

April 2025 Annual Report of Oxborough History Group

A big thank you yet again to the VH Trustees for continuing to accommodate the History Group archive, which continues to grow. Many thanks also to Mike Craig, as treasurer, holding a balance of £3,586.70 with NatWest, which along with petty cash amounts to £3,850.53, of which £3,225 is allocated to producing the grant-funded History of Oxborough book, which continues to make good progress.

The Visitor Guide [copies here on the table and in the church] produced last year for St John's Church has been selling steadily at £3 per copy, in the church, for their funds – and has received much positive feedback, also stimulating local interest in the historic relationship between the Bedingfelds at the Hall and people of Oxborough, most of whom – until the 1951 sale of the estate - were their tenants and/or employees. Eg:

The U3A has requested a conducted tour [25 Sept.] focussing on the Bedingfeld connections with St John's Church, as an add-on to their planned Oxborough Hall visit that day. **The National Trust has also requested a conducted village walk, for their volunteers**, (Tues 29 April) to feature surviving evidence of the links. This will include:

The St John's, now Church of England Parish Church, which the Bedingfelds' Wayland ancestors built here in C13 Catholic times.

The magnificent Bedingfeld Chantry Chapel with its terracotta tombs which they added in the C16], but *almost immediately* 'lost' to Henry VIII's Church of England, with Catholicism becoming illegal – though a number of Bedingfelds seem nevertheless to have been laid to rest in the vault beneath the Chapel floor – with illegal Catholicism sustained here, in secret, by 10 generations of Oxborough's covert Catholic community [hence the Hall's priest hole till] till 1791 when the Catholic Relief Act allowed it again – but NOT to be practised in the open air, nor behind locked doors, nor in buildings with steeples or bells – which ruled out St John's. SO, the Bedingfelds set up in the village –

A Makeshift Catholic Chapel for worship, for the next 40 years or so – which seems to have used part of the terrace of cottages between the VH and old phone box – while building their own new Catholic Chapel [which they still own] in the grounds of the Hall, completed in 1836. At the same time they used what is now ...

The Bedingfeld Arms, to house their 'by then legal' Priest, while building ...

The fine flint Presbytery opposite The Hall as permanent home for their Priest from 1849. The Bedingfelds had by then established

The RC School [now Sunnyside] which operated from 1841 till 1942, while just across The Green (then a field) the flint Protestant School [now Flint House] ran from 1850 to 1972. [Very unusual to have had a separate RC Primary School in an English village.]

Other ex-estate properties still standing and lived in, include the old sawmill and Sawmill Cottages, Clavering House, Chantry House, old keepers' lodges such as Hythe Cottage down Ferry Road, Church Farm House and others.

The 5-year grant-funded BFER project (Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership) – [of 60+ local, regional and national groups with the objective of conserving and celebrating the unique heritage of the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks] – was completed in January. It has drawn broadly on our archives throughout, as well as on local people with knowledge and memories of Oxborough rivers. Within the project, **specific research on the historic industrial uses of the River Wissey and its tributaries within Breckland (so between Stoke Ferry and its source near Bradenham) was led by Oxborough's James Parry**, founder and Chair of the Breckland Society [also infamous star – as extreme 'baddie' – in our Oxborough pantomimes!]

This work culminated in January with the official launch in Thetford Guildhall of the book ***Industrious Rivers: A History of the Waterways of Breckland***, [copy on the table] which may be loaned from the HG. The HG's specific contribution [Ch.2 pages 28-33] relates specifically to Oxborough's Stringside River/Stream, and its several tributaries. Stringside River is somewhat elusive, but is seen at the White Bridges on the Stoke Ferry Road and the Eastmoor Road.

What is confusing is that Stringside and its tributaries have significantly changed their courses and/or names over time with the result that Google Maps sadly ignores Stringside altogether, naming the entire waterway from Stradsett down to the Wissey as Lode Dike. It seems sad to lose the historic local names for our rivers and streams. And my list, so far – of known past and present names – comprises: the Gadder, Oxborough Drain, Stringside or Stringside River/Stream, or just The String, Old Carr Stream, Alton River, Beachamwell Brook/Stream, Boughton Fen Drain, Murgott's Stream and Lode Dike, so if you come across any names not on this list do **please let me know**. [I have very recently come across the use of 'Wislet' for the Gadder, it being a little tributary of the Wissey.]

Informal arrangements increasingly bring together the Fen Edge local History Groups for mutual support and sharing of resources. We recently supported Stoke Ferry & District HG in their successful grant bid to purchase a drone. And an excellent meeting at Methwold HG in October – to which we contributed – drew collectors, collections and experts from all around, to share a surprising number and range of fascinating finds.

A very well supported Open Archives session in November, in the VH drew excellent feedback. Attracting a wide range of people, including several first-timers, the various objects and displays prompting much sharing of questions and answers, memories, experiences and expertise.

Coming up: Denis Madden of Oxborough will present 'My Life in Flowers' sharing with us some memories of his earlier life, in London ...in the VH next Tuesday 22 April. £5 entry includes light refreshment as a fund-raiser for the History Group. Offers of cake and help on the night would be extremely welcome.

If anyone has any particular interests, contacts, contributions, thoughts, queries, or ideas for the HG, do please raise them, at any time. You all know how to contact me.

Meanwhile, as those of you already on the list know, I circulate details of local history events, as they arise, hopefully filling gaps between our own events.

To join this list please just ask/ring/email me.

And finally: a big thank you to all who have helped and supported in any way during the past year, and thank you to everyone here for listening tonight.

Do have a look at the publications !

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