRESERVED HIS ENTIRE CROP OF SWEDISH TURNIPS BY MEANS OF IT, while those of his neighbours were univerfally destroyed.

Norfolk Chronicle 5 May 1810

However, Mr Kerrich, a successful local businessman and brewer, seemed convinced by its efficacy and also persuaded the famous Mr Coke of Holkham who asked that at, after one of the dinners at a 3-day farming festival the secretary of the Agricultural Association . . .

(the Rev. St. John Priest) read a letter which he (Mr. Coke) had received from John Kerrich, Esq. of Harleston, stating the great utility of Mr. Paul's trap for catching the turnip beetle.¹⁶

Mr Coke raised a toast to Mr Paul and success to his fly trap – fame indeed!

By then Kerrich had tested out the system on his land near Harleston and was convinced - three years after Mr Paul had first presented him with this so ingenious and useful Turnip Fly Trap for which Mr Paul ... declined taking out a patent¹⁷. Paul appears to have been an inveterate tinkerer and designer of clever wheezes and cunning tricks whilst having sufficient funds behind himself to pay the cost of promoting or patenting those cunning wheezes. One of his most ingenious was still being lauded some years after his death whereby “he dealt with varmint like a christian”¹⁸ – I cannot resist reproducing this delightful description of his slightly macabre and convoluted rat trap!

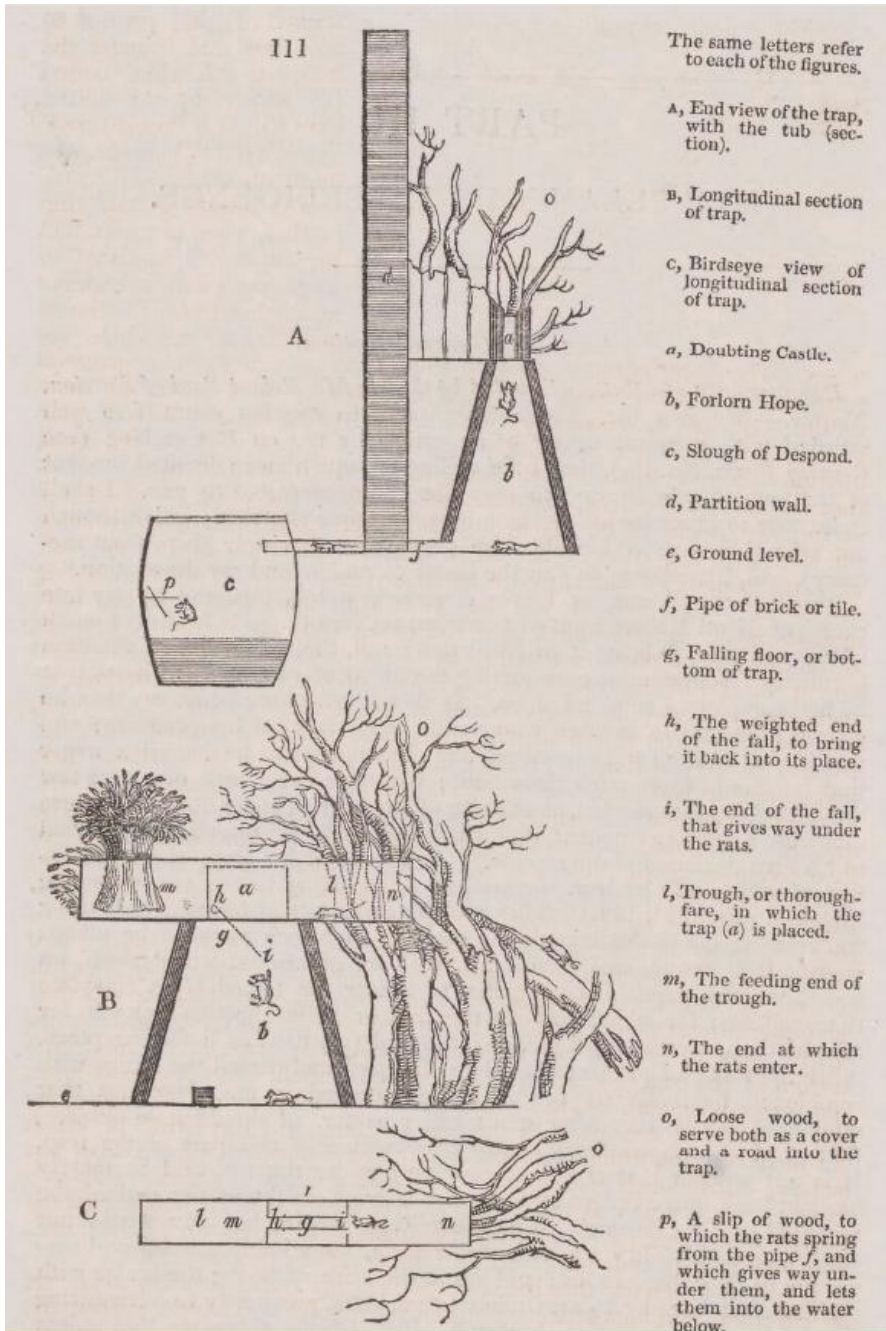
A rat goes upon the bridge – the bottom gives way and rises of itself again, down he drops into the dry cistern, he soon leaves this by the covered way, at the end of which he comes to the cistern of (*lime*) water. He makes a spring at a sort of flap fixed on the opposite side, which gives way under him and he ends his career.

The author then continues to explain how the point of death is far enough removed from the rat hotspot that rats are not disturbed by death of their companions and so many hundreds may be destroyed – he also lauds the fact that ‘however great the number taken, our friend could not be said to be their

¹⁶ Bury and Norwich Post 3 Jul 1811

¹⁷ Norfolk Chronicle 25 Jun 1808

¹⁸ Gardener's Magazine London, 1 Oct 1830



murderer since they all committed suicide' – presumably it is this nicety which makes this a 'christian' way of dealing with rats?

A schematic of the bizarre rat trap as proposed by Mr Paul, complete with notes, and even comments about the cleverness of rats and drawing parallels between them and elephants in how they both test unfamiliar surfaces before venturing onto them!

Paul was not just limited to aphids, rats and beetles, by 1821 he had transferred his interest into improving carriage springs!

To Robert Paul, of Starston, Norfolk, gentleman, and Samuel Hart, of Redenhall with Harleston, in the same county, painter and gig-maker, for certain improvement springs, applicable to various descriptions of carriages¹⁹

You have to love the English eccentric, and it is wonderful to know we had one just down the road at Starston Hall!

Shortly after taking out the patent detailed above, Mr Paul retired from business, selling off much of his farming equipment; 5 years later he shuffled off to meet the greatest inventor of them all

On Sunday morning last at Harleston, in the 66th year of his age, Mr. Robert Paul, late of Starston, in this county, well known to agriculturists for his curious inventions, and for his Interesting Inquiries into the natural history and habitudes of the turnip-fly and the wire-worm.²⁰

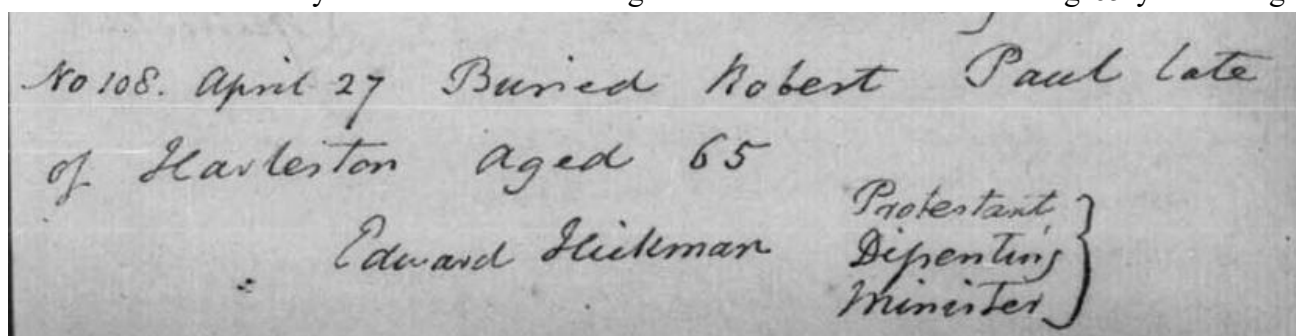
¹⁹ Hereford Journal 17 Oct 1821

²⁰ Bury and Norwich Post 25 Apr 1827

Rather confusingly the Suffolk Chronicle claimed he was 94 whilst The Ipswich Journal described him as

Mr. Robert Paul lately of Starston-Hall, ... A man of considerable genius and universally esteemed.²¹

A well to do, delightful eccentric of the finest sort, let's go with the entry from the Denton register where he was buried by a Protestant Dissenting Minister and described as being 65 years of age.



Slightly less individually Harleston's Farmer's Club, founded in 1837, had its own part to play in driving forward agricultural excellence addressing such scintillating topics as 'Cultivation Clauses in Leases', which provided many column inches of reportage in the regional papers.

Having described in general terms the context in which the town was formed and grew, it's time to move onto some more specifics. In 1673 the town appeared in an early directory by Richard Blome²² who even then described it as a

'town of some Antiquity . . . seated on the Waveney over which it hath a bridge. It is a long dirty town yet it hath a good market on Wednesdays for corn and other provisions'

To say the town is seated on the River Waveney is rather pushing matters, indeed the boundaries of Harleston stopped some distance short of the river. Unusually for a town of this antiquity, we have little or no running water, instead, by a happy mix of geology and physical geography, Harleston enjoys a high water-table; one does not have to sink a well far down before hitting fresh sweet water. No one would argue against it being a 'long town' although less so now as new housing developments continue apace spreading in a circular fashion from the old core of the town. I suspect that the 'dirtiness' had much to do with quantity of cattle, horses, sheep and pigs passing through its centre.

A hundred years after Richard Blome passed judgement on the town, Nathaniel Spencer was equally rude about the town buildings but also belittled the weekly market! He does mention a stone bridge; if this is the one at Shotford, rather the one at the foot of Dicky Hill, it has now been replaced by a brick version.

²¹ Berkshire Chronicle 5 May 1827

²² Britannia, Or, a Geographical Description of the Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, with the Isles and Territories Thereto Belonging, Richard Blome 1673

We crossed the river Waveney from Bungay, in Suffolk, and began our journey through Norfolk, at a small town, called Harleston, where there is a stone bridge over the river, but the place does not contain any thing worthy the notice of a traveller, the houses being little better than cottages, and the streets extremely dirty. It has a poor weekly market on Wednesday, with two fairs, viz. on the fifth of July, and ninth of September, being distant from London 100 miles.

The Complete English Traveller, 1772

Essentially the town lies in a valley with the original marketplace filling the middle of the wide, flat, gently sloping valley floor. The various yards and alleys

formed amidst the burgage plots that bounded the original spacious marketplace, run perpendicular down the valley sides to the valley floor. Before sewers were built to invisibly carry waste away, and with no nearby river to take away waste from abattoirs, fullers or tanners, liquid waste would have funnelled into the marketplace and down along through the centre of town – I imagine the odd downpour would have been more than welcome to flush everything clean although the tendency for downpours to flood the town with associated effluence would be even more unpleasant than it would be today. Many Harlestonites remember similar flash floods and slots, either side of doorways, to take waterboards can still be seen about the town.



A fabulous shot from 2011 showing modern sandbags ready for action and flood board slots either side of the double doors – Sue Read's Shoes, The Thoroughfare.

In addition to the mess and filth produced by the inhabitants, the streets would have been liberally spattered by dung from horses (the universal motive power pre-combustion engine era) and of course from the large droves of sheep and cattle coming to and from the markets and fairs.

I have heard from several locals that the only part of 'Harleston' that is Harleston, is the Market infill area bounded by the Old Market Place, Exchange Street, the Thoroughfare and Broad Street i.e. Middle Row and the buildings around Green Dragon Alley. Residents in this compact area would be referred to as having an abode in Harleston whilst all others in the town would be ascribed to Redenhall - except those in the parish of Mendham in Norfolk! Mendham in Norfolk (bounded by the River Waveney, the London Road leading down to Shotford and Mendham Lane) maintained its separate status until 1883 when the parish boundary was adjusted incorporating this area into Redenhall with Harleston. At the same time the parish boundary of Wortwell was redrawn resulting in the incongruous phenomenon of all of the church of St Mary's Redenhall, bar the clock tower, standing in the Parish of Wortwell.

I strongly suspect that the original late 16th C.²³ marketplace of more than 10,000 square yards (that broad based triangle apexing at Box Iron Corner with the base delineated by the front of the Magpie and Exchange St) more or less matches the footprint of the original hamlet of Harleston which, following the granting of the Market Charter to Roger Bigod, was surrounded by the carefully measured and laid-out burgess plots archetypal of a planned medieval market.

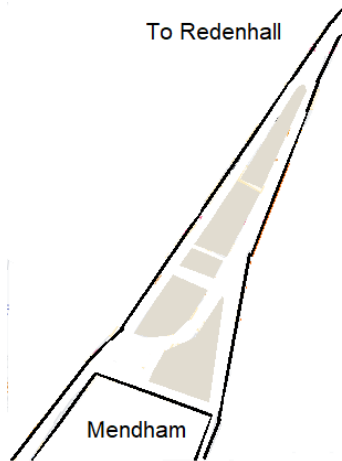


Diagram showing the extent of the original market place, later infill shown in grey.

Trading in the marketplace would have been controlled and taxes levied by the church on behalf of the lord of the manor. Trading would begin and end on the ring of the Chapel Bell – presumably a different one to that used to call the parishioners to prayer. Harleston would have been the 13th C equivalent of the 20th C planned new town but instead of focussing on roundabouts and concrete cows, the Lord of the Manor’s surveyors would have laid out long thin plots stretching back from the boundaries of the Market place.

Indicative lay out of Burgess Plots



These plots would have been fronted by a trading area which may have been either a drop-down flap or tables put out by the footway. Behind that stood either a shop or workshop with living quarters over and behind. Stretching out behind these early permanent retail and trade premises would have been what amounted to a smallholding. The medieval shop owner would have expected his household to be largely self-sufficient with orchards, vegetable gardens and stock pens behind the building fronting onto the street.

This practice could cause some trouble with the neighbours; back in the time of King James, William Aldred of Harleston took his neighbour Thomas Beaton to court due to Beaton’s pigs causing offence. To summarise; a 31ft by 2’6” strip of land between Beaton’s Orchard and Aldred’s Hall and Parlor was converted to a piggery, with associated smells. Beaton’s defence was that

The Building of the House for Hogs was necessary for the Sustenance of Man, and one ought not to have so delicate a Nose that he can’t bear the smell of Hogs.

There was some debate but since it transpired that the new piggery was also obstructing Aldred’s Hall windows and depriving him not only of fresh air, but also of light, the court found for Aldred.²⁴

²³ The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama. (2012). United Kingdom: OUP Oxford.

²⁴ constitution.org/1-Constitution/18th/coke9th/coke9th_151-200.pdf

An 1802 advertisement gives a wonderful description of how a burgage plot had evolved by the Georgian time when the town was thriving: Thomas Denny, Glover, Draper and Wholesale Taylor was occupying a Convenient DWELLING HOUSE with a spacious Shop and Workrooms (and) an acre and half or rich pasture land contiguous to the premises. This contiguous pasture land would have been in the area behind the burgage plot, fronted by the Denny's premises which in turn almost certainly was partly infilled with other dwellings and premises stood on the original orchards, drying grounds and gardens.

Norfolk Chronicle
6 Nov 1802

Bachelor, Thomas Denny, died in 1826 aged 68 having been apprenticed to Mr Gage, also of Harleston, way back in November 1779. Was he related to the Dennys who traded from the corner of Old Chapel yard for so many years? Could well have been as Edward Denny, whose son helped found the business, was a tailor, an allied trade.

A slightly earlier property advertisement gives not only an idea of the typical juxtaposition of shop and house with a yard and stable behind (possibly off what we now know as Old Market Place) but with a turnover of £600 a year, indicates how healthy trade was in town in the late 18thC – fuelled by the Scotch Cattle Trade which will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter.

TO GLOVERS, DRAPERS & WHOLESALE TAYLORS.

To be *DISPOSED* of to *RENT*,

And entered upon immediately,

A Convenient DWELLING-HOUSE, with a spacious Shop and Workrooms, and other requisites, well situated for trade, in the town of Harleston, in Norfolk, in the occupation of Thomas Denny, Glover, Draper and Wholesale Taylor. The Stock in Trade and Fixtures, to be taken at a fair appraisement. The Tenant may be accommodated with an acre and half of rich pasture land, contiguous to the premises.

Such Persons as are still indebted to the said Thomas Denny, are desired to pay their bills immediately to Mr. Gillingwater, or Mr. Gooch, his trustees, or they will be sued without further notice.

For further particulars apply to the said Trustees, or to Mr. Copping, Attorney, at Harleston.

To be LETT at a very Reasonable Rent,

A Very good DWELLING-HOUSE and a convenient SHOP, (wherein has been return'd six hundred Pounds a Year) fronting to the *Market-Place* in HARLESTON in NORFOLK, fit for a Tradesman; a good Stable and Yards, and several other Conveniencies.

For further Particulars enquire of Mrs. MARY TAYLOR, Widow, in HARLESTON.

Ipswich Journal
13 Feb 1742

The yards that are now such a feature of Harleston arose from infill and later development within the old burgess plots. As volume of

trade increased, shop proprietors and tradesmen relied less on their semi-selfsufficient small holdings, but more on a cash based economy, purchasing both staples and luxurys from the weekly markets or other tradesmen. The orchards and gardens of earlier years became occupied by stables, workshops and humble dwellings for the workers and servants employed by tradesmen and small scale industrialists - in this town brewers, cloth workers, builders and carpenters leap to mind

Traces of very early settlement exist below ground in the central market area. Below 'Toll's', the shop opposite Swan Lane and on the left-hand corner of Stone Court, stand some ancient arches within a celler. It has been mooted that they were built for secret worship and may have originally given access to tunnels leading to other parts of the town. A mystery as yet unsolved!

The separation in civic status between the marketplace with its later infill and the buildings that frame it is a well-established belief; Cromwell, in his 1818 book from which the engraving below of St Mary's has been taken²⁵, stated

A part of this town, called the Middle Row, stands in Harleston, the rest being in the parish of Redenhall.

Apr 29, 1938

Middle Row is essentially the area bounded by the existing Market Place, Broad Street and the Throughfare and, along with the area between Church Street, Exchange Street and the Old Market Place, evolved over the centuries as the original market booths (wooden structures which had themselves replaced temporary booths and pitches) were replaced by more permanent buildings.

A belief also widely held and supported by the limited number of deeds I have seen, is that the middle row was the only part of the town that historically had entirely freehold as opposed to copyhold tenancies. Copyhold tenancies, which existed until ownership of the Manor passed from the Duke of Norfolk to local solicitor William Hazard in the late 19th C²⁶, are another remnant of the old feudal land ownership system. Essentially the land and buildings upon it, still remained the property of the Lord of the Manor but use of it could be inherited by payment of a fee to the Manor when the sitting

ANCIENT CELLAR DISCOVERED.

The Dean of Norwich (Dr. Cranage) who examined the remains of an ancient font at Rushall Churchyard, also examined something of interest in the town, being an ancient cellar, in which are several arches of masonry of the 15th century.

The cellar is situated underneath the premises of Mr. F. G. Toll in the main thoroughfare, and is part of the oldest property in the town, and forms a section of the old stone tenement.

It is thought that the cellar was formerly used for private worship and to have formed the opening to a tunnel connecting with other parts of the town.

The Dean, after examination, asked Mr. Toll if he would have certain brick work cut away in an effort to locate other centuries old masonry, which the Dean thought might be hidden.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
At the MAGPYE in MENDHAM, in Norfolk, on WEDNESDAY the 29th day of June instant, between the hours of Three and Five in the afternoon,

A N ESTATE, part Freehold and part Copyhold, situate in Redenhall with Harleston and Starston, in the said county; consisting of that pleasant Dwelling-house where the late Mr. Robert Randall, the owner, lived, with a good garden and orchard adjoining, situate near Harleston street, next the road leading to Pulham, together with 45 acres (more or less) of arable land and pasture, lying near the house, and adjoining to the Bullock Fair there; the whole being now in the occupation of Mr. John Henley, whose term determines at Michaelmas 1786, and who will shew the premises. For further particulars enquire of Mr. Machel Smith, of Brockdish; John Kerich, Esq; Mr. George Applewhite, or Mr. Greenacre, attorney, at Harleston.

tenant died. There might be other annual payments and taxes included in the terms of the tenancy which was controlled by the Manor Court whilst the tenant was expected to attend these Manorial courts. Purchasing the Manor was not done by William Hazard as a vainglorious manoeuvre to raise his status; Hazard proceeded to sell off the copyholds to tenants so they could convert them to the much more desirable free-holds - a real money spinner!

This property up for auction in 1785 is slightly confusing, part being Copyhold (I am presuming the actual house and the

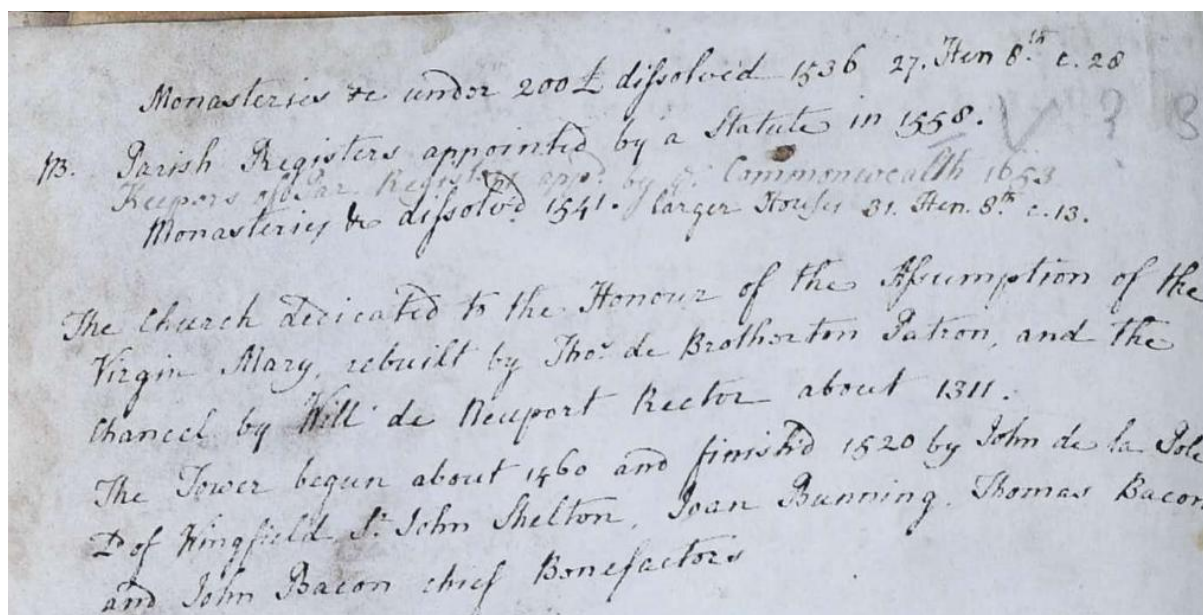
adjoining garden and orchard - maybe on Swan Lane, now accessed from Old Post office yard) whilst the nearby arable and pasture land adjoining the Bullock Fair would have been the Freehold parcel, in the parish of Starston from what I can make of the advertisement - it is also worth noting that by this stage the importance of sheep trading had been overtaken by the Cattle Market hence the former Lamb Sale Ground being referred to as the Bullock Fair.

²⁵ Excursions in the County of Norfolk, Thomas Cromwell 1818

²⁶ When Hazard bought the Lordship of the Manor he sold off many copyhold leases which then became free hold leases, releasing the holder from charges due to the manor and providing a quick income stream for Hazard

We know that the market was already being 'infilled' quite early; in 1559 John Father (*was*) admitted on the death of his father George Father to messuage in 'le myddell rowe' (boundaries specified) in Harleston. Whether the messuage was at that stage a permanent building or just a delineated space would have to be determined from the original document currently lurking in the Ipswich archives.²⁷ That the market infill tenancies had a different legal status (freehold rather than copyhold as described earlier) to the planned development around it, which we can safely assume was planned and controlled by the Manor when the Market Charter was granted, is in itself, significant circumstantial evidence that the pre-existing 'free' Hamlet of Harleston became the original Market Place whilst the Manor controlled the land and development around the Market Place that stood outside of the boundaries of the Hamlet. As would be expected, the Market, under the wing of the Church some miles away at Redenhall, took on the name of the Hamlet of Harleston in which it stood. The town that grew up around Harleston Market, also adopted the name of the market which brought it into being, whilst still remaining part of the Parish of Redenhall and hence the Town of Harleston was created within the Parish of Redenhall.

Since the church was basically in charge of the spiritual and local government needs of the town it seems a good a point as any to look at the Harleston Chapel as well as the grander Redenhall Church. There is an ancient book of Parish Records for St Marys with records dating from 1615 which contains on the front fly leaf, in a much later hand (18th C?) a series of important dates



Monasteries *be?* under 200£ dissolved 1536 27. Hen 8th c20

Parish registers appointed by a statute in 1558

Keepers of Par. Register appd²⁸ by the Commonwealth 1653

Monasteries *be?* dissolved 1541 larger houses 31 Hen 8th c13

²⁷ Copy court roll: manor of Harleston, Suffolk Archives - Ipswich, HD 1538/247

²⁸ Appointed

The Church dedicated to the Honour of the Virgin Mary, rebuilt by Thos de Brotherton²⁹ Patron and the Chancel by Will de Neuport Rector about 1311

The Tower begun about 1460 and finished 1520 by John de la Pole D of Wingfield Jt (*Justice*) John Shelton, Joan Bunning Thomas Bacon and John Bacon chief Benefactors

Act for burying in Woollen 1677

Harleston Chapel dedicated to the St John the Baptist rebuilt in 1726 at the Expense of 1100£ the Parish raised 700

This 1818 coloured engraving is easily recognisable as the St Mary's we know today – that may even be the old Yew Tree public house on the left-hand side of the image although at one time known as the Three Feathers.³⁰ Clearly visible, although in the distance, are the pillars that still stand either side



of the now disused steps down to the main road – access blocked in the early 21st C. Then as now, those pillars are topped by skulls capped with laurel leaves depicting how worldly glories are of little importance in the light of eternity.

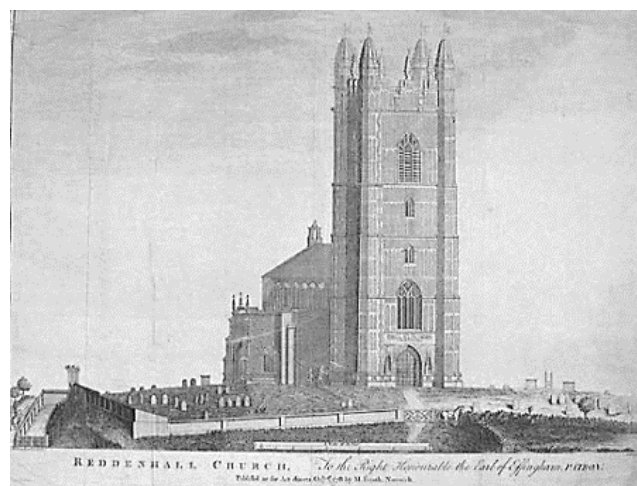
1818 engraving of the Mother Church, St Mary's Redenhall, Thomas Higham

Sadly 300 years or so of weathering now gives these memento mori a jollier aspect than originally intended, with the

laurel wreaths appearing more like frilly mobcaps – at least from a distance. A slightly earlier engraving, by Pierre Fourdrinier, a famous engraver of the time, appears to have been created by a man who had never seen the church, possibly from a sketch made by a person with a less than firm grasp of perspective³¹.

St Mary's Church, Redenhall, Pierre Fourdrinier (1698-1758)

However, disregarding the oddities of this earlier engraving it does indicate that, at some time in the late 18th C, the main entry gate moved from in front



²⁹ 1st Earl of Norfolk, 1300 to 1338

³⁰ What Ever Happened to the Half Moon?

³¹ Sketch made by Mr Milton according to the advert selling Part VI of the New and Complete History of Norfolk in 1799.

of the tower to the main road where it remains today. Or then again, so much of this engraving is off kilter, including the gated road and the wall to the left of this image – who knows?

This much later engraving of the church featured on the front cover of the Parish Magazine in high Victorian times. Here the foot path leading up towards the main doors crosses the area which is now an extension to the church yard³² although the old wall between this and the church still remained.

There is much already written about St Mary's, Redenhall the mother Church, less about the Chapel of Ease in Harleston, a town which had no church until the 20th Century, so I shall largely now focus on the Chapel. St John's in Broad Street replaced our original ancient chapel in the Victorian era, became (eventually) a church and is a classic of its time. When fire hit in Oct 2025, the strength and quality of the structure was able



to resist the depredations of the fire which caused serious damage to the glass windows and much of the contents of the church. The architect assessing the repairs and damage after the fire remarked particularly on the quality of the flint walls and roof beams.

HARLESTON, June 26.—During the tempest on Saturday evening last, the Tower of Redenhall Church sustained considerable injury from being struck by lightning. It appears upon examination that the electric fluid struck the western turret (upon which was a weather vane), and forced it to the ground; it then passed in a lateral direction to the centre of the tower, and made its escape by the roof of the Church. The above beautiful and venerable pile, sustained a severe shock from a similar cause, in the year 1616.

One thing that could be said in favour of our original compact chapel was that, unlike St Mary's it was unlikely to attract lightning, something which caused serious damage to St Mary's in both 1616 and 1834. The 1616 lightning strike resulted in the good people

of Harleston, successfully petitioning the Justices For aid for repair of Redenhall steeple 'almost utterly ruined'. With order allowing £13.6s.4d. from the Marshalsea money; note by Framlingham Gawdy one of the Marshalsea money treasurers re payment of same; and receipt 11th Jan.³³

Sited in the Market Place and administered from the mother church of St Mary's Redenhall, the Chapel of Ease was for centuries the focus of worship in the town. When Pope Boniface IX first gave dispensation to provide a chapel of ease, in 1402 according to the Papal Registers, it was described thus:-

Mandate to give licence to the inhabitants of the town (opidi) Harlyston, in the parish of Redenhale in the same diocese, distant a legal mile or thereabouts from the parish church to have mass and other divine offices celebrated by said church or any other fit, even hired, priests in Harlyston which chapel is dependent on the said church.³⁴

³² I believe in the 1930's

³³ Norfolk Record Office MC 98/1/3, 543 x 2

³⁴ Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: 1362-1404. Catholic Church. Pope, H.M. Stationery Office, 1902 - Great Britain

I am afraid to say that the small chapel which slowly became encircled by market infill fell upon hard times on several occasions, with the building having decayed to such a state that

In the 16th Century it was restored and became vested in the Parishioners; and in the year 1688 being nearly deserted and useless for want of a fitting endowment Archbishop Sancroft settled £54 in trust to pay the same to the Schoolmaster to preach in it.³⁵

I suspect the 16th C restoring of the chapel was connected with the introduction of an act in 1559 making attendance to Sunday worship mandatory; it was a bit of a trek from Harleston to the mother church in Redenhall, but church attendance was non-negotiable therefore the town dwellers were happy to support a chapel in the middle of their settlement in which they could conveniently fulfil their religious obligations

The penalty for non-attendance on religious worship was imposed in the clause of the act of Elizabeth, called the Act of Uniformity, which says:— Whosoever, having no lawful or reasonable excuse to be absent, shall forbear to resort to his parish church or chapel accustomed, or upon reasonable let thereof to some usual place where common prayer and such service of God shall be used in such time of let upon every Sunday and other days ordained and used to be kept as holy days, and then and there abide orderly and soberly during the time of the common prayer, preaching, or other service, shall incur the penalties of a Popish recusant.³⁶

i.e. if you did not go to church, you could be burnt at the stake or even worse. James I somewhat moderated the act with a fine of 1s being levied on non-attenders, 9 such fines being levied in 1626 by the Redenhall Churchwardens.

The mid 17thC was a tough time for the old chapel. In 1644 the churchwardens (who doubled as the chapelwardens) paid out 8d for taking down the crosses at the ends of the chapel and another 9d for taking down or defacing pictures in the chapel.³⁷ Although this was some years before Cromwell deposed King Charles, he was by 1643 in control of East Anglia having routed all the Royalists from the region. Any sensible person, irrespective of his personal beliefs would have got with the programme and imposed Cromwell's puritan ideals upon the churches, stripping them of decoration and iconography. This was also the time of long sermons – in 1648, the churchwardens paid a sum of 8d for an hourglass to regulate the length of the sermon.

1688, when Sancroft settled the bequest on the Chapel, may have been a very significant date, this being the year when Britain's last Catholic and also Stuart King, James II, was replaced by protestant William and Mary – much more in line with the sympathies of this region despite the Duke of Norfolk being a leading Catholic. The Sancrofts continued their links with the town, the locals were very aware of their antecedents and status, which was of wide renown. The family were very pro-Anglican and anti-disestablishmentarianism, controversial in this area with strong non-conformist leanings in some

³⁵ The Ipswich Journal 15 Apr 1871 I believe this refers to a claim by Warburton quoted by Candler that the Chapel, along with the Rectory originally belonged to a monastery at Bungay but following the Dissolution of the Monastery was given to the Duke of Norfolk who in turn handed it to the town during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

³⁶ HC Deb 11 February 1842 vol 60 cc309-15

³⁷ Does not actually say Harleston Chapel in the records but this would be a reasonable assumption.

quarters balanced by Catholic recusants on the other side, led by the Dukes of Norfolk. Indeed Archbishop Sancroft wound up in the tower for opposing James II's more tolerant attitude towards the Catholics but, having refused to swear allegiance to the very Protestant William and Mary who

succeeded James wound up being deprived of that Archbishopric. And yes, this *is* the Archbishop Sancroft after whom our High School is named.

A few days since died at Harleston in Norfolk, Mrs. Sancroft, relict of William Sancroft, of Fressingfield in Suffolk, Esq, nephew and heir to the great Archbishop Sancroft (deprived of his archbishopric by King William) by whom she left two Daughters, one of which married John Wogan, of Gawdy-hall in Norfolk, Esq, She was daughter to Sir John Cotton, of Maddingley in Cambridgeshire, Bart. and sister to the late Sir John Hind Cotton, Bart. and aunt to the present Sir John, who married a daughter of the late Alderman Parsons.

Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal 5 Oct 1763

Funding of this out-post of the mother church was an on-going issue with the chapel clergyman being expected to double as a tutor to the associated school; meanwhile, the town steadily outgrew the old chapel. In 1718, when the market cross was within the walls of the chapel, and the school was being held in a room over the market cross – presumably leading to about a third of the foot print of the chapel being dedicated to secular use, the majority of the chapel funding was lost, the school was discontinued, and prayers were said but once a day.

In early days a congregation's participation was largely observational, and they expected no seating; by Georgian times when pews and other seating became the norm, and attendance and participation was expected by the town folk, the chapel could no longer meet the needs of the town. Judging by correspondence of the time it appears that a 'Breach' had been made in the chapel rendering it semi ruinous and no longer safe. It was already further compromised by the secular structures within the chapel: the market cross, the school held in a room over the market cross and various bits of parish storage. In 1726, the various extra structures were moved from within the chapel to the outside rear of the old chapel leaving more space within the old chapel walls for worship.

A whip round was held both locally and county wide. Collection money was added in; some reclaimed materials were sold off and in 1732 a separate subscription was raised for new Alter Rails and Communion table. The Pews were a territorial issue; rights to certain of them would be attached to a property, others were leased annually, whilst the hoi polloi would make do with more basic pews in less favoured positions. Unlike today you could not just turn up and 'grab a pew' as the saying goes –

your selection was limited to those designated as 'free pews' – often towards the back of the church or in other less desirable parts of the place of worship.

House Letting details from Mar 17, 1787, detailing pew rights

N O R F O L K.
To be LET at HARLESTON in the said County, and
Enter'd upon at LADY-DAY,
A Convenient Brick HOUSE, with or without a
small stable in thorough repair, late in the occupa-
tion of Mr. Turrell, attorney, deceased. It will suit a
small family. Seats in the church and chapel belonging
thereto. Enquire of Mr. Kerrich, Harleston.

Pew rental or sale, whereby a family or property were guaranteed sole occupancy of a specified pew was a reliable money earner – in 1761 the gallery that then ran only halfway along the long wall was extended around the Eastern end of the building to provide the extra seating needed to accommodate the growing town population and additional paid-for pews were included in this new section.

The status of the chapel continued to be uncertain, we already know that the responsibility for it had been passed to the parishioners in the 16thC and Sancroft had settled a trust on it to ensure the schoolmaster would double up as a preacher, making sure the chapel continued as a place of worship rather than just a civic hub. In 1763, the parochial set up was described as the **Rectory of Redenhall and the united Chapel of Harleston**.³⁸ The Chapel was formally separated from St Mary's and was being run as a Charity, although this last point might have been down to a confusion between the provision of the chapel and the funding of a clergyman/tutor by Archbishop Sancroft, it seems fairly clear the chapel was financially independent of the mother church in Redenhall.

Late 18th C or early 19th C watercolour of Harleston Old Chapel – the earliest image we have with no civic buildings to the rear of the chapel.

Not too surprisingly, as the town continued to thrive, the Chapel continued to creak at the seams and in the early 19th C, about 90 years after the installation of additional pews and extended gallery space, the Chapel itself was enlarged receiving grants of £150³⁹ with the locals raising the remaining £680 required to modernise and extend the building. This resulted in the addition of another 150 free seats⁴⁰ for the town residents and was achieved by demolishing the old Market Cross,



inconveniently placed for traffic, the Lock Up, not necessary to replace, and the Fire Engine House which can be provided elsewhere – all of which had been moved to the outside of the chapel after the improvements in 1726.

The Fire Engine house (and please remember the engine then was a small thing – essentially a horse drawn tank with manual pump) was moved to the Old House, on the corner of Exchange Street and Mendham Lane.⁴¹ I would be confident that the heavily re-enforced door, complete with peep hole, that opens into an under the stairs cupboard in the Old House, is the old door from the Cage or Lock-up, fitted when those various civic structures were demolished and the Fire Engine was moved up to the Old House.

The Chapel had long been associated with firefighting in the town. We have an early, 1712 entry in the Churchwarden's Accounts recording that there were belonging to the chapel and 'delivered to the

³⁸ 5th March 1763 when Thomas Warburton was installed as Rector.

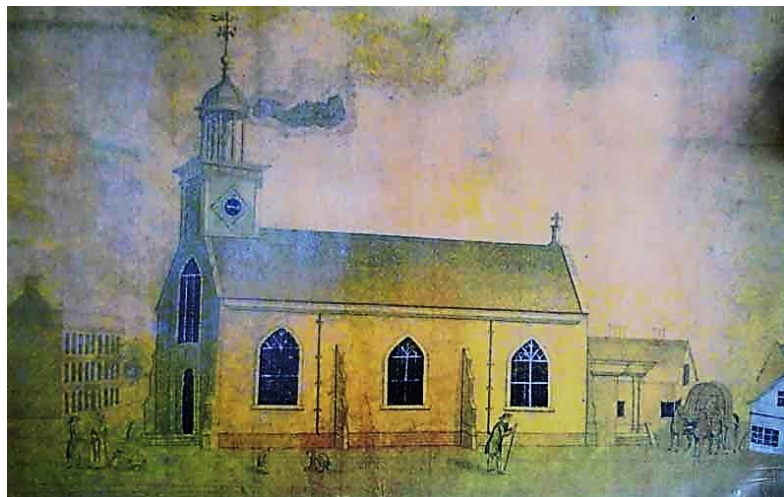
³⁹ The chapel was the first recipient of a grant, £100, from the Society for Promoting the Enlargement and Building of Churches and Chapels, founded in 1818. Another gift of £50 was received from the Master and Fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Norfolk Chronicle, 7 Jul 1821.

⁴⁰ Free seats as opposed to boxes or pews rented annually

⁴¹ The Church Warden's accounts in 1820 include an invoice from Thomas Poole, draper, £1-5-0, for a year's rent re the housing of the Fire Engine. When the remodelling took place, the old lock up door also made its way to the Old House where it now provides access to the under the stairs cupboard. Other pieces of panelling may well have also been repurposed in the house – a door to an outhouse is assembled from several well carved pieces of oak.

churchwardens the same day' . . . 'three Cromes⁴² and 25 Bucketts and 2 ladders for the use of the town'

Cromes, a curved sort of pitchfork, were an essential part of the firefighting equipment of the time and, still in use in the 20th C, would have been used to pull burning thatch off a building. The ladders would have enabled access to the roofs in the first place, and the buckets were used for water chains from ponds near to the site of the fire. In later years a drawn pump or Engine was stored at the back of the Chapel and evidence shows the Churchwardens continuing to be in charge of the funding of the 'Engine' through to the early 19th century. Ringing of the Chapel bell, probably the Market Bell, and



in later years the clock tower bell was for centuries the fire alarm signal to rally the town firefighters.

Naïve and poorly reproduced but this does show the market cross to the rear of the Chapel.

A mere 50 years on from the demolition of the various excrescences and the extensive additions to the chapel, a certain element of movers and shakers in the town decided Harleston was worthy of a smarter

(more modern – Victorian) place of worship. I don't think it was ever seriously planned that the old chapel would be retained but at one point it was floated that the chapel be enlarged across Cage Walk to the North of the existing building

Mr W.M.Hazard,⁴³ with characteristic energy and liberality, purchased homes on the north side to enable the enlargement to be made in that direction. It was impossible to go southwards (*onto*) public property... greatly needed for the market, neither ...on the west next the main street.⁴⁴

It was evidently decided this was an impractical solution, by 1869 ecclesiastical architect Mr Phipson had submitted plans for the new Chapel and in 1870 'The Harleston Episcopal Chapel of Ease' was offered for sale for the sum of £500⁴⁵. At the time of its demolition, it was even alleged that it was no longer consecrated; a very convenient discovery when it was decided to demolish the small, ugly and inconveniently situate.(Chapel).

In 1726, when architecture was at its lowest state ... an ugly erection with galleries round three sides, seated in which it is impossible for a person of ordinary height to

⁴² crome (E Anglian) A garden or agricultural implement with 3 or 4 tines bent at right angles, in appearance like a garden fork with bent prongs. Used for breaking up soil, clearing ditches, raking up shellfish on beaches, and similar tasks.

⁴³ Local lawyer and general bigwig.

⁴⁴ Norwich Mercury 19 Apr 1871

⁴⁵ Norfolk Chronicle 9 Jul 1870

see the clergyman in the pulpit. ... the chapel stands in the Market-place without railing or ground of its own round it; the consequence is that the children of Harleston use the walls for playing against, and their shouts and laughter mingle most inharmoniously with the services within. ... it was discovered that the present building is not a consecrated one (*How convenient?*)⁴⁶

Sadly, it seems the local press decided that the opportunity for a general polemic against the Old Chapel was obviously too good to miss; this provides a detailed, if subjective, description of the venerable building.

Small, ugly, inconveniently situated⁴⁷ ... stands on the South side of the Market Place ..a very plain building.. ground plan is an elongated square, ... no tower but a pigeon-locker bell, turret contains one bell. There are three windows ... on the Market Place ... in imitation of the most approved examples of 'Carpenter's Gothic'. On the walls ... very good flint work buttresses and they are about the only things the lover of ecclesiastical architecture can look upon in the Church without a pang. The interior comfortably fitted ...utter absence of all tasteful and elegant influences .. pulpit about as large as an ordinary windmill, stands at the centre of one of the long sides of the building. On the other side and across each end are galleries. The floor is furnished with pews and a wide space between each row leads from the West entrance to Communion Table and rails ... at the Eastern end. The floor is paved with York Stone ... The pews, pulpit and fronts of galleries are of wainscot, ... dark from age. The fittings ... good and even costly. Taste alone seems to have been wanting .. this absent may very well be understood when we say this work was executed in 1726⁴⁸ ... The galleries are supported on iron standards about two inches square and twisted. The tie beams made in the same manner ... museum for kitchen pokers .. the carpenter's gothic of the window is matched by the blacksmith's gothic of the detestable bits of metal which take the place of the elegant clustered shaft of better architectural times. The roof is plastered and whitewashed. Over the East gallery is a circular skylight and under it another window similar to those on the South side. Church is well lighted though there are no windows on the North side. Mr Phipson, the architect of the new Church, says the Chapel of Ease was probably built ... in the late 14th Century⁴⁹. ... congregations were disturbed by the traffic in the street, or by children playing in the marketplace. ... Mr J. Sancroft Holmes .. a few words ..⁵⁰

The Memorial Stone for the new chapel was laid in April 1871 – an event of such significance it was marked in an article in 'The Architect'.⁵¹ Either that or Mr Phipson had a very good eye for self-

⁴⁶ The Bury and Norfolk Post and Suffolk Herald 2 May 1871

⁴⁷ Contrasting somewhat with the large and roomy building described in the Norwich Mercury 22 Jun 1872

⁴⁸ Ironic when we compare our modern perception of Georgian Neo-Classical Style with High Victorian Taste.

⁴⁹ Not a bad calculation – Boniface gave dispensation for the Chapel of Ease in 1402 so I think we can assume it was built in the very early 15thC

⁵⁰ The Ipswich Journal 15 Apr 1871

⁵¹ The Architect: A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Art, Civil Engineering and Building, Volume 5 Gilbert Wood & Company, Limited, 1871

promotion. Another, contemporary article,⁵² details how the cost of the building exclusive of pulpit, prayer-desk, lectern, font, stained glass, screens, enclosing walls, gates &c would be £3,150

Harleston, Norfolk.—The foundation stone of Harleston Chapel-of-ease, situate in the Market-place, was recently laid. The chapel will consist of a nave, 68 feet long by 20 feet 6 inches wide, and 41 feet high to the ridge of the roof. On each side are four decorated arches, opening into aisles of similar length and 10 feet wide. The chancel is 30 feet long, and the same width as the nave, with an apsidal east end of five bays, with a single light window in each bay. On the north and south sides are the organ chamber and vestry, treated as transepts, with stone archways opening into the aisles, and chancel and circular windows in the gables. The principal entrance is at the west end; there is also a south entrance, and the first bay of the south aisle will form a baptistry. The roofs are moulded, open throughout, and of pitch pine covered with green slates. The walls are of flint and stone, the west front towards the road being of squared flints laid in regular courses. The church stands well up from the road, and will be reached by four steps. There is no tower or spire. The architect is Mr. Phipson; and the contractor, Mr. Grimwood, of Weybread. The style of architecture is the Geometrical Decorated of the fourteenth century, or of the reign of Edward II.

and how the 400-person church would not in any way partake of the modern Gothic character now becoming so common.

Richard Makilwaine Phipson was the diocesan surveyor (architect) for the Anglican Diocese of Norwich from 1871 to 1884, and also worked on All Saints Alburgh as well

as a number of more high profile projects along with other workaday ones in both Suffolk and Norfolk. He was alleged to be “fond of big, unexpected figure and foliage carvings”⁵³ whilst other sources seem to highlight his generally conservative attitude to his work in the diocese. He was noted for the high quality of flush work (knapped flints framed in stone) featured in exterior walls and this was indeed a characteristic remarked on by the architect in charge of the post 2025 fire restoration



Harleston Chapel of Ease – late 18th C/ early 19thC?

Whilst the modernising movers and shakers in the town may have merrily belittled the old-fashioned Chapel of Ease, the Town was not unanimous in a desire to demolish this local landmark. The article

⁵² Bury and Norwich Post 2 May 1871

⁵³ Wilson, Bill (2002). revised Pevsner Architectural Guides, Norfolk, Part 2

below questioned the propriety of demolishing the building which has for some 300 years .. been the chief seat of religious worship in the town another contemporary report was a little more

THE OLD CHAPEL OF EASE.—At last it has been decided that this building should meet the fate that has in this age of progress awaited many of the ancient structures in this country, and for some days workmen have been engaged in divesting the chapel of its roof and inside till nothing but its bare walls are left. It must be remembered that in June, 1872, the erection was completed of a new and handsome structure on the east side of the town, adjoining the grounds of W. M. Hazard, Esq. The pulling down of the old chapel (St. John the Baptist) has been long delayed, and various opinions have been expressed as to the propriety of demolishing the building which for some 300 years had been the chief seat of religious worship in the town. Any doubts, however, that may have existed as to this are apparently now removed, and in a few days the last of the old chapel will be seen, and a considerable space will be added to the already good sized market place. It is not as yet decided what will be built on the site of the chapel, but it is understood that the erection of a clock tower and other buildings is contemplated. The town clock was on the old chapel, and to prevent the inhabitants feeling the loss of this for any length of time a temporary tower is being erected. A new tower would, it is estimated, cost several hundred pounds, and some dissatisfaction is felt that such an expense should be incurred. A very liberal offer has, however, been made by a gentleman resident in the town, and, undoubtedly, it will soon be decided as to what will be done.

forceful about popular feelings in the town.

Great interest has been manifested in the fate of the old building by many inhabitants and ..some looked upon its destruction as more or less sacrilege .. plenty were averse to the erection of a new edifice.

The Halesworth Times and East Suffolk Advertiser
13 May 1873

The same article described the old chapel as

A large plain looking building with box like pews and a large old fashioned gallery⁵⁴ - really not to high Victorian tastes as the previous articles demonstrated.

As well as affection for a building that had been a physical and religious centrepiece for so many years, I can imagine some irritation existed about the fact that, a mere 50 years earlier, Harleston's old Chapel had not only received grants of £150⁵⁵ but the locals

had raised the remaining £680 required to modernise the building, adding another 150 free seats for the town residents.⁵⁶



Having rejected the plan to extend the Chapel northwards as impractical and with the new Chapel completed, by 1873 the Chapel Path (aka Cage Walk) was closed and the Old Chapel of Ease was being demolished. This weathered corbel which normally lurks in a town garden is believed to have come from the old chapel when it was demolished – it really is rather beautiful.

A carved corbel alleged to have come from the old chapel – presumably out of reach of the destruction bent followers of Cromwell back in the 17thC?

The new and handsome structure on the east side of the town adjoining the grounds of W.M.Hazard Esq was completed in June 1872. I might be doing Mr Hazard a disfavour, after all it could be argued that he was merely providing the town with a modern place of worship more fitting to its status and size

⁵⁴ 13 May 1873

⁵⁵ The chapel was the first recipient of a grant, £100, from the Society for Promoting the Enlargement and Building of Churches and Chapels, founded in 1818. Another gift of £50 was received from the Master and Fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Norfolk Chronicle, 7 Jul 1821.

⁵⁶ Free seats as opposed to boxes or pews rented annually

of population, but I am rather of the opinion that demolishing the, even then, ancient chapel was an act of blatant vandalism. I rather suspect enlarging the old chapel was never really on the cards and this option perhaps was floated as a sop to the locals who rather resented the demolishing of their shabby but much-loved chapel. When it was built, the new chapel had a clear and unobstructed view to the open country to the east – not these days as tall trees have grown up to the East and North of the chapel. More significantly it was essentially in the grounds of Caltofts, the family home of the Hazards and in full view of the house – a stone celebration and lasting legacy for a wealthy man who had no children.

A late 19th C photo of the Hazard women folk taking tea on the lawn with their caged parrot – the chapel clearly almost in the grounds of their home



Although much of the chapel was originally fitted with largely plain rippled glass, the five windows at the Eastern end of the church over the Altar were part of the original design and were installed by the time the church was consecrated. This was the work of A & WH Connor & Taylor a family business started by an Irishman in 19th C London.

The row of Hazard Family memorial windows along the South wall were designed by the same company, one of the windows bearing the date 1874 although we know the window for William Martin Hazard, at least, was not put in until 1884.

The West window over the main entrance doors was installed in 1875 and depicts the life of the patronal Saint, St John. To the south of this window, in 1877 the Carthew window was given by George Carthew of East Dereham in memory of his parents George Snr and Elizabeth Carthew. They had died some years back, but no expense was spared by the dutiful son. Although local plumber, glass and hardware man, James Chappell, installed the window the piece itself was commissioned from Wailes, Son and Strang of Newcastle⁵⁷, a highly regarded firm which produced work for a number of cathedrals including Gloucester Cathedral as well as restoring the medieval glass at York Minster. The Carthews may have been a little surprised had they known this window was to wind up incorporated into a kitchen built in this corner of the church and even more shocked if they were to know the window was destroyed in the fire of October 2025.

Returning to the furore when the old chapel was demolished, in spite of some of the rude descriptions above, it is evident many held the Chapel in affection as shown by the lavish gift donated specifically to the Chapel, rather than the mother church, by the widow of a former church warden and not just any

⁵⁷ Norwich Mercury 19 May 1877

church warden; William Sancroft Holmes was an important local personage, scion of a well established and notable family even if his son John Sancroft Holmes leant his weight to the campaign to demolish the Chapel some quarter of a century after his mother's bequest.

Norfolk News
10 Aug 1850

Further indications of the affection in which the town held the original chapel, appeared only a few years before it's demolition when the Christmas decorations in both St John's and St Mary's were praised but special attention was drawn to how Many of the ladies in Harleston have contributed their assistance in embellishing the Chapel, which is even more elegantly decorated than the Church.⁵⁸

As hinted above, I am less than a fan of Mr Hazard who seems to have been awfully keen over the years to sanitise and standardise our lively town into a state of Victorian rectitude. His part in the demolition of the ancient chapel is particularly galling, and I would tend to think was as much about his personal glory as the benefit of the town. During the first months after the opening of the chapel, a few of the rougher elements of the town vented their resentment by heckling and pelting stones at the attendees of Services at the new St John's. Even more seriously a window shattering explosion in

A VERY HANDSOME COMMUNION SERVICE has lately been presented to the inhabitants of this parish, for the use of St. John's chapel, by the lady of the late W. S. Holmes, Esq. It consists of a flagon, paten, chalice, and collecting salver, weighing in all about 50 ounces. The [flagon and salver each bear the following inscription, "Sacred to the service of the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, Harleston, in memory of William Sancroft Holmes, Churchwarden, born October 22nd, 1816, died September 11th, 1849.—Easter, 1850." Each piece is enriched with the monogram, "I. H. S.," and a cross environed with rays as a sun in its splendour, (rayonné and pointed alternately) and forms altogether a very handsome and appropriate tribute to the memory of the deceased.

to make their escape without being recognized. On Tuesday night a more serious affair took place. Between ten and eleven a report resembling an explosion was heard, and it was discovered that an explosion of gunpowder had taken place near the new church. The design of the perpetrators appears to have been to injure the large window of the church, but luckily no harm was done to it. Several houses near, however, did not fare so well, as many panes of glass were smashed. The offenders at present are unknown, but a reward has been offered for their discovery.

August 1872 was reported to be linked with animosity towards the new church – the culprits were not apprehended.

East Suffolk Gazette 3 Sep 1872

The pulling down of the old chapel may have been long delayed and the local traders

doubtless looked forward to a considerable space (*that*) will be added to the already good sized marketplace. However, with the demolition of the chapel there was now neither a town clock nor a town bell so whatever the town as a whole felt about their chapel being demolished and replaced by a modern building more or less in the shadow of Caltofts, the home of Hazard, local solicitor and the prime driver for its replacement, from now on the focus was bent upon the provision of a new clock.

The old town clock was temporarily mounted on the roof of one of the buildings surrounding the market square⁵⁹until the tower for the new clock was built by Mr Grimwood of Weybread⁶⁰ with the new clock provided by Gillet and Bland of Croydon⁶¹although it still had not been installed by November due to concerns about the safety of the tower. In brief, our clock tower, the iconic symbol

⁵⁸ The Ipswich Journal 4 Jan 1868

⁵⁹ Norwich Mercury 24 Jun 1876

⁶⁰ £320 Norwich Mercury 2 Aug 1876

⁶¹ £95 Norwich Mercury 2 Aug 1876

of this settlement that has been in existence for at least a millennium, is only about 150 years old – striking and beautiful as it is.

Whilst it seems somewhat bizarre that an Italianate style tower was erected in this Norfolk town, this style may well have been chosen to echo the Railway Station erected twenty years earlier at the other end of the town. Essentially the northern rail entrance to town was marked by the elegant and highly modern Italianate Station, the southern road entrance was marked in a similar way by the equally elegant clock tower marking the town as being both modern and stylish in outlook.

GILLETT & JOHNSTON,
(Late Gillett & Bland.)
Clock Manufacturers,
BELL FOUNDERS,
 AND
BELL HANGERS,
CROYDON, LONDON.



MAKERS OF THE

CLOCKS AT	BELLS AT
Cathedral.	Craig-y-Nos Castle
Mandall do.	Eddystone Lighthouse.
Wells do.	Birmingham Municipal
Sigo do.	Buildings.
Manchester Town Hall.	Hove Town Hall.
Bedford Town Hall.	Burnley Holy Trinity Ch.
City Courts, London.	Crawley Parish Church.
St James' Palace, London.	Corbridge-on-Tyne, do.
Worborne Abbey.	Pontypool (Trevethin
Worcester Town Hall,	Church).
N.S.W.	Windsore Church.
Hamersmith Parish Ch.	Eiffel Tower, Paris.
Leamstead Clock Tower.	Dunstable Parish Church.
Gate of Albany Memorial,	Aylesford do.
London.	St. Mark's Church, St.
Hotel Tower, Paris.	Helen's.
Shanghai Custom	Royal Normal College,
House.	Norwood.
Weger's College, Hull.	Tetbury Parish Church.

The 'new' clock was believed to have unfailingly served the town for 80 years until, in the winter of 1955, the cold was so intense and the snow so persistent that the hands on the north face (on the side opposite to the market-place and pointing down the throughfare) froze into position, much to the concern of the town clock winder, Mr H P Cooper. After a precarious and risky attempt to release the hands, Cooper decided that discretion was the better part of valour and let the inevitable thaw sort out the problem for him.⁶²

Bell News Vol 18 – 1899

The original clock on the old chapel dated back to at least 1720 that being the year that the overseers

Paid Sam^l Bassingthwaite⁶³ for new Rooning the Chap^l waits being 60^{li} at 1d y^e pound 5^s adding 21^{li} of new Led at 2d y^e pound.

i.e. Samuel Bassingthwaite was paid for new rounding the Chapel Clock weights and supplying 21 pounds of lead although whether the lead was for replacing the old weights or had another purpose is not completely unambiguous.

The Chapel was described by Bloomfield as being tiled, hath one good bell in a sort of cupola for there is no tower.⁶⁴

This good bell from the old chapel was reused, being the bell upon which the new clock still now strikes whilst, in 1881, the Redenhall Bell Foundry cast and mounted the new bell for the new chapel.⁶⁵ There is a common belief that the cupola was taken

from the old chapel; I believe it was in fact just the old bell that was reused, the entire rest of the tower and clock being new built but closer examination of the plans held in the Norfolk Record office should clarify this.

⁶² Diss Express 21 Jan 1955

⁶³ A Samuel Bassingthwaite buried his wife Elizabeth at Denton in April 1728, he followed her to the grave within 4 months.

⁶⁴ Bloomfield also refers to the Market Cross and chapel having been partially rebuilt in 1726

⁶⁵ Diss Express Norfolk, 6 May 1881

I say the 'Old Bell' but according to an inventory of 1552, in the 16th C the Chapel had two large bells of 9cwt and 7cwt respectively which would indicate a rather more substantial tower than that sported by the chapel in the late 18th C. That there was more than 1 bell receives a bit of sideways confirmation as in 1684 the 'ringers' plural were paid 10s for proclaiming the ascension of King James II at Harleston⁶⁶. It may well have been that one bell was to call the faithful to prayer and the other was a secular bell, rung to indicate the start and finish of market trading and/or acting as an alarm bell in case of fire or another calamity. If this was so, the two bells were reduced to one by 1691, when the Redenhall Churchwardens permitted a maximum annual allowance of 5s for the ringing of the Chapel bell (singular) on Sundays whilst in 1706 9d was paid for a new Leath^r for the Chappel Bell Clapper.

There was also mention of payments to refix and gild y^e Fane called Jack pudding. Was this a nickname for the Weathervane? Looked it up and indeed, Jack Pudding was a nickname for a Weathercock as well as a slang term for a street clown.

In 1711, more work was done on the Chapel Bell with 14/6d being paid out for the re-hanging of the bell (singular) Labour, grease and oyle (*sic*) included along with beere (*sic*) for the 'helpers'. This bell was replaced in 1751 when the church wardens allowed £3 8s 6d for the charges of the Bell (for the Chapel); this is the 'old' bell that hangs to this day in the clock tower. Inscribed Rob^t Catlin Fecit 1751 this doubtless was also the bell described in the Churchwardens accounts as being rung at 3pm to signify the end of the market trading.

Whilst there was no scope for burial in this chapel hemmed in on all sides, as it was, by marketplace or properties, many children were baptised here - a lot more convenient than trekking over to Redenhall. I found no separate records of baptisms in St Johns' until the mid-nineteenth century but, according to a note in the annual Bishop's transcripts, baptisms had taken place there since the time of the reformation.

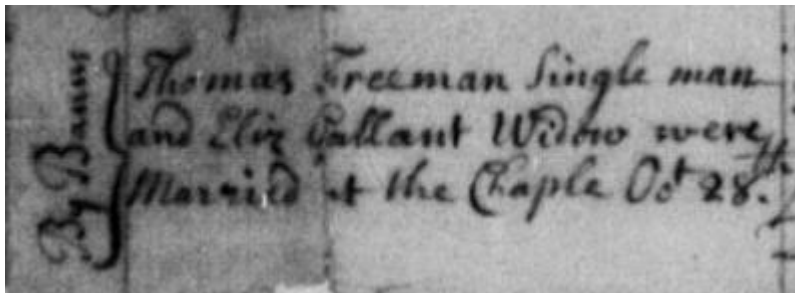
This creates another trip hazard for the unwary researcher; it is easy to pursue the St Mary's Redenhall records in a certain year and be unaware of the St John's Chapel records or other local, non-conformist records. Since both Chapel of Ease and Church served the parish, either could be used at the discretion of the parents or convenience of the curate. Families living in the Norfolk part of the Suffolk parish of Mendham (in the triangle formed by Mendham Lane, London Road and the Suffolk border with the tip truncated by the Market Place) also often attended the Market Place Chapel in preference to Mendham church.⁶⁷

In 1912, John Perowne, the then elderly Rector, addressed this issue in the Fly leaf of the 1786 -1812 Parish Register. He believed that children baptised at St John's Chapel had their details recorded on loose scraps of paper (still then extant) that were only later entered in the main mother church register, and this had also happened when duplicated recordings (both on loose sheets and in the main register) of weddings were also discovered. Perowne was not quite able to square the circle of why there were some double recorded funerals, bearing in mind that there were no burial grounds at the chapel of ease.

⁶⁶ This might have been hand ringers or town criers whose role was to disseminate crucial news at the weekly markets rather than tower bell ringers.

⁶⁷ Suffolk Returns from the Census of Religious Worship of 1851 edited by T. C. B. Timmins, David Percy Dymond

I have found very little evidence of marriages taking place at St John's (at least not until well into the second half of the 20th Century when permission to do so was granted in 1962) except for this one



entry from 1732, the only one described as having been at the Chapel. One wonders if this was unusual and if so, why this particular couple wed there and not at the mother church.

*Redenhall with Harleston
Parish Register 1732*

Whilst the residents of the Town, Mendham in Norfolk and the Common may have preferred to use St John's Chapel of Ease, the inhabitants of Wortwell, a small hamlet to the east of Redenhall, had neither Church nor Chapel of Ease (although the village did boast, at one time, 2 non-conformist chapels) and instead the folks of Wortwell were, largely, baptised, wed and buried at the church of St Mary's in Redenhall; rather spoilt for choice, they could also belong to the Parish of Mendham and often used Denton Church.

The Wortwell Baptist Chapel, built in the 1820's is now a private dwelling, but worship still takes place in Wortwell's formerly Congregational Chapel, now URC, which dates from the 1770s. Not only could the chapel goers be married and baptised at the URC chapel, but they also had a burial ground with records careful kept by the Dissenting Minister, although no-one is perfect as evidenced by an entry in 1811

Whereas the late Reverend Henry Llewellyn did in consequence of his great age & infirmities omit to register the burial of John Say the son of Joshua Say and Mary his wife of the parish of Wortwell . . . we whose names are underwritten do hereby certify that the said John Say died on the 5th day of July in the year 1804 aged 5 months and was buried in the burial ground belonging to the Protestant Dissenters of Wortwell on the 8th of July⁶⁸

Fair dues to Ezekiel Bloomfield, the Minister at the time this record was inserted, for not trying to cover up this error which probably came to light, 7 years after the little boy's death, when the illiterate parents (signed with crosses) baptised their daughter Lydia. Sadly, like so many children at the time, Lydia died in infancy and was buried, aged 17 weeks, at the same spot as her older brother had been 7 ½ years earlier.

Rev. Ezekiel Bloomfield

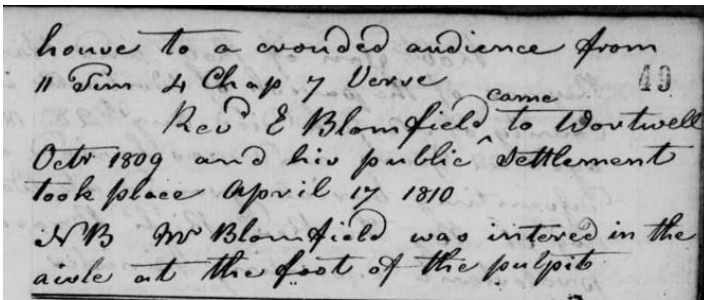
The Wymondham born Rev. Ezekiel Bloomfield, who discovered this error, had moved to Wortwell in 1809 and not only was a preacher but also an author of various books of an improving and informative nature commissioned by Bright and Child's of Bungay. Unlike his predecessor he did not get to a great age but died aged 40 on the 14 July 1818, at a house



⁶⁸ Chapel register

in Suffolk leaving a widow and, after 18 years of marriage, a family of 8 children (a 9th child had, as so many did at the time, died in infancy) in relative poverty. He was interred in the aisle at the foot of the pulpit.

Blomfield's long-suffering wife, Mary, survived him by many years dying in 1834 at the age of 57; "long suffering" is not a modern-day judgemental comment but how a contemporary death notice described her at the time of her demise.

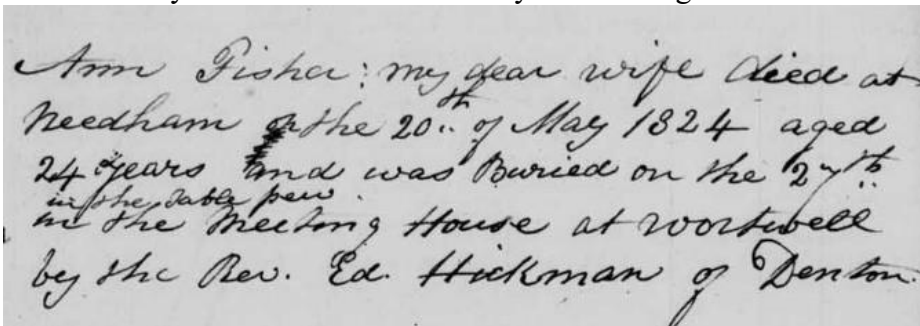


Blomfield's physical arrival and heavenly departure from Wortwell

Blomfield's evangelical energy was inherited by his daughters; five of them eventually migrated to New Zealand, a sixth spent time in Tahiti; four of those six girls married missionaries.

Ezekial Bloomfield is mostly forgotten today but is still an interesting character whose children spread out from Wortwell to far flung foreign places and whose chapel, where he preached, is still active.

John Fisher followed Bloomfield but his was to be both a sad and short lived ministry. His wife died aged 24 and was buried in the 'Table Pew' when The meeting house was more than filled during the ceremony. 18 months later their 2-year-old daughter was laid in her mother's grave. John Fisher,



in a bizarre echo of his predecessor, also died aged only 40, and (in 1832) was also buried in the Table Pew near where his wife and their child had been interred less than a decade earlier

Wortwell's chapel goes certainly got their money's worth; in 1822 Charles Valentine of Diss gave a 30-page sermon at Wortwell, later printed for posterity by our local printers, the Canns, on the western side of the Market Place

PREACHED AT THE OPENING
OF THE
Unitarian Meeting House,
HARLESTON, NORFOLK,
On SUNDAY the 7th of APRIL, 1822.
BY
CHARLES VALENTINE,
Minister of the Unitarian Church, Diss.

In earlier days, the busily recruiting chapel may have had the odd problem with a few wayward members. A certain Morris Buxton of the village was admitted into the church in July 1812, a year later in the June 1813 meeting it was reported that:

In the course of this month Morris Buxton having conducted himself in an idle and disorderly manner was conversed with & requested for the present to keep from the Lord's table.

i.e. Buxton had been conducting himself in a manner that was judged to not be up to standard and was banned from attending chapel until he changed his ways. Public opinion really counted for something in the days of small and static populations.

Services alternated between the Wortwell Chapel and the Mendham Lane Chapel, probably very convenient after the Wortwell Chapel was closed for a period whilst alterations were made, reopening on October 8th, 1816, although sadly the grand re-opening fell a little flat.

Wortwell Meeting House having been shut up about 10 weeks was reopened after having been enlarged from 2 to 3 (*2 to 3 what?*) There being an unusual highwater prevented many both ministers and people from attending.⁶⁹

I wonder if it was at this point the two side doors were replaced with a single central door?

If you wish to read more about the history of the Mendham Lane Chapel, a very comprehensive booklet was written in the early 20th C⁷⁰.

Hopping back to Harleston, within 60 years of the enlargement of Wortwell Chapel the far more ancient Harleston Chapel was demolished and replaced by the familiar Victorian structure we know today. Whilst I do love the iconic clock tower which is so much a symbol of the town today, I can't help but feel regret that it also marks the loss of our 15thC Chapel.

⁶⁹ All the above from the Chapel Register Book

⁷⁰ A small print run, written by Bill and Helen Kennet