

From the Chairman

I regret that we, as a committee, have not been able to produce a Newsletter since April and apologise for this. However, you will have seen various articles about our activities in the *Holt Chronicle* and *Just Holt*, which I am happy to update you about. For those activities we owe an enormous 'thank you' to our Events Officer Polly Binns and her team of supporters. Polly has taken control of this important element of our activities and produced a calendar of events that are informative, different and exciting. This has clearly been to your liking, as each and every one has been oversubscribed! The next year's calendar (see page 2) looks just a good, if not better!

We also welcome our newest member to the Committee **Tim Bennett** who has taken on the important role of Planning Officer. As a qualified surveyor who is very familiar with Holt, he brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the post and is already proving to be indispensable. Welcome Tim!

We have been extremely busy during the last few months covering for the sad loss of **Ken Jones** our Membership Officer and *de facto* go-to person for anything IT related. Ken leaves an opportunity for a new person to join the committee which already has a vacancy unfilled from the AGM in April. So, if you would like to become involved do, please contact us via the website so we can talk you through what's involved. You really will be most welcome and fresh ideas are always greatly appreciated.

So what have we been doing?

We have received confirmation that our film *A Stroll Through Georgian Holt* has been appraised and accepted for inclusion in the prestigious East Anglian Film Archive held at the University of East Anglia. The final agreement needs to be concluded, but this really is an honour and helps to promote Holt, to say nothing of our star performer Steve Benson!

The visit to Hunworth House gardens was made possible through the generosity of owners Henry and Charlotte Crawley. We enjoyed a wonderful tea followed by a talk on the history of the Hall from Charlotte. We were then taken around the gardens by Henry who had created them from scratch, including a water feature in the Dutch style. The event raised £250 for Hunworth Church which was gratefully received.



With the support of the Holt Town Council, the Holt Society delivered, on its aim to mark the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a pair of celebratory slates that were unveiled by HM Lord-Lieutenant of Norfolk, The Lady Dannatt MBE. I will not hesitate to reiterate here our immense gratitude for all the donations received that made this possible. It was a huge ask but it has been delivered – thank you to all concerned.



Back in the summer, as part of the Holt Festival, we sponsored two actual 'Mary Hardy' walks led by our member Margaret Bird. Margaret, as she did with us back in March during our 'virtual walk', took us on a route around Holt explaining how the town looked and felt in the Georgian period through the contemporary writings of diarist Mary Hardy who lived in Letheringsett. The success of these has led Margaret and the Committee to commence work on a 32 page booklet that documents Margaret's fascinating commentary.

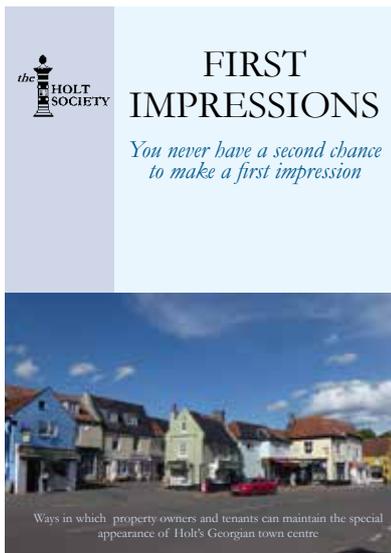
The Cellar Survey project, initiated by Keith Gosden, was inaugurated with a visit to the extensive Bakers & Larners cellars for which we thank both Nick Baker and Patrick Sewell (see page 27 in the October *Holt Chronicle*).

To date we have identified 26 cellars and have already surveyed eight – in just a couple of weeks! If you want to become involved, or know of a cellar, do please contact us via the normal email or by telephone on 01263 711223.



Holt Society visit to Bakers & Larners cellars

We have updated and republished our booklet entitled *First Impressions*. This offers advice on how the appearance of facades in the High Street can maintain the special nature of Holt. It will be given free of charge to all businesses in the Town and it is hoped that this will promote a clearer and more attractive street-scape that reflects Georgian values and ethos.



It is with great regret that we record the death of **Kathleen Thompson** on October 17th 2022. For many years, Kathleen served on the committee of the Holt Society.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FRIDAY OCTOBER 28TH 2022 6pm to 8.30pm
The Venue: Holt Community Centre

Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn - a Story 900 Years in the Making

Speaker: Hannah Jackson

The transformation of Norwich Castle's iconic Norman Keep is one of the largest heritage projects currently underway in the UK, generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Join Project Manager Hannah Jackson who will explore the fascinating history of this important building through a virtual tour behind the hoardings to see the work underway and discover what will be available for visitors when the Castle Keep reopens in 2024.

MONDAY DECEMBER 5TH 2022 6pm to 8.30pm
The Venue: Holt Community Centre

Saffron in Norfolk

Speaker: Dr Sally Francis

Dr Sally Francis is a Norfolk born-and-bred botanist from a farming background, and proprietor of Norfolk Saffron.

Norfolk Saffron has been growing the world's most precious spice on the north Norfolk coast for over a decade. "Our saffron and products are award-winning, and we are the only commercial growers in the county."

WEDNESDAY FEB 22ND 2023 6pm to 8.30pm
The Venue: Holt Community Centre

The Discovery of the Gloucester 1682: a Well-kept Secret

Speaker: Julian Barnwell

In 1682 *HMS Gloucester* carrying James II was lost off the East Anglian coast. She was discovered, and the site secured, in 2007, identified in 2012 but not until June of 2022 was the location made public. A well-kept secret indeed – come and find out more.

MONDAY APRIL 3RD 2023 6pm to 8.30pm

The Venue: Holt Community Centre

HOLT SOCIETY AGM

Guest speaker: Michael Gurney DL, previous High Sheriff of Norfolk, who will speak on the history of his family and the work of a High Sheriff.

TUESDAY JUNE 6TH 2023 6pm to 8.30pm
St Andrew's Church (members only)

A talk and walk: The View from the Pews: Holt Society in 1727 The evening will end with refreshments.

Speaker: Susan Smart.

Full details of each event will be circulated nearer the time and given on our website as usual.

www.theholtsociety.org

Tale of Two Obelisks

Holt and East Dereham

As we all know, there has for many years been a debate around why we have an obelisk, from where did it originate and are the mileages correct. The 'story' in Holt is simple and is expressed most eloquently by our own Steve Benson in his book *A Stroll through Georgian Holt*:

“Now we have reached Obelisk Plain. The pineapple-topped obelisk itself was a gatepost at Melton Constable Park and the distances engraved thereon are clearly incorrect. The reason for this, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner tells us in his monumental *Buildings of England*, is that they are given 'squirearchically' i.e., from one country house to another. No-one knows how the obelisk arrived in Holt.”

Steve, later in our film of the same name, adds that, at some point, a second gate post was gifted to East

Dereham and during the Second World War, in compliance with government requests, all signposts were to be rendered unreadable. It is said that Dereham decided that they would put their obelisk down a well, whilst here in Holt we simply whitewashed out the place names and mileages!

This may well be correct, and who are we to question Steve. Given, though, that it is the logo of our Society, Margaret Bird, a renowned historian of Holt and its surroundings, author of many books on Georgian Holt and, of course a member of the Holt Society, decided to disentangle myth from fact.

First, we can confirm that there were indeed obelisks in both Holt and East Dereham and the photographs below show both. Not quite a matching pair but did they once match and were then changed by the recipients? The upper photograph is of East Dereham's obelisk, cropped from a postcard from the Wrench series, postally used in 1904. The Holt photograph, underneath, is cropped from a photograph of a similar vintage. It can be seen that there are some distinct architectural similarities, apart from the finials and the mileages, both of which we comment on in due course. These similarities certainly give some credence to the belief that once they could have been a pair of gateposts.

From the work undertaken by Margaret Bird, who has been in a 'Miss Marple' mode recently, looking for and finding evidence to support or correct previous explanations. We know the fate of the Dereham Obelisk, as recounted by Beanie Brown of the Dereham Heritage Trust, and it seems there is substance to the story that it was put down a well

So, this is the most likely time line:

Sir Jacob Astley, of Melton Constable, installs two gate piers, in the park, which may date from the Hall's construction between 1664 and 1670.

Capability Brown landscapes the park from 1764 to 1769. At this time, Sir Edward Astley removes the two piers, which are now redundant, and gives one to Holt and the other to East Dereham. Both towns erect them as obelisks, at the far end of their marketplaces. In Dereham, this took place in 1768 but at the time of writing we cannot be certain of the Holt date.

Each town incises different mileages on the piers, giving accurate distances to numerous towns and properties within Norfolk. Whilst the list of places chosen are closely aligned to each other, the



East Dereham. Photograph courtesy of the Dereham Heritage Trust.



Holt. Photograph from the Archie Checkley Collection.

layouts used are different on the two obelisks as are the fonts as can be seen on the photographs opposite

These differences, in both style and mileages (for example, Dereham to Hingham is 10 miles but Holt to Hingham is 27 miles) indicate that both were carved after removal from Melton Constable. The distances on the surviving Holt obelisk have been cross-checked with contemporary maps and do appear to be accurate, although they do not necessarily reflect modern distances due to changes in road layout over the years.

The obelisks thus became milestones, at a time when milestones were being erected in some numbers along turnpike and other roads.

Noble Holt cherishes its obelisk but at a date unknown, perhaps mid-20th century, Dereham feels the need to remove an obstacle to traffic, breaking up its obelisk and placing the remains in a well. The pump that drew water from this well was near the Assembly Rooms in Market Place. It can just be seen on the right in the photograph of Oldfield's shop below - probably taken in the 1930s or 40s. On the reverse of the photograph is a handwritten note saying that it is this well into which the broken obelisk was thrown (presumably when the well was being filled in). Again, our thanks to the Dereham Heritage Trust for this information.

Sadly, no evidence has been found thus far to support or verify an impetus to action caused by a feared German invasion, and a determination not to give help to the enemy!

Little is known of the finials. Dereham's obelisk has a gas lamp which may, given its location, have been used to light the surrounding area for the safety of the public. However, Holt has no such feature. Could this have been due to the known poor gas supply? Current research does not assist us but we keep looking. Hopefully, more will be revealed in the booklet we have commissioned Margaret to write

It is most appropriate, that, as the Holt Obelisk is the Holt Society's logo, we should endeavour to separate fact from



Inscription on Dereham Obelisk.



Inscription on Holt Obelisk.

fiction and for this we are indebted to Margaret Bird and to both Robena (Beanie) Brown and Trevor Ogden from the Bishop Bonners Cottages Museum in Dereham, who have helped us enormously. I, of course, extend my apologies to Steve!

Keith Gosden, Chairman.



Site of the pump drawing water from the well into which the broken-up Dereham obelisk was tipped. Photograph courtesy of the Dereham Heritage Trust.