

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY

MINUTES OF MEETING 10th JUNE 2015

MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

David Verlander Deputy Chairman	Paul Salvidge	Chris Bush
Heather Salvidge	Mike Rea	Margaret Rea
Diane Bush	Carol Wylde	Tim Snow
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Colin Smith
Christine Hall	Valerie Austin	Vic Dowsett
John Segar	Caryl Benner	Ian Jackson
Graham Morland	Kevin Wood	Teri Williams
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Tony Eatson

Apologies:

Ray Franklin	Sue Johnson	Margaret Shaw
Ray Gaubert	Nina Gaubert	Jean Platt
Moyra Jackson	Andy Elliott	Frances Elliott

The Society welcomes our new member, Mr Graham Morland.

1. The Deputy Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Mr Tony Kirby, our guest speaker for the evening.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 4th March 2015

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Deputy Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes however Mike Rea apologised for inadvertently referring to our President as the Chairman in the June Elsenham News.

4. Guest Speaker Mr Tony Kirby

The Deputy Chairman introduced Mr Tony Kirby who has returned to present his talk, Tides of Fortune, the story of the rise and fall of the East Coast holiday resort. In an entertaining and informative hour he explained how in earlier times prior to the mid-17th century, going to the seaside on holiday was a completely alien idea, the sea was for fishing, trading and fighting wars. Using Yarmouth as an example, he showed how the South Quay would have been the centre of life in the community

surrounded by a dense network of roads, known as rows, where the locals lived. Interestingly these Rows were numbered rather than named as is the case with modern streets. The sea always presented a threat from invasion and many seaside towns and villages were fortified such as Southwold which today displays a row of cannon, albeit not original, that demonstrates its previous role in protecting the coast.

People going on holiday in the 1650's went to Spa's, Tunbridge, Epsom and of course Bath being the best known. Going to a Spa was a bit like today's cruises where all walks of life were welcome, if they had the money. The idea of the seaside as a holiday began in Scarborough around 1650. As well as the sea, Scarborough had a mineral spring and this was promoted, together with the benefits of its sea water, as being able to cure almost any ailment. It became very popular towards the end of that century and the first use of bathing machines was seen. Similar facilities sprang up round the coast such as the Margate Sea Bathing Hospital of 1787. The English resorts got another boost in 1793 with the outbreak of war with France when the Gentry suddenly found themselves unable to visit the elegant French resorts and had to stay in England. At around the same time, a Dr Crane recommended the health benefits of his home town, Weymouth, to George III who was so enamoured of the place he spent much time there. Pitt, the Prime Minister of the day was obliged, with his Government, to visit the King "on holiday" to transact the business of Parliament. After this, the seaside became fashionable and many resorts were developed all around the coast like Yarmouth which was built by a group of Norwich businessmen to become the "Brighton of the North".

Up until the 1840s the seaside would only be visited by those with the time and money to travel however the coming of the railway meant that anyone could visit and with the introduction of the Bank holiday in 1871, the day excursion became very popular. Stations were built at many resorts often close to the beach and several of the larger places were provided with excursion platforms that would regularly see half a dozen trains stabled awaiting the trek home and maybe more. Large firms, such as the Bass brewery at Burton On Trent would hire eight trains at a time to take their entire workforce to the seaside for the day.

Taking Cromer as an example, it was a small fishing village on land owned by the Bond-Cabell and Sayville families who at that time did not want to change the place. By the 1870s a new generation of the families came along who sold off parts of the Estates to permit development of the Cromer resort and by the 1900s it was a much sought after retreat by English and foreign Royalty and Gentry. The Great Eastern Railway built a station in the town in 1877 but it was badly situated being some distance away and 300 feet above the sea. By 1890 the Midland and Great Northern Railway had built a much more accessible station near the beach and this opened up the town to flocks of visitors from the Midlands and both Cromer and the adjacent Sheringham had a Midlands feel to them. While many developments succeeded, sometimes things

went wrong. The Ravenscar Estate was bought by a group of Leeds businessmen in the late 19th century. A hotel was built, roads marked out and a sewer system started but the place was never completed and remained something of ghost town, probably because what beach it had was very rocky and some distance away. The nearby presence of Scarborough didn't help either.

Hotels were always part of the seaside and were always important buildings such as the Grand Hotel at Scarborough designed by Cuthbert Broderick which at the time was one of the biggest and best hotels in Europe. Some hotels, such as the Zetland in Saltburn even had their own station where the very rich would decamp from their private trains.

Resorts were generally laid out the same way, with a main road leading from the station to the beach along which could be found various shops designed to separate the visitor from their money. Along the seafront would be a promenade often decorated with flower beds and here would be found the main hotels offering sea views from their best rooms. Behind these would be found the lesser hotels and the boarding houses popular among the skilled workers on holiday there. Finally, there would be the rows of tenements where the local workers lived and where in Edwardian times it was unwise to stray. Of course, any resort worth the name would have a pier originally built to berth the coastal passenger steamers that would bring in the visitors. Over the years, these piers became an attraction in their own right gaining theatres and amusements to keep the visitor happy. Among these amusements were the highly popular waxworks that would acquaint the populace with the celebrities of the time. Always on the lookout for ways to keep visitors amused, the seaside towns were early adopters of the cinema with many being built in the early years of the 20th century.

By the 1930s, the seaside holiday had competition as buses and coaches opened up the countryside to visitors and the railway companies and the resorts combined forces to produce memorable advertising that still has resonance today. One of the best known advertising campaigns dates from the early 20th century when the Great Western Railway coined the phrase - The Cornish Riviera - to advertise the delights of Cornwall and named one of its crack expresses the Cornish Riviera Express which ran to Penzance until recent times.

In 1938 the holiday with pay was mandated and this made the Holiday Camp as espoused by Billy Butlin a popular attraction. With everything provided on site there was no need to visit the adjoining resort town and by the late 1950s the resorts had, generally, had their heyday. From the late 1950s caravan parks became popular and like the holiday camp, with everything on site the nearby resorts suffered. The final nail in the coffin was the package holiday. In 1960 only a third of the population had been abroad on holiday, by 1970 less than a third hadn't!

The resorts tried to reinvent themselves with bigger and better amusements and wholly inappropriate illuminated signage on fine old buildings to give a semblance of modernity but in general it failed to stem the decline. There has been something of a renaissance in recent years and it can be said that the age of the seaside resort is not over.

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 Help Wanted!

We are grateful to Valerie Austin for the gift of a small photo album of pictures taken around the Village. These will be scanned and added to our growing photo archive. Odd photos like these or small artefacts can trigger research as can a personal reminiscence. So, if you, or someone you know, have old photographs of the Village and its activities that you think might interest us please let us know so we can scan them for our archive. Similarly, if you have any reminiscences or stories please consider writing them down or consenting to an interview.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday September 9th. For a slightly different sort of evening, Heather Salvidge and Mike Rea will narrate a film of the farming year on Ugley Hall Farm in the 1950's. Assembled from 8mm home movies shot by Jean Reay's Mother, it should make for an interesting evening. We are indebted to Jean Reay for giving us a copy of the film and hope to welcome Jean as a guest on the evening.

ENDS