A thousand years of Salle

During the millennium year, Salle village, church and estate celebrated the history of Salle on a beautiful June day. Morning service was attended by most of the villagers, followed by drinks at the hall with Sir John White before everyone joined in a barbeque at the Village Institute. The afternoon was spent in watching a cricket match or climbing the church tower for a glimpse of the splendid view from the top. This was a real traditional village event made all the better by the blessing of good weather. To bring memories of the past into the present, Claire Buxton, chairman of the Parish Meeting, with help from long-time inhabitants of the village, such as Ben Stimpson, had organised an exhibition in the church. This included archive material and a fascinating display of metal detector finds dating back across most of the last two millennia and collected by Richard Saunders who lives and works in Salle. This article is based on a brief history of Salle which was available as a handout on the day.

Origins

Salle lies on the top of the Norfolk watershed between the Bure and Wensum rivers. It is, in very many ways, a typical Norfolk village. Its history from before the beginning of this millennium illustrates what was and is happening in many other Norfolk villages. The name “Salle” is usually taken to derive from sallows, the old name for willows but other suggestions have been put forward. Is it a corruption of “aul” the old English word for hall? One of the manors in the village was once known as Kingshall which could easily lend itself to shortening as “Sall”. Or perhaps it is related to an old northern word describing a high, windy place that appears in the Cumberland name Black Sail Pass? Salle is high and windy − for Norfolk.

The land of the village has always belonged to one or other of the manors in the parish. Now, it is almost entirely part of the Salle Farms estate. Before the improvements of recent centuries this would have been regarded as poor soil and used for sheep, much perhaps remaining as common land which was important also for the poorer villagers. In the past, those with common rights not only grazed their animals on the common but also collected wood and kindling and wild fruit. This left their own small plots, or “pightles”, to be cultivated to feed the family. As in the rest of the county, enclosure started quite early in Salle to meet the changing needs of the farms. Commons and small pightles and closes have now long been enclosed and those old, open fields themselves have been changed to meet the needs of modern farming practices.

A small landowner in the village is the church but it is the large and beautiful church itself which is the jewel in Salle’s crown and perhaps the best known building in this part of Norfolk. Salle church has recently figured in *England’s Thousand Best*

Churches by Simon Jenkins (1999). No one should leave the village without making a tour of this unique church. Built on the wealth of the wool grown on the sheep which grazed the local heaths, its presence emphasises the change from stock farming to arable which has taken place over the centuries as the farming families who built it grew wealthier. Heath, pasture and woodland have now largely given place to open arable fields. The building of Salle church by a group of leading sheep farmers in the 15th century and its maintenance since by leading local families shows how such families have always been important in supporting the life and people of a village and its surroundings.

The families and manors of Salle

Perhaps the most important historian of Salle is Rev. Walter Parsons who was the parson here for over 30 years. As a former scholar of Pembroke College and Dean of Selwyn College, Cambridge, he took great interest in researching the history of his parish. His book *Salle* saves all of us much time and effort when researching the early history of the village, the manors and the church. It provides invaluable information on the history of the village and is available from Reepham Library.

Salle also figures in the *Paston Letters*. One of the Salle manors belonged to the Mauteby family, one of whose daughters married into the Paston family. Although litigious and concerned about keeping a grip on their lands, like so many medieval Norfolk farmers and lords, the letters concerning Salle directly are often concerned with the promotion of a courtship between John Paston and Margery Brewes. The Pastons remained closely associated with Salle for the next 100 years.

Salle itself is mentioned in *Domesday Book* when it was said to have four manors. The history of the manors is well testified. Today, Salle Moor Hall and Stinton Manor House probably represent the site of two of the manors while a third was probably finally destroyed when Salle Hall was built. Parsons speculates that the fourth manor house was sited on the Wood Dalling side of Gatehouse Farm near the bridge over the stream.

Salle Moor Hall was a Bullen (Boleyn) possession from the 14th to the 16th century. Yes, that is the family of Anne Boleyn! But there is no evidence that she ever lived in Norfolk! More recently in the hands of the Stimpson family, Salle Moor Hall now belongs to Ardisher Naghshineh who is farming this land organically. Ben Stimpson is now the only member of the Stimpson family still living in Salle. Though now past his 90th birthday, he remains a forceful member of the community and was, until very recently, still a churchwarden. His knowledge of the past and present of Salle village and its church and people is unsurpassed.

Stinton Manor is the manor that was formerly a royal manor but that was before the Norman Conquest. *Domesday Book* tells us that this “Kings Manor” belonged to

Godwin − the father of King Harold. Harold, himself, held Cawston. By the time of Domesday, both were held by one Ralph who was made Earl of Norfolk. He rebelled and his lands were given to the new Earl, William de Warenne, one of William's major lords who built Castle Acre. Stinton House, having passed through the hands of the Townsends of Raynham and Bulwer Longs of neighbouring Heydon, is now part of the Salle estate and is, at present, the home of Paul Hovesen, the Salle Farms estate manager who came here from Denmark some 13 years ago.

Many other well-known Norfolk families have held land in Salle: the Briggs, Fountaines, Pastons, Townsends and Earles, to name but a few. After Edward Hase created the park and built the hall in 1765 it passed to the Jodrell family after Richard Paul Jodrell of Lewknor in Oxfordshire married his daughter. She had inherited the right to a baronetcy from her uncle, John Lombe, which now passed to the Jodrells. The Jodrells were squires here until Major Timothy White, who owned the chain of chemist shops, now absorbed by Boots, bought the estate in 1890. Both these families have done a great deal to both preserve and to develop the estate and parish of Salle.

Farms and farmers of Salle

One interesting point emerging from early history is a suggestion that this was an area with many "freemen" in the Middle Ages. Their counterparts, after the 16th century, were the yeomen farmers, tenants of the remaining farms in the village, all of which now belong in one capacity or another to the estate. These were the successful men who prospered by buying up and enclosing land after the collapse of the feudal system. A number of their old farmhouses have been sold off as private houses though some remain as part of the estate.

A typical example of an old farmhouse is Park Farm, formerly Bog Farm, standing on the edge of old water meadows which lie between Salle and the former royal manor of Cawston. This is now the home of Andrew and Claire Buxton. Andrew farmed with his brothers in Heydon and now works for himself while Claire is chairman of Salle Parish Meeting. Park Farm stood empty for some years until it was used as a film set for the television production of *Mill on the Floss*, which was filmed largely on location around mid-Norfolk. Since then, it has been restored with a considerable degree of sympathy to retain much of its original character. The date 1770 can be discerned in the brickwork on the front of the house but the house is older than this. Like many Norfolk houses it has been refurbished or rebuilt repeatedly over the years.

Manor Farm, which may have been closely associated with Dorothy Repps, mother-in-law of the builder of Salle Hall, remains an integral part of the estate as the farm office. It probably started life as a common-edge manor house in the Middle Ages. The late 18th century estate maps indicate that the area that is now Bluestone Wood

was then common land as was an area near the bridge on the way to Cawston. The name “Brake Pasture” of a field next to the park, also indicates common. A “brake” was a field cut out of common or heath.

The insertion of an older staircase into Manor Farm may have been carried out because Edward Hase lived in Manor Farm after the destruction of the former manor house. The date on Park Farm also seems to link the improvements to these two farms with the creation of the park and building of the hall in the late 18th century.

Practically next door to Manor Farm lies Cherry Tree Farm. This still belongs to the Bulwer Longs of Heydon and illustrates how closely interlinked all the villages, manors and farms of this group of villages are. This probably stems from the old manorial system when strips of land were held in a variety of open fields, not always close together or even in the same parish. Later, we find farmers owning strips belonging to different manors. This is shown particularly clearly on the 1846 tithe map where the few remaining strips still held by individuals show where the old open fields existed. This intermix also affected the parish boundaries. Until very recently a long strip of Reepham parish cut right across Salle Park, balanced by a strip of Salle, which reached down to Reepham Moor. The parish boundary has now been changed to adjust this anomaly which had been perpetuated over time, possibly due to old land ownership boundaries, perhaps to allow a manor or tenant to have a mix of arable land and water meadow.

Salle Village

The village itself is not large, consisting of a scatter of houses leading down past the cricket pitch from the church. It comprises cottages probably built on the sites of the old “tofts and crofts”, formerly worked by tenants who may also have been craftsmen and whose families would have spun and woven woollen cloth in the time between all their other tasks. Even in the past the number of brick built or stone houses would not have been much more than now. There would, however, have been many more residents, working the land, carrying out their trades in the village or working as servants on the farms. Families were also much larger, and expectations lower, until well into this century, so each house supported more people.

The old school house still stands opposite the church. The school was originally a “non-provided school”, that is to say, it belonged to the estate and was administered under an agreement with the Board of Education as a church school. As owner, the squire was, therefore, chairman of the Board of Managers and appointed several of them. Surviving correspondence in the White family archives gives interesting insights into the running of the school around the turn of the century. Education was already fairly closely controlled and inspected and the school developed over time to

include examinations and scholarships as opportunities opened up. The staff consisted of a headmistress, most of whom seem to have come from southern counties and were required to have musical skills and to be able to teach physical education as well as the other more usual attributes of any teacher. The headmistress was supported by one assistant teacher and/or a “monitress” who was a senior pupil of promise. The letters of these women, written when applying for the job, indicate that they had very little money. Shades of Jane Eyre!

Before the First World War children would have finished their education by 12 years of age. In such a rural area, holidays were taken to allow the children to help with the harvest and these had to be specifically requested from the education authorities. Mrs Williamson, the last teacher, is buried in the churchyard.

Next door is the Lynton White Institute, built by the White family, which provides a home for the Parish Meeting and a site for social events, not least cricket teas, as the institute stands on the edge of a splendid cricket field. On the other side of the field is the forge, owned by the church and still a fully fitted working forge, though no longer regularly used. The first of the houses in the village is the former “White Horse” public house now converted to a dwelling house since its closure in the late 1960s. The Street continues down to Gatehouse Farm between two rows of cottages, some of which are occupied by estate workers.

There were more cottages around the eastern fringe of the park and a dairy farm in the park but there is very little more than a few bricks left from these buildings. More interesting are the houses in the park itself and the picturesque style lodge cottages at the four entrances to the park. These have one unique feature as lodges: they are on the opposite side of the road from the hall. Most of them have now been adapted or enlarged by the estate to meet the needs of their inhabitants.

The village is, obviously, dominated by its magnificent church but nothing has been included here, as booklets on the history of the church are available in the church. Suffice to say that the church of St Peter and St Paul continues to attract visitors to view its architectural splendour and music lovers who wish to take advantage of its excellent acoustics to perform and listen to concerts and to make recordings.

Salle Park

By far the largest house in the village is Salle House. Edward Hase created the park itself in the late 18th century before he built the house. A map, still in existence, shows how Edward Hase bought up small closes and strips to make the park, processes know to historians as “engrossment” and “emparkment”. When Edward Hase died, he fortunately left a *Memorandum Book* which Sir Richard Jodrell continued to use after he succeeded in 1804 so we can date and follow some of the early developments in the park. Gardens and trees were planted, a beautiful walled

garden still remains in use and there is an icehouse in the shrubbery. Work continues to maintain house and gardens in their present good order. Pat Dennis, who has now returned to the village of his birth, keeps the gardens in order without the army of under-gardeners and boys of former days. He still lives in the old gardener's house next to the walled garden. Fortunately, pleasure gardens were not fashionable when the house was built and were never planned to be very large though extended across the south lawn as far as an ornamental ha-ha before 1846.

One particularly happy aspect of the park is the number of magnificent trees it contains. Of course, creators of parks, following the ideas of Humphry Repton (now buried in Aylsham churchyard) and Capability Brown, looked for a natural effect in their new parks. Trees were often planted in clumps or as shelter belts but also in "rows". One way of achieving a rapid mature effect was to retain the trees which had formerly stood in hedgerows along field boundaries. It is possible to identify these former hedge lines from aerial photographs and old maps even though, in their more mature state, the lines are not always obvious as trees succumb to old age or storms. Many trees have been felled during the 200 years of the park's existence. However, one major oak tree, which must predate the park by some considerable time, still remains. It is now a huge and venerable veteran supporting considerable amounts of wildlife. The park trees have always been well cared for and a new avenue of horse chestnut trees is now beginning to grow up along the main drive across the park. New plantings of park trees also include Turkey, evergreen, red and English oaks.

Salle House

Salle House was built in 1763. It is a mid-Georgian neoclassical building influenced by the emerging forces of romanticism. It consists of a two-and-a-half storey central wing of seven bays, built in red brick with a stone Ionic pediment on both north and south elevations and a hipped roof surrounded by a balustrade. The architraves of the principal doors are also of stone. A single-storey wing extends to both east and west where two courts were converted to an orangery on the east and a billiard room on the west in Major White's time. The Victorian upper storey, added over the billiard room, has since been demolished. Beyond the wings, low two-storied buildings extend on either side – to the coach house and stables on the east. The appearance of Salle House is now almost identical to a drawing on an estate map of 1807. This, however, is due to work carried out by Sir John White who has now restored the house both inside and outside while retaining its original character extremely well.

Salle Farms Estate

Salle Farms is now entirely arable. Crops include large-scale cultivation of barley, beet, beans, peas and wheat on land which, before the improvements of recent

centuries, would have been regarded as poor soil and used for sheep, The estate also remains conscious of its stewardship of the countryside. Successful modern farming is contract farming to meet the needs of large-scale food suppliers. Output is constantly monitored by the use of satellite technology. In addition to the large-scale production of grain, pulses and sugar beet, a recent addition has been the appearance of plantations of Christmas trees which provide work during quieter periods of the year. Areas of set-aside supplement other conservation innovations that are now possible

Attitudes to the countryside have changed in recent years and many who formerly knew little about it are able to get out and about and have demanded access to a countryside which they regard as a common heritage. This can be a two-edged sword. Unlimited access can be disruptive to wildlife habitat, to game birds and to growing crops alike. However, many footpaths and green lanes marked on the OS maps are maintained to provide walks across the estate. Some paths have been diverted round the edges of fields rather than cutting through the middle. Those who wish to quibble at this should remind themselves that walking along the hedge is much more interesting as this is where the greatest variety of flora and fauna is to be seen.

In addition to the more conspicuous pheasants and partridges reared on the estate, and the ever-present rabbits, there are less evident denizens of this land. Stoats, weasels and other small mammals are much shyer but are still in abundance where there is a large rabbit population. Though many small birds have disappeared in recent years there are a number of larger birds to be seen. Herons and kestrels are regular hunters in the area. Barn owls are becoming re-established and three are nesting on the estate. Recently, a group of Canada geese have settled near one of the ponds. These birds can be a mixed blessing and have become a nuisance on some farms elsewhere. The more remote part of the estate is hare country and numbers of mad March hares are to be seen every spring.

Yes, there are large fields but many new hedges have been planted and old hedges preserved. Other conservation measures are being undertaken. These include the planting of broadleaf trees along the old railway line near the Cawston boundary and maintenance of existing patches of woodland on the estate. One important conservation measure now being implemented is the scheme whereby four-metre strips along watercourses are left as permanent set-aside to reduce the risk of contamination of ground water by pesticides and so forth. The watercourse, which crosses the estate from beyond Wood Dalling, winding round past Cawston to Booton, is a case in point. Anyone who walks down the road by the side of Wood Dalling church should note the ditch on the right-hand side which is full of wildflowers, especially primroses and orchids in springtime. This ditch now has a

preservation order on it. Yet, it was dug very recently, showing that modern farming activity is not always destructive.

Much of the information in this article was obtained from the White papers and Bullen papers, now held in the Norfolk Record Office.

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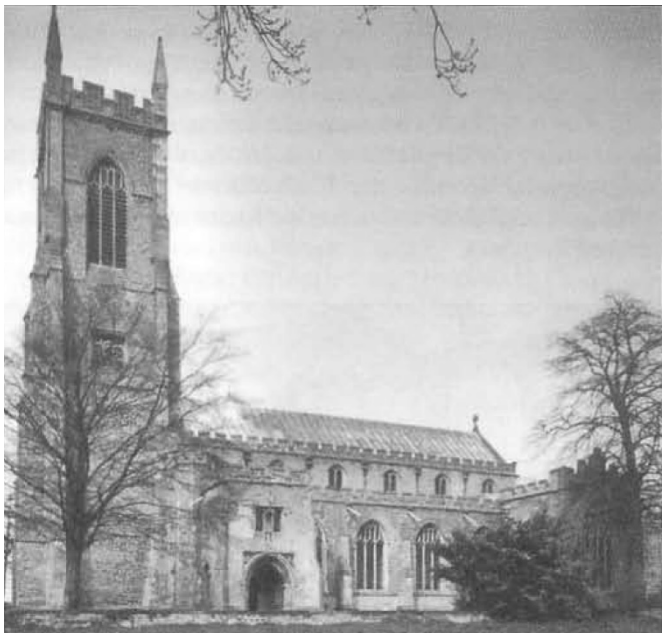

Salle church from the south on a winter's day in January. This huge and beautiful church dominates the skyline.

Manor Farm as it today when it is in use as the Salle Farms estate office.

Salle village street looking west from the church. The larger house on the left was formerly the White Horse public house.

Salle Hall from the southern garden. The park is so thickly planted with trees that there is only one sight line from which the hall can be seen.