



A PLACE OF NO IMPORTANCE

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It is given freely to inspire those interested in finding out more about All Saints Church, Welborne Village, its people, and its neighbourhood.

Once you have read it, please pass it on to someone who you think will be interested to find out more about this important place of no importance.

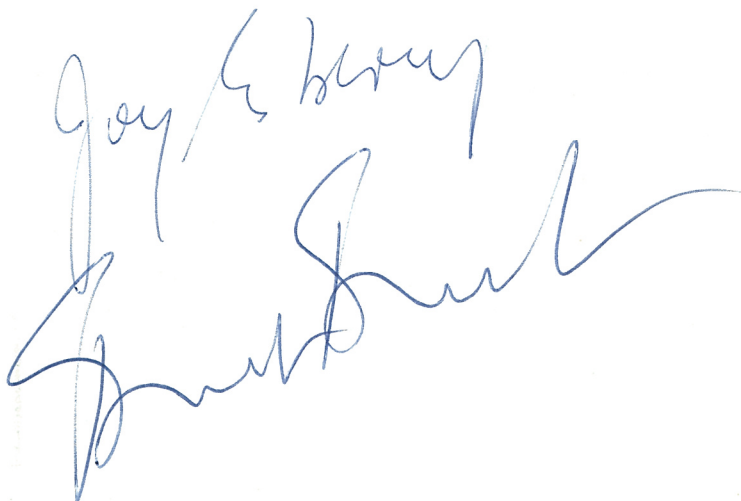


A PLACE OF NO IMPORTANCE

A history of Welborne

Written and compiled by Joy Esbrey & Brenda Baxter

With the help of the people of Welborne



Handwritten signatures in blue ink. The top signature is 'Joy Esbrey' and the bottom signature is 'Brenda Baxter'.

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This history is a result of extensive research and of both individual and joint efforts. While the initial idea and research was begun by us for the Welborne Exhibition in 1991, it has been subsequently transformed into a participatory village project. All residents were invited to contribute and the support received was considerable from both present and former villagers. It is to these contributors that we extend a very special thank you. However, we take full responsibility for the research and writing and any errors that may occur in the end product. We are indebted to the following people for their contributions of information, both written and oral, photographs, illustrations, maps, house deeds and all other documents pertaining to property in and around Welborne. The late Mary Barham Johnson deserves a special mention for allowing us access to her family papers.

Welborne Residents.

Lynne BALL, Madeleine BALL, Doug & Kathy BARRETT, Ethel BREEZE, Joyce CURSON, Robert CURSON, Trevor CURSON, Andrew & Hilary EGERTON SMITH, Reg & Lili EVANS, Graham & Penny FAIRCLOTH, Charles & Jean FRANCIS, Jack & Jean GRIFFITHS, Nigel GRIGSON, Rachel HILLMAN, Mark HILLMAN, Hilary HODGES, Mike HODGES, Trixie HODGES, Joan & Johnnie JOHNSON, Claire LUSSIGNEA, David MATTHEWS, Joe & Carol PERRY, Cecily SAVORY, Joan & Phil SEGGER, Lauren STEPHENSON, Josie STEPHENSON, Harry THOMAS, Peter TOOLEY, Angela WADHAM, Lettice WATKINS, Mike WEBB, Liz WHITAKER, James WHITAKER, Michael WHITAKER.

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Those who are sadly no longer 'part of the Welborne scene'

John CURSON, Margaret CURSON, Elizabeth GRIFFITHS, Jessie MATTHEWS, Robert MATTHEWS, Gladys NORTON, Anne SYMONDS, plus anyone whom we have inadvertently omitted to mention.

Joy Esberey & Brenda Baxter.

PREFACE

Many people assume that anything to do with history is boring, but if we accept that history is just 'what happened yesterday' why should it not be as interesting as today's gossip? This book is a record of people, their lives and the place in which they lived. It reflects their attitudes, hopes and dreams, their response to their environment and to conditions beyond their control. It may not be an 'Emmerdale' or 'The Archers' but the lives of real people can be as dramatic as any work of fiction. The history of Welborne includes incidents of violence, murder, robbery and transportation but these are not the dominant themes. Rather it is the story of ordinary people in a small rural community. The skeleton of a great tale is here, all it requires is some imagination and perseverance on the part of the reader to make it come alive.

The volume is not a chronological narrative, due to lack of source material before the nineteenth century. The topical approach has the advantage of allowing the reader to skip to sections more in line with their interests without completely losing the thread.

While always taking care to indicate clearly where the words being used were not our own, we have not stuck rigidly to academic style of footnoting and identification of sources. We have assumed, perhaps incorrectly, that most readers will not plan to duplicate our research and that there is no need for precise academic citation. Further, we have allowed peoples words to stand as written, even if the grammar, punctuation and use of capitals seems strange to our eye. It better conveys the sense of the times. The decision not to include any original documents was made on practical grounds: it made it possible to include more photographs and the children's illustrations. The choice, like any other, has its costs, the main one being the very loss of the flavour of the times that we sought to preserve in our quotes. In compensation, we have included within the text, short extracts from key documents, while at the same time summarizing the rest of the contents and converting it into Modern English.

Finally, we should emphasize that this volume is only the first word on Welborne's history, not the last. The decision about when to stop the research, what to leave out of the final draft and when to publish is hard to make; there is always one last fact to be checked or some new material that turns up at the last minute. As none of us is getting any younger (writers and potential readers) we decided to publish this version while already planning further research and some form of supplement to be published at a later date. Similarly, while we have made every reasonable effort to verify the statements

we have made and the relationships identified, there will inevitably be some errors. We welcome any feedback —corrections or original material which will remove as many of them as possible.

We have chosen not to attempt to convert monetary values and measurements into modern equivalents. Such figures are provided for comparison within the historical period only. If you want to check our arithmetic you need to know that there were 12d or pence in a shilling and 20s in a pound, 40p or perches to a rood and 4r to an acre.

In this book the authors have resisted the temptation to express any opinions or to make any judgements. We are all products of our environment and all men and women of our times. How people behaved centuries ago may not always be easy for us to understand but perhaps if we ask ourselves what those in centuries to come will find easy to condemn in our society, we may better be able to accept the actions and ideas of our ancestors.

INTRODUCTION

It is very easy when wandering around Welborne, or attending a church service, flower festival or fete, to wonder what motivated people to build a church just here and to speculate about the lives of those who chose to settle in this particular location. We can get some clues just from looking around us: the building materials and the shape of the church tower tell us something of its age and pedigree. The grave stones in the older churchyard tell us that a lot of former inhabitants died very young while those that survived the traumas of childhood, often lived to a ripe old age; but they cannot tell us how these people lived and worked. House and street names provide further clues, although not as many as one might hope. The fact that there is a Common Road certainly indicates that there was a common but does not tell us its precise location and extent. We have a Burnt House Lane but have found no clue as to when a house fire of such importance occurred or where indeed the house itself stood. There is a Hall farm but no record of there ever being a Hall and a Frogs Hall shown in early maps, though the property was never referred to by this name in nineteenth century records. Clearly, observation can take us only so far and often raises questions that cannot be readily answered.

The historians' richest source of information should be the written records that have accumulated in the parish chest and the documents and family papers of the former residents. Unfortunately, the Welborne Parish chest contained nothing pertaining to pre- nineteenth century Welborne except the Parish Registers some of which are water damaged or illegible. Although there was a Lord of the Manor for most of Welborne's history, only the Manor Court books survive. Nor was there any other 'big house' or major estate for which records are available. Fortunately, the family that took on the parochial responsibilities for the parish in the nineteenth century were a 'literary' family and kept many of the family papers which contain some references to Welborne.

In this century, especially around the Millennium, we have become very conscious of the need to keep and preserve records for future generations. Our predecessors have not made reconstructing Welborne's history as easy as they might have done. They were both meticulous (if long winded) in making records and inclined to carelessness or disinterest when it came to keeping them. One former resident told us of her horror in finding her more practical sister using old family papers to upholster the kitchen chairs. The practice of putting old papers under the wallpaper to increase insulation did not help either. This disregard for posterity was at least practical, not so our other

example. The Welborne Inclosure Award (1812), one of the most important legal documents in the village's history, lay in the cellar of a building in London for 30 to 40 years, apparently borrowed by the Lord of the Manor who not only forgot to return it but completely overlooked it when he moved his office from the building concerned to another location. Once we get over the disappointment of what isn't there (the frustration of references to surveyor's accounts or settlement certificates that no longer exist), we are confronted with a surprisingly rich body of records pertaining to Welborne that can be found in the Norfolk Record Office. Because most of this material refers to Welborne in the nineteenth century, this period will, of necessity, make up the bulk of this history. While records exist for the twentieth century, many of them are still closed. Consequently, we have turned to oral history - to the memories that the long term residents have of their childhood and the stories told to them by parents and grandparents, as a very important supplement to the written records and of course their photographs which provide the main illustrations of this volume.

From these various sources, sparse and incomplete as they are, we have managed to recreate a substantial, if not entirely balanced picture of life in Welborne. Because it is the history of an ordinary mid Norfolk farming village generally bypassed by the great events of English history, it is not a story of famous buildings or stirring events, it is a story of ordinary people going about their daily task of earning a living and raising a family, coming together for worship and social activity, a self governing, self sustaining community. As might be expected, we know more about the clergy, the landowners, the tenant farmers on the one hand and the poor and needy on the other. It is the life of ordinary families, living and working without public assistance, that is the hardest to document; so, we have used general historical sources to provide a picture of how life might have been for them.

While the wealth of statistical information that exists for the nineteenth century is very useful to the historian, it carries hidden pitfalls. In a century in which people use birth dates as alarm and access codes and are required to fill in their age on myriads of forms, it is hard for us to imagine just how unimportant this vital statistic was in previous centuries before compulsory education and welfare entitlements made accuracy vital. The records are full of supposedly factual statements, which are not mathematically possible. If we add to this numerical problems, the fact that many of these records were compiled from oral reports with the person collecting the data being scarcely more literate than the person giving the information, it is not surprising that there is considerable confusion about the spelling of names. Even where the

name was accurately recorded, the frequent use of the same Christian names within the family and the practice of using the name of dead children again, makes accurate use of these records challenging.

We also faced a similar difficulty when trying to locate different families shown in the census in specific farm houses and cottages in the village. Firstly, the census takers did not all start in the same place or move around the village in the same sequence. Secondly, very few places were mentioned by name eg. the property known as Frog's Hall today was throughout the nineteenth century identified only as near Brandon Parva or as the estate of Mr The Horse Shoes Public House provided one fairly fixed reference as did the Parsonage once it was built. The Brick kiln/yards at the top end of the Common and the Tollbar/gate on the Mattishall Norwich Road, were further guide points. But a census which used 'the crossroads' without further clarification four times, confused more than it helped. The map accompanying the Enclosure Award 1812, provides the first set of guide posts reinforced by the Ttithe Apportionment map of 1839. These have been supplemented by several estate agents maps concerning property sold in this period. Then there is nothing for 40 years until we have a plan drawn by the Rector of property and occupants in 1879. The first and the last of these have been included to help you visualize Welborne in the past. We have also drawn our own plan as a guide.

The lack of early records made it inevitable that we should focus or tell the story of different aspects of Welborne life rather than attempt a narrative that followed a time sequence. Within this framework, we have tried to be as comprehensive as possible without attempting to include every single fact that we have found. But while it is easy to decide to be selective, it is harder to decide on the criteria on which the selection should be made. Some aspects are self selecting. You cannot talk about an English village, without talking about its church and its pub. The important role that the Rector, John Barham Johnson, played for much of the nineteenth century means that we include more about his incumbency than that of other rectors. The Inclosure Act (the legal name of the process otherwise known as the Enclosures) and its consequences is also self selecting. With regard to the village as a physical entity, it seems appropriate to concentrate on the infrastructure (roads and boundaries), the farmhouses that have existed for more than two centuries and the houses built immediately after the enclosure.

The same issue arises when we turn to the people of the village. It is not possible or even desirable to give equal treatment to everybody. Some people, who lived in the village for a very short period of time but one that coincided with a census, would have had a prominence out of proportion to their

Welborne connection. Families such as the Greens and the Porretts attract our attention, not merely because several members of the family lived and worked in Welborne simultaneously, but also because they were residents over several generations. Others like the Onleys and Sendalls while not resident had a major influence on the working life of people who did live in the village. The misfortune that brought families and individuals into the Parish Alms Book and the Workhouse records also permit their inclusion.

We have already shared our decision not to make judgements, however, there is an associated problem related to the use of descriptive terms. Our forebears used words such as bastard, imbecile, and pauper in ways we would find very insensitive today. At the same time being poor or an agricultural labourer carried no stigma in the past it was a fact of life. Rather than sanitize their reports it seems preferable to remind ourselves of these facts. Similarly, working as a servant was a normal, even desirable, state of affairs. Nor was there any stigma in being uneducated or illiterate in a society where it was the common state and the alternative was not highly valued. The aristocracy and upper classes in this period were in the most part minimally educated and proud of it. Overcrowded and insanitary living conditions, poor diet, limited horizons and the general acceptance of one's lot were commonplace. Radicalism and demand for reform may have touched the fringes of Welborne life but seem to have had no more influence than the great tides of war and exploration that dominated English history.