

**ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING 09<sup>th</sup> November 2022**  
**MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM**

**Those Present:**

Ray Franklin Chairman	Dave Verlander Vice - Chairman	Paul Salvidge
Heather Salvidge	Chris Bush	Lynda Jolly
Mike Rea	Margaret Rea	
Marco Newton	Tim Snow	Valerie Austin
Lorraine Miles-Newton	Vic Dowsett	Anne Player
Keith Hunt	Jill Hunt	Tricia Holyomes
Carol Wylde	Chris Waite	Sue Waite
Frances Lambert	Lynda Bowcock	Ian Jackson
Do Hackett	Trevor Hackett	Roger Clarke
Phyllis Clarke		

**Apologies:**

Brenda Davidson	Sue Johnson	Roger Kendrick
Kevin Wood	Campbell Dunn	Lynda Dunn
Diane Bush	Ian Beeston	Jean Beeston
Moyra Jackson		

Jill French and Helen Mudge tendered their resignation from the society as they have moved from the area.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present to the meeting as well as our speaker for the evening, Richard Till.

Lorraine Miles-Newton was welcomed as a new member.

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

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

**3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### 4. Speaker, Richard Till

Richard got involved with Thaxted's history following a period as a post-graduate urban history researcher. He realised that Thaxted had a fascinating history that was worth revealing. He started off by writing a historical note about Thaxted which led to much more detailed research on the Cutlers.

In the 1381 Poll Tax return, 79 Cutlers, 4 Sheathers, 11 Smiths and 2 Goldsmiths were identified out of a total of 249 males. Why this should be so is not clear. In 1300, Thaxted was primarily agricultural and comprised five great open fields arranged as three meadows along the River Chelmer divided into strips allocated to those that worked them. At the centre was the "Vill" of Thaxted surrounding the Church – Manor complex. Because of the distances involved there were five satellite settlements near to the fields and a sixth that housed the Parkers who looked after the Great Park, in effect a sixth great field.

In 1320, Hugh De Audley, Earl of Gloucester was Lord of the Manor and he made Thaxted a Borough offering various inducements that served to incentivise a Cutler presence, tempting them to leave London to escape the Black Death that was also prevalent at this time.

Cutler was a generic term that covered Bladesmiths, Hafters, Cutlers Proper and Cutler Merchants who assembled the knives and sold them on. It should be noted that at this time, there were no such things as forks, everyone had their own knife that went with them everywhere and was used to eat wherever they might be.

By cross referencing the later 1393 Pol Tax records it was possible to locate the homes of the Cutlers. Bladesmiths worked around Stony Lane and Fishmonger Street, near where the Corn Exchange would be built around 1430 -1450. The Hafters were dotted around the settlement, making handles not requiring the same amount of equipment as smithing.

Cutlers Green it is thought is where the Cutlers bought their houses and lived.

The names of the Cutlers were rather odd for this period too. Broxheude, Herlinge, Pamphelon and Clerevaux for example. These names lead credence to the theory that they had come from London having previously settled there from the Continent. By the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, very few of these names remained suggesting that they had returned to London after the danger from disease had left. The only two local Cutlers were Thomas Bolter and William Wymbush.

A study of transactions and Civil disputes that some of Thaxted's iron was scrap imported from Germany through the Ipswich Docks. Scrap iron had already been smelted so was quite pure and further smelting just served to enhance that purity. Of course, the best knives that held their edge

longest were made from steel and further examination of the records showed quantities of steel imported from Spain via the London Docks. Ivory that made the poshest handles was imported from Greenland and Iceland via London. Wood that was used to make charcoal for melting the metal came from large estates around Chelmsford,

The stock in trade of Thaxted Cutlers was the domestic knife but Cutlers made all sorts ranging from fine double edged daggers to the humble kitchen knife. Archaeological digs have revealed finds from c.1400 of whittle tang knives that had a tang that was jammed into the handle but which quickly came loose. Archaeologists also found scale tang knives where the tang was riveted to the handle and lasted much longer. Most Thaxted knives were of this type.

Thaxted Cutlers formed their own Guild and identified their products with a special mark. This mark has shown up when finds were x-rayed as were several knives marked with four Xs denoting they were no good and were to be melted down and remade.

Around 1400 the Master Cutler was John Kent and the Cutler's Guildhall was locate near his premises in the Stony lane area. The digs suggested that these premises covered all stages of manufacture but other smaller workshops were found that some Bladesmiths, Goldsmiths and Hafters worked semi-independently.

Thaxted cutlery production continued through to about 1480 when Sheffield Cutlery began to dominate. A few years later it had ceased almost completely.

This concluded Richard's talk and there then followed a question and answer session.

## **5. Open Forum and Any Other Business**

### **5.1 Committee Members**

We have had two vacancies on the Committee for a while now. Tony Bailey recently expressed an interest in joining and attended our last meeting to see what we did. If still of the same mind, he will be formally elected at the AGM in March.

### **5.2 St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival**

We will once more be putting a tree into the St Mary's Festival and Heather Salvidge has once again agreed to coordinate the decoration. She would appreciate some help so if there are there any volunteers to assist, would they please get in touch.

Secretary's Note: After the meeting Brenda Davidson volunteered her services and with Heather produced a fine looking tree. Thank you both.

### **5.3 Possible visit to Saffron Walden Museum**

It has been a while since we had our outing to Stow Maries Aerodrome and the Committee has been pondering where else we might go. Saffron Walden museum is not far and houses a fine collection of local artefacts. They offer tours of both the main museum and the reserve collection at Shire Hill. Cost is £2.50 a head and there is an extra fixed charge for a guide and refreshments. If we have a party of 20, the maximum number, then it would work out at £5.00 a head. Please let me know if you would be interested.

### **5.4 Wreath Laying**

It was noted that David Verlander would be laying a wreath on behalf of the Society at the Village Remembrance Service.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023 . Our speaker will be Chris Bush who will be telling us about "The History of Park Road".

**ENDS**

Minutes Agreed: ..... March 2023  
Ray Franklin - Chairman