

LATE EDITION

Newsletter December 2020



From the Chairman

Covid has upset a lot of plans this year for all of us and your Society is not immune from this. However, hopefully the vaccines will improve our quality of life in the forth coming year, meaning that we can resume our activities and meet socially. In the meantime, from your committee, we wish you all a safe and Happy Christmas and a Prosperous and Healthy New Year.

Tony Leech

Speaker 2021

We had planned to invite Margaret Bird to give a Talk in March 2021 based on a Mary Hardy Georgian Walking Tour that she has been working on. This would have been followed, when the better weather arrived, with a physical walk accompanied by an illustrated guide produced by Margaret. Needless to say, plans have been scuppered and until such time that vaccines etc allow we have had to put this on hold, probably until later in the year. We are, however, looking at ways in which we can engage with you, our Members, and will have more news early in the new year.



Escapades in Holt

A big Thank You to all of you who have helped with Escapades in Holt – buying, selling, finding new sales venues and introducing friends and family to the delights of our special town through the eyes of Olly. Although Olly has been temporarily ‘furloughed,’ we are pleased to say, that once viable in the new year, he will be off on his travels again making more book donations to local schools and worthy causes. Books are currently available in Holt at The Holt Bookshop and The Tannery, at Pensthorpe, Jarrolds in Norwich and at True’s Yard Fisherfolk Museum in Kings Lynn.

2021 Subscriptions Reminder

2020 has been a very difficult year for all of us and the Society is very much looking forward to restarting a full programme of events again in 2021. However, throughout the pandemic your committee have been busy working on other important issues, including monitoring planning applications, to ensure that the wonderful fabric of Holt is maintained.

The New Year means that the annual subscriptions are due and many of you now have a standing order set up and we thank you for this. If you wish to pay by standing order, going forward, do please contact Keith Gosden by email, holt societymembership@outlook.com (alternative postal address below) and request the necessary form.

For those of you who prefer to pay by cash or cheque can we please ask you send your subscription (£5 per person) to Keith Gosden, Hanworth House, 23 Cromer Road, Holt NR25 6EU if you have not already done so. Cheques should be made payable to The Holt Society.

Thank you for your continued support and we look forward to 2021 with renewed optimism.

Holt’s Green Edges (in 4 parts)

With current interest in the exciting Greening Holt project it is good to reflect that the town is already at least green at its edges with a number of semi-natural, visually attractive and biodiverse places within walking distance of the centre.

Part 1 - Holt Country Park

This area to the east of the Norwich Road, just south of the town, is geographically part of Holt Lowes but has a very different feel. It was probably first afforested in the mid-1800s and, under a succession of different owners, trees were re-planted until, in the late 1950s this finally removed the remaining small open areas. The North Norfolk District Council acquired the land in 1979 and opened it as a country park the following year. Although predominantly a conifer wood, the site has retained patches of broadleaved trees, especially along many of the rides, enhancing its biodiversity.

Despite largely sympathetic management, the diversity of flowering plants may well have steadily decreased. Some of the grassland and wet meadow species noted in the first half of the 20th century are no longer there but the rare Bird’s-



nest Orchid can still be found. In the 1980's, Holt Country Park became known for the presence of Creeping Lady's-tresses, a tiny orchid occurring in the Scottish Highlands and few other places. This, too, may have disappeared, possibly as a result of the thinning of the canopy, allowing brambles to dominate.

If plants have disappeared then at least some butterflies have re-appeared. The park has become a good place to see White Admirals nectaring on Bramble flowers, and in the last few years it has become a quite unexpected location for the Silver-washed Fritillary, a magnificent orange butterfly long since departed from the east of England. But note that in 1933, the Gresham's School Natural History Society recorded five species of fritillary in Lascelles Meadow, now part of the Country Park.

The main entrance on the Norwich Road is well known. Attempts by the Holt Society to establish a footpath to it from the corner of the Thornage road have not so far succeeded but we will go on trying. Most local folk know of the entrance from the Hempstead Road (just beyond the industrial estate) where there is no charge for parking.



Parts 2 Holt Lowes, Part 3 Spout Hills & Part 4 River Glaven, will appear in the next editions of the newsletter.

NELSON HOUSE

Fact And Fantasy, Fairy Tales And Footprint

It was a nice idea. Horatio Nelson had an uncle William Suckling, his mother Catherine's brother, living in a fine house in Holt. When he was nine, Horatio's father, The Rev. Edmund Nelson, Rector of Burnham Thorpe, decided to send his son to board at Paston Grammar School, North Walsham, some thirty miles away. What more likely than that he would break the considerable journey by stopping off with his Uncle William en route. So young Horatio would have slept on many occasions in an attic room in what became known as Nelson House.

And so the story was told down the generations. Unfortunately modern research, as so often in these matters, has punctured the fantasy.

It appears that Uncle William had a fine career in Customs and Excise ending as Comptroller of Customs in London where he lived throughout Horatio's childhood and his early naval career.

So the Nelson family connection with Holt is just a fairy tale? Well, not quite.

Uncle William Suckling had a son, Benjamin, who became an Anglican clergyman in the diocese of Norwich and who became for many years Rector of Matlaske and Plumstead, villages near Holt. We know that The Rev. Benjamin was living in Holt in 1830 and that he died in the town in 1837.

The plot thickens when we read an article published in the Daily Mail in 2012, following an interview with a well known Holt Estate Agent, John Shrive, who purchased Nelson House for his offices. John quoted the story of the Horatio sleepover whilst making clear that there was no proof of Uncle William having owned the property. Significantly, however, he added, "Soon after I bought the property I had to replace the old lead in the porch roof and a footmark cut in the lead with the words 'B.W.Suckling 1828' was found."

Now we know that The Rev Benjamin had a son who also became a clergyman: The Rev. Benjamin William Suckling.

From this definite evidence it is reasonable to deduce that The Rev Benjamin lived at Nelson House at least from 1830 until his death in 1837 age 73. Although he remained Rector of Matlaske and Plumstead until he died, it would not have been unusual for him to have placed a curate in one of the rectories and moved to the much more comfortable and accessible premises in Holt as he grew older. His son's footmark suggests the family may have moved into Nelson House around 1828 when, perhaps, they did a bit of restoration work.

So all is not lost! Horatio may not have slept here but his cousin and perhaps his cousin once removed did. So 'Suckling House' may be a more correct name for this lovely and historic Georgian building but the family connection to Norfolk's Hero remains.

Sometimes detailed research spoils a good story – but in this case not quite!