

# FRAM

Newsletter no. 8

November 2023



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## From the Chairman

I am delighted to introduce our latest Newsletter. As I write, a new season is well underway and you should have received details of our programme of Winter Lectures for 2023/24. These lectures have been going on, in the current format, and at the same location for many years, and it is tempting to think that it's about time some changes were made, but they are very popular as can be demonstrated by the number of members who attend each talk. However, you may have noticed there are two modest innovations this season. First, for our December event we are almost holding a party rather than a lecture, and it will be held in the Unitarian Meeting House. Secondly, in response to requests from a number of you, and happily not because of COVID regulations, the January meeting will be held on ZOOM.

Our membership numbers are holding up well, and our finances remain robust and so it has been decided not to increase subscriptions this year. I hope you will agree that they represent excellent value for money, and I urge you to recommend friends and neighbours to join the Society. Bring someone along to one of our talks and they will be hooked!

In 2023 our programme of Summer Visits was very well received, but we continue to seek someone to join the committee to help plan and run them. You have a fairly small committee, all of whom are heavily involved in running the society and to have to add responsibility for the Summer Visits to an existing commitment is not sustainable. Please do reflect on whether you can help us with this, and let me or any other committee member know.

Finally, may I thank on your behalf, John Bridges, Alison Bowman and Annie Heining for this Newsletter and Charles Seely for preparing yet another varied and interesting series of Winter Lectures.

*David Ransom*

## Subscriptions

Thank you to all of you who have paid this year's subscription. For those who haven't - a gentle reminder. It remains unchanged at £12 for an individual and £18 for a couple at the same address. You can do this – if you have access to online banking - by standing order or bank transfer to the Society's bank account.

HSBC Bank. Sort code: 40-21-30. A/c no: 01397869. Reference: Sub + your name.

It is important that you let Annie know if you decide to pay your sub. by bank transfer. You can do this by emailing her at [annieheining@gmail.com](mailto:annieheining@gmail.com).

You can also pay by cash (although we would be grateful if cash could be avoided) or cheque made payable to the Framlingham & District Local History and Preservation Society and given to Annie Heining either at a meeting or by post to: Annie Heining, Membership Secretary, 15 Double Street, Framlingham, WOODBRIDGE IP13 9BN

## Winter Talks 2023/24

Please note the charge for visitors is £3.00 except for the Christmas event which is £5.00

Wed 18th October 2023: The Medieval Farming Year in Pictures Alison Bowman

Wed 15th November 2023: AGM followed by:

The 1931 Pageant: a recently discovered film of this amazing event John Bridges

Wed 6th December 2023: Unitarian Meeting House ★ Special Christmas event:

The Harbour Lights Trio will entertain us with a programme of Suffolk Songs, with mulled wine and mince pies

Wed 17th January 2024 (note this talk on Zoom):

World War II Coastal Defences in Suffolk. Dr John Greenacre

Wed 21st February 2024: Suffolk's Lost Heritage - A look at some of the buildings that have been lost over the years. Stephen Poulter

Wed 20th March 2024: Expert Edgesmith to Engineering Enterprise: The early days of the Leiston Garrett dynasty Fraser Hale

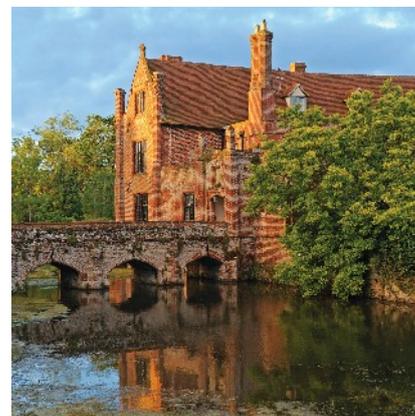
Wed 17th April 2024: The Hidden History of Orfordness, 1914-1993 Clive Chambers

## Summer Visits 2023

As David has said, we had three very enjoyable outings this summer which were well attended. If you have any suggestions either for Summer visits or the format of the visits please let any Trustee know.

### Crows Hall

Around 2.30 pm on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023 some twenty members, or so, gathered on a rather windy day at Crows Hall, Debenham to be greeted by the current owner, Caroline Spurrier. The visit began with a tour of the magnificent 16<sup>th</sup> century barn – recognised to be one of the longest in Britain, much of which has been restored and it is now used not only for the wedding business Caroline has established at Crows Hall, but also as a community resource for the parish of Debenham. Perhaps one of the most interesting features of the tour of the barn and outbuildings was to explore those parts which have not yet been renovated. The extent of the work and the skills required to do so were very apparent, and it was possible to appreciate how well the work carried out so far has been done.



We then crossed the brick built bridge over a moat which extends to three sides of the Hall and entered the courtyard which has been beautifully landscaped by one of the country's finest gardening designers, Xa Tollemache of nearby Heveningham Hall, together with the rest of the gardens. We were shown from the outside where restoration and improvements to the glazing and windows of the Hall had been carried out since Caroline bought it in 2005. On entering the house we were ushered into the main reception room and shown a substantial period stone fireplace – reconstructed after lengthy discussion with planners and conservation experts and which dominated the room. Also there were a number of a large portrait of Caroline's grandmother, Lady Mercy Greville who was born 1904 and was the daughter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick. Although not connected directly with Crows Hall, Lady Mercy, who apparently led quite a colourful life, did not look out of place in the room. We then explored the rest of the house both upstairs and

downstairs admiring particularly the attic floor which has been converted into a large and comfortable self-contained flat for visitors. We also saw the room recently re-constructed on the side of the house for Caroline's own use as a sitting room. Nowhere was out of bounds, and it was possible to reflect on the magnificent and ancient structure of the whole building, and also admire the sensible and sensitive re-modelling which has taken place. Crows Hall is definitely not a museum, but it contains some wonderful artefacts and architecture and yet is also a comfortable home in which to live. The visit ended with a slice of cake and a cup of tea in the morning room just off the kitchen in which were displayed numerous magazines featuring Caroline's wonderful restoration of the whole estate.



It was a very pleasant visit and having thanked our host for the charming and informative way in which she

### **Benton End House & Gardens July 28<sup>th</sup>**

This was a fascinating visit looking at what had been, what is and hearing about what might be in the future. The house and grounds (near Hadleigh) had been purchased by Sir Cedric Morris (1889 – 1992) and artist, Arthur Lett-Haines (1894–1978) and set up as something of an artist retreat. Its first attendee was Lucien Freud and the last was Maggi Hambling. As well as setting up the the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, Cedric was an avid plant collector particularly of iris in their natural colours with which he planted out across the gardens. Whilst an advocate of using the natural plant colours he was not averse to using selective breeding to get exactly the colour he wanted!

These factors made the visit of double interest both across the house and the gardens in terms of both building and garden history. The plan is to renovate both house and garden back to its state when Cedric and Arthur were in residence. Since this time the house and the garden have fallen somewhat into disrepair and although some work has been done, much is left to do.

We were given a very interesting and informative tour by the people now working in both areas, showing us what is there now with some of the history as well as what is planned (grants permitting). To get some idea of how it is hoped the garden will look in terms of colour palette and style one only needs to look at the Chelsea garden based on Cedric's garden which won a gold medal.

(<https://www.gardensillustrated.com/chelsea/sarah-price-nurture-landscapes-guide-2023>).

It is planned that the house and garden will again act as an artistic venue both by day and possibly residential. Hopefully at sometime in the future we can revisit the venue to see how plans have progressed.

*Alison Bowman*



*May Flowering Irises No. 2 (1935), Cedric Morris*

## The Lanman Museum August 16<sup>th</sup>

The Lanman Museum is well known to many in the Society but some of whom may not have visited the Museum recently or at all, so this outing provided the opportunity for members to visit a museum dedicated to their history without having to either pay the entrance to the Castle or join English Heritage. The visit was very well attended and short talks were given on the various displays by Trustees of the Museum. These ranged from the role played by Sir Henry Thompson to the Clyde bell which is an artefact of national importance. Many lively discussions ensued particularly about the presence of Queen Mary where there is a copy of a letter written by her in the castle (putting bounties on the heads of her enemies!!) where she first calls herself Queen. If members wish to learn more about the Museum and its collection there is a wealth of information on the website <https://lanmanmuseum.uk/>

The visit was followed by a tea kindly provided by David and Mary Ransom at their home in Fore Street.



In 1936, only five years after the main Pageant of 1931, there was a further ambitious event. The Elizabethan Masque was produced by Lady Ypres to celebrate the ter-centenary of the death of Sir Robert Hitcham, and was held over days. King Henry V111 was played by Bernard Cossons (the bank manager), with Mrs J F Watson as Anne Boleyn.

See later in Newsletter for much more information on the 1931 Pageant

Credit

<http://framlinghamarchive.org.uk/search-ngg-images>



A number of photos have been added to the website, including this one showing W Thurston's barber shop on the Market Hill (now Curry India). The intention is to also include recent photos that show buildings that have changed or gone, such as St Michael's Rooms and Barclays Bank.



Thurston's barber shop, Market Hill. He was a hairdresser, perfumer and tobacconist here between 1891 and 1904. *Framlingham Archive*.



St Michael's Rooms. Built 1890, demolished early 2022 to make way for the new Castle Community Rooms. *Credit JFB*

## **Mendelssohn's Connections with Framlingham**

Our journal FRAM, in the December 1999 issue provided some information on the links between Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) and Framlingham, by Arthur Kirby, which is reproduced below.

Felix died young, but visited this country ten times and was fascinated by London "that smokey nest which is fated for ever to be my favourite residence. How much I like everything and how grateful I am to the kindness of old friends". Among his closest friends was Thomas Attwood (1765-1838), organist at St Paul's Cathedral and celebrated musician, and his family.

Thomas was the only English pupil of Mozart, and can be considered one of the founders of modern English church music, and it was his friend Felix who introduced Bach's music to the world. Thomas married Ann Denton in 1793 and one son, George became Rector of Framlingham, from 1837 to 1884 (although it is clear he took over in 1834). Another son, William Hamilton, became Rector of Gosbeck near Ipswich. Thomas is buried in St Paul's cathedral, but his wife, Mary Ann, who lived at Framlingham after her husband's death, and George and his family are buried in Framlingham Cemetery.

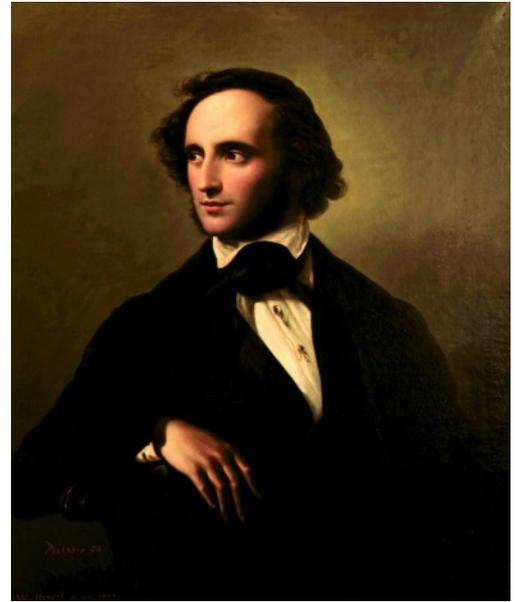
We believe that the influence of Felix Mendelssohn on the Attwood family and on music at Framlingham must have been considerable. There has been much discussion about whether Felix actually visited Framlingham, and extensive research was carried out for an exhibition which accompanied the recent very successful concert given by Malcolm Russell's *East Anglian Academy*, which featured the music of both Felix and Thomas. There is no doubt that Thomas's daughter Caroline, who is buried at Gosbeck, became the organist for St Michael's Church, and Felix would have been fascinated by its famous Thamar organ. Within recent memory, it has been known that she was taught by Felix, and it is believed that he was active in the area, even arranging a modification to the Sibton organ. It would be nice to find a letter or some evidence

even more conclusive, but I am personally satisfied. What is beyond doubt is that the lives of Felix Mendelssohn and the Attwoods were inextricably linked.

Arthur Kirby 26<sup>th</sup> October 1999

A book has been discovered that does show he came to Framlingham. *Musical Recollections of More Than Half a Century, 1826-1899*, by Lindley Nunn, Mus. Bac. (Cantab.), ARA. On page 99 he says:

*One musical reminiscence of this period is that Mendelssohn occasionally stayed at Framlingham with the Rev. G Attwood, who was closely related to the composer of Church music of that name. Mr Attwood's sister, at a very advance age, was a pupil of mine on the organ. It was too late in life for her to do very much, and a rather inferior instrument was not calculated to assist anyone, however desirous of improvements.*



Portrait of Mendelssohn by Wilhelm Hensel, 1847 Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf

Lindley Nunn died in 1899 aged 73, while George Attwood's sister Caroline died in the same year aged 92, hence his reference to 'a very advanced age'. However, when taught by Mendelssohn she would have been in her 30s. There is some uncertainty in what is meant in Nunn's final sentence.

A *Framlingham Weekly News* article of 29<sup>th</sup> January 1938 refers to George Attwood who was a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and that he received the living of Framlingham and Saxtead on the death of the previous Rector. It also refers to his father Thomas Attwood and that Mendelssohn stayed with him on his visits to London. This additional information indicates that Arthur Kirby's final sentence referring to the lives of Mendelssohn and the Attwoods being 'inextricably linked' is correct.

## A Water Supply for Framlingham, Part 2

In Part 1 we had reached the point where an ambitious scheme for a piped water supply had been put forward at a cost of £7,700, but in 1920 this was rejected because the cost had risen by a quarter. Moving forward to 1927, Dr Wood-White, the County Medical Officer of Health attended a meeting and stated that Framlingham was the only town in East Suffolk with a population over 2,000, which did not have a constant water supply. Two of the three public supplies were polluted. He understood that several of the wealthier inhabitants had had wells sunk at their own expense. He concluded that a constant water supply was of such importance even if it appeared to be outside the realms of economic possibility; it was worth making sacrifices to attain such an end.



A far less ambitious scheme was started in late 1929 when the Parish Council sought tenders for the installation of an electric pump and gearing to replace the hand pump in Jeaffreson's Well. C. Garrard (Framlingham) Ltd. put in the lowest tender at £127.10s. 0d. which was accepted. The pump was located on a steel platform six feet below ground and would automatically switch on to fill the tank at high level in the shelter, and would switch off when full. Obtaining water was now a simple matter of turning on a valve to fill your pail.

1934 was an important year because it saw the dissolution of Plomesgate Rural District Council and the introduction of Blyth Rural District Council

Jeaffreson's Well. This photo shows the old pump with the large tap on the right. The electric pump that replaced it was below ground. Credit Framlingham Archive

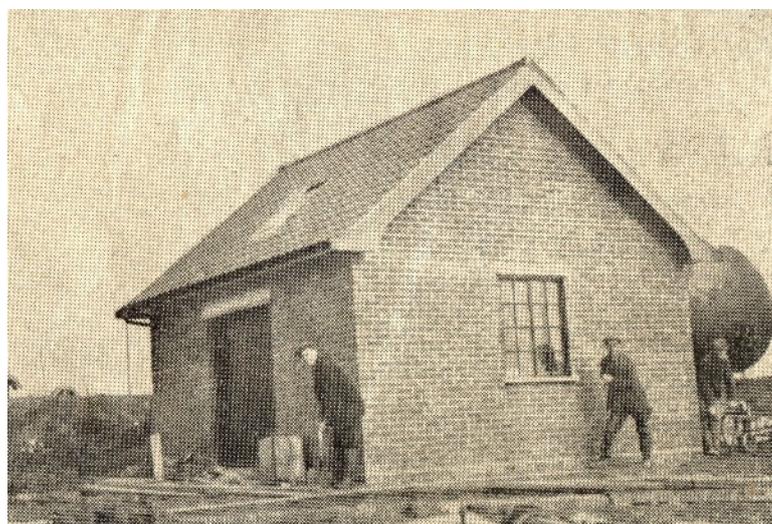
(BRDC) with offices in Saxmundham. A new scheme was on the table and costed at £2,500. However, by May 1936 the scheme had been extended to include Saxtead and the cost in excess of £11,000. In December an enquiry was held at the Court House on behalf of the Ministry of Health into the application by BRDC for a loan of £12,324 to cover the scheme. Matters moved along and land next to Jeaffreson's Well was bought from Mr A.G. Potter for the pumping station and reservoir. It was part of the land along Saxmundham Road that he had previously developed with the construction of nine bungalows, and they benefited from a piped supply to them from the tank in the shelter. This was actually the first piped supply in the town, although on a very limited scale.

BRDC notices were placed in *FWN* in January 1938 stating that the mains laying was nearly complete, and applications for a supply had to be made by January 31 otherwise the full cost of connection would have to be charged. The official opening of the works took place on March 30 when Mrs Reading, wife of the vice-chairman of BDRDC formally switched on the plant. The cost of the installation was ultimately shared equally between Suffolk County Council, Blyth Rural District Council and Framlingham Parish Council.

The newspaper photo shows the pump house, the raised mound over the reservoir and the large air compressor cylinder. This arrangement did not rely on a high static head of water, but a compressed air system to provide the required pressure. Mr E.C. Kitchen was the surveyor for BDRDC and lived in Framlingham. Arthur Wells, nick-name 'Bomber' was in charge of the water works.

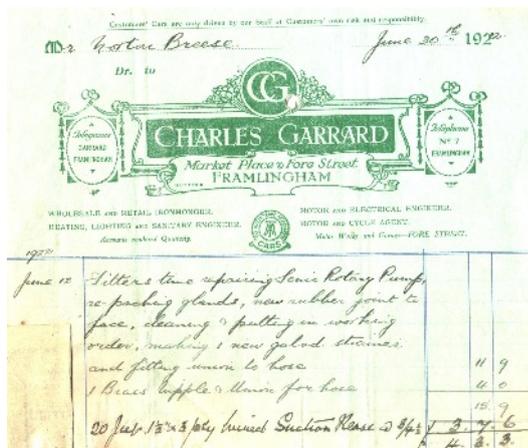
It had been a long time coming, but Framlingham now had a piped water supply. However, not everyone was connected; some were content with their own private well, some did not wish to pay for connection and some including many farmers were beyond the distribution network. In the last war, the very real threat of invasion brought concerns over disruption to the new supply system and an investigation was carried out to establish the location and condition of the remaining wells. The following table dates from around 1943 (see next page).

Depth in feet. Yield in gallons per hour  
 NOTS = Not on town supply, OTS = On town supply  
 EP = Electric pump, HP = Hand pump



The new pumping station in February 1938, with the large compressed air cylinder behind. *Source JFB.*

Water is now provided for the town by the large water tower located on the Saxmundham Road.



Charles Garrard installed the electric pump in Jeaffreson's Well in 1929. This is a typical Garrard invoice showing involvement with such works. *Credit James Breese Collection.*

LOCATION	DEPTH	YIELD	REMARKS
Saxtead Lodge	220	300-400	NOTS
Area School [Thomas Mills]	172	200	EP, NOTS
Council Houses	180	Good	HP
Mr Baldry, Pembroke Road	180	Unfailing	NOTS
No. 6 Pembroke Road			HP
Hazeldene, Pembroke Road, (Simmons)	160	Good	EP, NOTS
Pembroke Lodge, Pembroke Road			EP, OTS, pump seldom used
Framlingham College	300	1500	Steam and electric pumps. Storage 27,000 gallons
Strawberry Hill, Pembroke Road	150	350	EP dismantled. Out of use for 3 years
Wooden House, College Road			HP
Mount Pleasant Farm (Fulcher)	183		EP and elevated tank
Hill House, Mt Pleasant	150		EP in working order. OTS
House adjoining Hill House			HP, OTS
Public Well, Mt Pleasant	50		HP, in use
Nesling's Farm, College Road	117	250	HP
The Limes, College Road	170 half		EP in working order, OTS
42 College Road, (Miss Mann)		Good	HP. In working order
Fishmonger's yard. Vyces Road			HP. In working order. (Fish curing establishment)
Gas Works	25	Good	HP. In working order
White Horse Inn, Wellclose Sq.	Shallow Well	Copious	HP. In use. NOTS
The Spring Well, Albert Place	Shallow Well	Copious	HP. Public Supply
LNER railway station	28	2,500	For half hour. 2 hours recovery. EP. Storage tank 5,000 gallons
Ash Grove	135	1200	NOTS
The Rectory	160		OTS. Not used for 5 years
Lloyds Bank, Market Hill	155	Bare	HP in working order. Previously reported good yield
Barclays Bank, Market Hill	150	Good	HP. In working order
Cooperative Stores	20	Shallow Well	HP, out of order
Miss Carley, Manor House	20	Shallow Well	HP, in working order
Northwold House, Double Street	120	400	EP. OTS
The Haynings, Fore Street	100	250	EP. NOTS
Fairfield House, Fairfield Road	150	400	EP, in working order. OTS
Moat House, Castle Street	130		In military occupation. Pump now dismantled. OTS
Framlingham Castle (HMOW)		Good	HP, in working order
Moat Farm, Badingham	307	Good	NOTS
Moat Farm, Saxmundham Road	307	Good	NOTS
Hatherleigh Farm, Saxmundham Road	225	Good	NOTS
Rookery Farm, Saxmundham Road	225	450	NOTS
Mills Almshouses, Station Road	Shallow Well		
Crown Hotel, Market Hill	Shallow Well		HP in use
J Self Esq., Wellclose Square	Shallow Well		HP in use
Crown & Anchor Hotel	Shallow Well		HP in use
Castle Inn	Shallow Well		HP in use

## Framlingham Pageant July 8 -11 1931

The last newsletter mentioned the possibility of there being a film of the Pageant. There had been similar rumours in the past and very short clips had surfaced which were not worth showing. However, after much chasing, a DVD made from the original film dropped through my letterbox, and it was with great excitement that I put it in the player, and was not disappointed. It is of course in black and white with no soundtrack, but for around 15 minutes you are immersed in the activities of the Pageant. On first viewing, it is rather confusing as the various Episodes are all merged into one film. Therefore, it is useful to outline the format of the Pageant. Most photos we see are in the castle, but it actually took place on the castle meadow where there was a grandstand to hold around 800 people.



A few facts:

- £500 to £700 needed to be raised by donations and guarantors.
- Duke of Norfolk was President of the Pageant.
- 4 evening performances and 2 matinees.
- 600-700 performers, full choir of 80 plus orchestra. 35 horses, including Suffolks provided by Wm. Woodgate.
- Needlework party made 300 costumes. 310 articles of head gear, hoods, hats and helmets. Mary Nicholls and friends made 180 cushions and 197 props.
- Mr Lanman made a model of the castle and the Flodden helm (in the Lanman Museum).
- 36 stewards, programme/ticket sellers
- Performers had to wait and assemble in the castle, so could not see Pageant.
- Rehearsals on 22 separate dates.
- Covered grandstand on castle meadow.
- Tickets from 2/4 to 10/6. Seating for over 800 people.
- Pageant House booking office on Market Hill
- Transport for those attending; LNER trains, Eastern Counties coaches, charabanc tours from distant towns and cars.

The Pageant consisted of eight Episodes based on various events in the life of the castle. The interpretation is somewhat loose. In Episode 1 for example, the castle did not exist in its present form and it is not proven that King Edmund ever fought at Framlingham. In Episode 5, the Duke of Norfolk is portrayed at the castle, whereas he was actually still in the Tower of London under sentence of death and was not set free until Mary reached London. A brief outline of each Episode follows:

### Episode 1 King Edmund Surprised by Ivar the Dane, 860

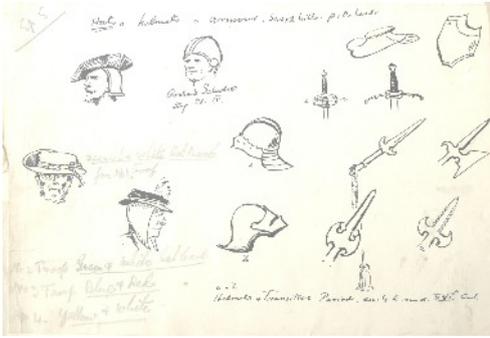
Fanciful story about Ivar the Danish chief who surprises King Edmund at his Framlingham stronghold. The blind mason is lead to Ivar and asks for reward for showing the weakest point in the wall. Fighting breaks out on the castle bridge. The blind man tells Ivar he has not seen Edmund, who escapes.

### Episode 2 The Normans, 1067

William the Conqueror retains important strongholds, including Framlingham. Ralph de Wahr, first Earl of Norfolk arrives with his troops to take over the castle for the King. Roger Bigod is given a Manor. The Thaine Ailmar refuses service to the King so his lands are given to Hugh D'Avranche.



Sketch of an Outfit



Various Types of Headgear

### Episode 3 Home coming of The Second Duke of Norfolk, 1523

Thomas Howard, Second Duke of Norfolk, at the age of seventy won the Battle of Flodden in 1513. Ten years later after providing further service to King Henry V111, he retires to his castle at Framlingham. The Duchess comes to greet him with her ladies and a party of girls with ropes of roses.

### Episode 4 Funeral of The Second Duke of Norfolk, 1524

His body is taken from the chapel in the castle and conveyed to Thetford. The cortege, including Chief Mourners, Kings of Arms, Heralds and Lords ride in black liveries, their hoods on their heads. The procession is headed by chanting White Friars. The Helmet carried in this Episode is the replica made by Harold Lanman



Partial view of the grandstand

### Episode 5 Queen Mary at Framlingham castle, 1553

On the death of Edward V1, Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed Queen. Mary immediately rode from Kenninghall to Framlingham castle to raise her supporters. The news is received that Lady Jane Grey has been deposed and Mary is proclaimed Queen. On 31 July she set off for London with 30,000 loyal supporters, where she would be crowned Queen of England.



The Duke of Norfolk played by F. Charrington.

### Episode 6 Escape of Catholic Prisoners from the Castle, 1601

The castle was used as a prison for Recusants who would not accept the Act of Uniformity. This Episode based on scant evidence relates to the escape of three Priests and a Layman while an Elizabethan fair is in progress. On their escape, they are drawn to a booth at the Fair where they exchange their clothes and are hustled away towards Aldeburgh in a moving caravan.

### Episode 7 Nicholas Danforth's departure to America, 1634

Nicholas Danforth arrives at the castle with his family and servants to bid farewell to Lord Howard before departing on his long journey to America. The Lord is seen meeting Danforth on his return from a hawking party. Nicholas's son Thomas would be granted land in Massachusetts and established the town of Framingham.

### Episode 8 Procession of Sir Robert Hitcham's Pensioners

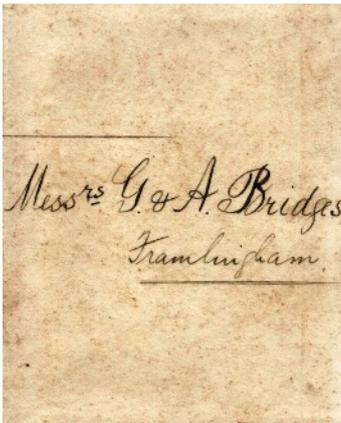
Sir Robert Hitcham purchased Lowes Hundred, which included estates and the castle in Framlingham for £14,000. He bequeathed this to Pembroke College in Cambridge. Part of his will required buildings in the castle to be dismantled to provide Alms Houses. This Episode has a procession of Pensioners from the Alms Houses. No photos have been found for this Episode.

## Barclays Bank

To a previous generation, it would have been inconceivable that the bank would ever close. Their closure information states that 86% of Framlingham customers have banked online by some means, and only 25 customers regularly use the bank as their only means. The bank now has a Pop Up shop in the Crown Hotel on Monday to Wednesday 09.00 to 17.00 (closed 12.30 to 13.30), and Thursday 09.00 to 12.30, where various transactions can be made but no cash handling.



Barclays cheque of 1922. Note Gurney name.  
*Credit James Breeze Collection.*



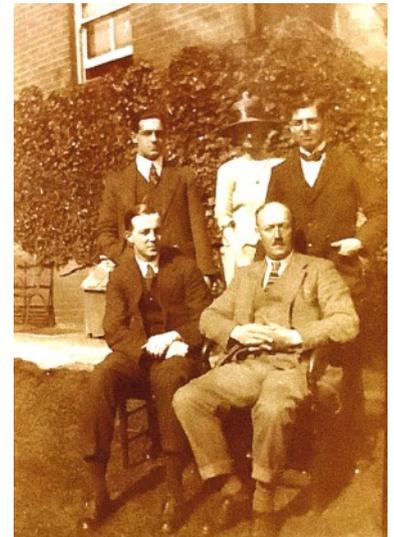
A leather bound business folder for recording transactions. *Credit JFB*

It was in 1855 that Harvey and Hudson bought the present Barclays site and constructed new premises, although their tenure was relatively short lived. The senior partner Sir Robert Harvey had speculated on the Stock Exchange, but the Franco Prussian War created a major drop in prices which ruined him. He shot himself on 15 July 1870, and the bank closed the next day.

The property and goodwill of the company were bought by the Gurney Bank, and in 1873 the new Market Hill premises opened for business. By 1891, the Framlingham branch was under the control of the Halesworth partnership of the group 'Gurneys Birkbeck Barclays Buxton and Orde'. In 1896 several banks amalgamated to form Barclays Bank and Co. Ltd.

The Framlingham branch of Barclays closed on Friday 25 August 2023. The closure of banks is nothing new in Framlingham. In 1919, Lloyds Bank bought No. 12 Market Hill, but it closed in 1941 as part of an agreement with Barclays in respect to overall business in Suffolk. HSBC closed their Church Street branch in 2013. We are very fortunate to have the Post Office where many banking functions can be provided.

Anthony Runnacles was Barclays manager, and on his retirement in 1926 after 22 years, he was presented with a gold watch, dinner service, standard lamp and a gramophone. *Credit Framlingham Archive.*



The final days of the bank in Framlingham, 2023.

Summary of the last of the talks 2022/23 by Annie Heining:

### **The Women's Land Army** A talk given by Nicky Reynolds on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Women have worked in agriculture for centuries, but in 1899 the Women's Garden Union was formed which also acted as an employment bureau. As women wanted careers in agriculture training opportunities gradually developed. Daisy Brook – a wealthy socialite and mistress to royalty – founded several schools to train women in agriculture.

The First World War drew women into numerous industries and by 1915 it was realised that no-one replaced them on the land, and fields were lying fallow. So in 1915 the War Agricultural Committees organised female volunteers. In 1916 the Women's National Land Service Corps was formed, organised into two groups – the Forage Corps and the Forestry Corps. Women's work became indispensable to the war effort.

1916 was a harsh winter and there were concerns that there would be enough food. Most food was imported, and shipping was targeted by Germany. In 1917 the Food Production Department was formed. This organised women agricultural workers into a single force who could go where they were needed, and the Women's Land Army was born. This was paid work, and there was a big recruitment campaign. The Land Army was divided into three groups – farm work, forage, and forestry. Training lasted four-six weeks and joining was not easy. There was a tough selection process, many had no experience, and it was hard physical labour in all weathers. Many were turned away.

The Land Army was not a military organisation, but it had a military flavour. For example, there was a code of conduct, arm bands and badges for good service. The service was supported by the suffrage movement and the Pankhurst's. It continued its work up to 1919 and was demobbed late in that year. 20,000 women had answered the call. Some stayed on after the war and in 1920 the Women's National Association of Landswomen was formed.

In 1939 at the start of the Second World War the Women's Land Army was reformed, organised by local committees. By September 1939 numerous women had signed up including many from the First World War. Initially women were recruited from the 16-40 age group, but the younger girls could not cope and so the minimum age was raised to 17 1/2yrs. The upper age was also reduced to 35yrs. The women were volunteers, although they were paid for their work.

The entry criteria comprised: -

- Physically fit
- Usually, unmarried
- No ties – could be sent anywhere in the country.
- Had a medical certificate.
- Were interviewed for suitability.

The Land Army was a great social leveller, it attracted all classes. While the training was initially a bit hit and miss it gradually became systematised. Land girls worked for the farmer and not for the state. Their average pay was 10s less than that for a man. They worked a 48–50-hour week for 28s, half of which went on accommodation and keep. With conscription in 1941, this rose to 32s per week. Conscription brought in a different type of women. They had not chosen this work and came with different attitudes and behaviour. They had one day off each week – not easy to take if you worked in a dairy. The Land Army uniform became iconic (and remained the property of the Land Army). The jodhpurs, green jumper and hat were good quality, practical and hard-wearing, with no zips or buttons. They were free with 36 clothing coupons. (66 coupons were allocated for a whole year.) Again, armbands were worn to denote length of service, as in the First World War.

The work consisted of, field work; ploughing and hoeing; thatching; hedge laying; stone picking; harvesting; fruit and vegetable picking; nursery work; pest control; animal husbandry; maintaining and operating farm machinery and tractor driving. To keep up morale and training, proficiency tests were set up, each with a badge and certificate on successful completion, along with higher wages.

The welfare of the women was taken seriously, they were visited by local representatives to check that all was as it should be. Land girls could also draw extra rations. They could also opt to work for war agriculture, in which case they lived in hostels and worked together in larger groups. Parades and rallies were a big part of life in every county and land girls were expected to look and walk smartly. They also formed Land Army Clubs for socialising.

In 1939 there was a need for large scale timber production and in 1942 the Women's Timber Corps was formed as a specialist land army team. It employed 8000 women, aka Lumber Jills. These women were educated to higher standards. It was skilled, complex work and commanded higher pay. Entry was from age 19 yrs. They were demobilised in 1946.

In 1942 a benevolent fund was established under the War Charities Act; it was wound up in 1981. The Land Army failed to be recognised as equal to other services, despite public campaigning and in 1949 they dis-banded.

The spirit of camaraderie was legendary, as the many reunions testified. For those who came from an agricultural background, perhaps not much changed. But for those who had not worked on the land before the experience was life changing.