

## A brief history of Hackford parish through the last millennium

*By Jennifer Roberts*

*Jennifer Roberts lives in Pettywell and has been there now for several years. She is a qualified archaeologist. Though no longer practising that discipline she has a deep interest in local history. She is another of our authors who has completed a local history course under the aegis of Chris Barringer. This article is the result of the research carried out on her course and since. The view from a slightly different standpoint, that of Hackford, gives new details about the history of Reepham and its satellite villages.*

Hackford-by-Reepham is one of the three parishes sharing the communal churchyard in Reepham. The parish includes most of the town of Reepham and land on either side of the Eyn Brook. It is possible that the boundaries of the parish were determined by the heath and common on either side but this is by no means certain. It is possible that the name Hackford was derived from *haca*, a hook, or *hoecc*, a flood or sluice gate. "Ford" is Anglo-Saxon for river crossing. The name then could either mean a "ford at the bend of the river" or "the sluice gate (for catching fish) at the ford".

At the turn of the last millennium, just before the Norman Conquest the principal lordship of Hackford was held by a freeman called **Wither**. It is possible that Reepham was at the centre of a large Anglo-Saxon estate. After the Norman Conquest it was given to **Earl William de Warrene**, just one of the 139 manors he held. Although William de Warrene resided frequently at nearby Castle Acre, at the time of the Domesday survey the manor of Hackford was held by a person called **Tuold**. There were few inhabitants, probably only 17 or 18 families lived in the area. The land was farmed, some was put down as meadow but cereals must have been grown as there was a mill. Honey and wax were important products. Beeswax was used for church candles, and it was the tradition for beekeepers to supply their local church. Hackford at that time had five skeps of bees. It had woodland able to support 30 swine. Sheep, rounceys (horses) and cattle were also kept. There was a church supported by 11 acres of land. It was valued at 15 marks. The manor passed through William de Warrene's heirs for the next 200 years.

in 1276/7 a Saturday market and annual fair charter was granted to Sir John de Vaux, who owned both the manors of Hackford and Reepham. An unofficial market had existed in the "cemetery of Reepham" for many years before the Bishop of Norwich, in 1240, ordered the Sheriff of Norfolk to ensure that a new market place was found. The market was held on Saturdays, with a fair on the "eve, day and morrow" of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29th June). The present market place lies in the parish of Hackford, but it is not known if this was the site decided on in the 13th century.

By the following century, the **de Roos** family held land in Hackford, probably as tenants of the de Warrenes. A few years later they are mentioned as being the holders of the knight's fees and paying returns to the Duchy of Lancaster.

Some of the local inhabitants during medieval times must have been fairly rich for the church of All Saints had a collection of rich vestments, communion ware and church ornaments, including silver chalices, a portable cross and a holy oil vessel. The vestments included some made from worsted, fusteyn (fustian) and velvet and silk. **Margaret and Ralph Vernon**, Hackford landowners, were possibly some of the major benefactors during the later part of the 14th century.

During that century several of the Hackford residents stood surety, along with citizens of other parishes, to locals who were in trouble with the law. **Brice of Hackford** stood surety when **Agnes Renandgo** and her sister Emma were released on bail after being arrested for the murder of **Richard Brightman** at Billingford. A **Richard of Hackford** also stood surety in a murder case when **Robert of Holden** was accused of robbing and killing **Henry of Clermont**. Other 14th century crimes include robbery. One night **William Rillo** had one quarter-and-a-half of barley, worth 5/-, stolen from him. A **Roger Willok** was charged but acquitted for the offence.

Some information about the medieval inhabitants of Reepham and Hackford parish can be gleaned from the old wills. For instance in 1429 **Robert Baxter**, a citizen of Norwich, is mentioned as owning lands in Hackford. Fifty years later **Hugh atte Fenn** made a will leaving 6/8d towards the upkeep of the church. He also left money, to be obtained from the sale of his lands and manors in Hackford, to help scholars at Cambridge and Oxford as long as they were not wasters and haunters of alehouses.

**William Cubit**, the rector, in a will dated 1505, gave to the town and the church of Hackford a drinking house with two acres of land to have a yearly obituary kept in the church. He also mentioned that the guilds and "drinkings" of all the four parishes, i.e., Hackford, Whitwell, Reepham and Kerdiston, be kept there if they desired it. In a will dated a few years later **John Goddyng** gave 6/8d towards the making of a chapel in the south part of the church if one happened to be erected there. If not, the money was to go to the upkeep of the church.

In 1543 a fire burnt down most of All Saints, the parish church of Hackford, along with its church goods, ornaments and jewels. The fire also destroyed most of the town.

The tower and parts of the west gable were the only parts of the church that survived. They were pulled down in 1790/6. It is, however, possible that a part of the gable can be seen in the tower of St Michael's. A drawing in 1784 by E.F. Boon shows that the surviving tower had a chequerboard parapet and diagonal buttresses. The

south wall of the tower had a square sound hole and the porch an elaborate doorway.

As a result of the fire, Hackford parish lost its independence and was joined with Whitwell. On 18th April 1544, an agreement was made between **Robert Coke**, owner of the fee simple of the church of Whitwell, **Christopher Lockwode**, clerk, parson of Hackford and vicar of Whitwell, and **Thomas Bayfield, William Brese** and **John Blofield**, parishioners of Hackford, that the church and rectory of Hackford was to be consolidated with Whitwell by William, Bishop of Norwich. According to this indenture all the parties were in agreement. However, some of the parishioners obviously intended that the church should be rebuilt. One, **Anthony Sugate**, bequeathed 20 marks (1 mark = 13/4d or 66.6p) towards its rebuilding. Some of the surviving church plate was sold in 1547 for £20, probably to stop the ministers of Edward VI getting their hands on it. Some of the church materials were used to repair roads in the parish and some were used to build the transept in Whitwell church.

During the reign of Elizabeth I each parish had to provide a militia. The parish was involved in a muster in 1577. An inventory was taken of "all Common Armor, Artelery munition and weponne and every ptecular pson shewed". It was found that the town had "one Corselet, one peke, too Curreors et Dom furnished"(!). Three people were also able to support arms. **Vynse Hawude, Thomas Crotche** and **Roger Hase** were able to furnish a few bows and arrows, pikes and helmets between them.

The Bishop's court had some dealings with local drunks. **John Twithney** and **Henry Bagrave** were brought before the Bishop's representative on a charge of being common drunks. Henry Bagrave, who swore and resisted arrest later, confessed to being drunk every day of the week and was ordered to do penance.

Around this time the inhabitants were having problems with a person called **Robert Kirk**. It seems he was extracting money from the people as fines and then keeping it for his own use. The parishioners paid him 6/- as payment for a fine for not planting hemp. A **Thomas Croche** then paid him 2/6d and then swore on "his book" to make a payment of 5/- yearly. **Mr Berte**, "Gent", also agreed to pay Kirk 5/- a year for all years to come. **Nathaniel Bacon** set up an enquiry into Kirk's misdeeds but the outcome of this appears to be lost.

Hackford gained some notoriety during the Commonwealth when the parish refused to billet a party of troops because the commanding officer referred to the parish as Reepham instead of Hackford. At the same time the parish was paying £3.3s.10d per month towards the upkeep of troops and the furnishing of ammunition for the Royalist cause. As in Elizabeth's time, the inhabitants were expected to attend

musters. Hackford men formed a Foot Militia under **Sir W. Doylys**, which mustered at Heydon Ollands on 24th September 1661 to be inspected.

During the 17th century, weavers in Hackford, as in many of the local parishes, supplied worsted. During 1657 **Henry Juby**, a local worsted weaver, must have been having a period of prosperity. Surviving records show that he took on several apprentices: **Matthew Bale**, **Roger Hammond** and **John Humfrey** were indented for seven years while a **John Crotch** was indented for eight years.

The social make-up of the parish changed during the next 100 years. The worsted weavers gradually disappeared, a result of cheap products from Yorkshire, and tanning became important as a local industry. The tanners were wealthy enough as a group to make wills. There was also an increase in the number of shops and professionals in the parish. Grocers, bakers, brewers, a surgeon and an excise officer were all wealthy enough to make wills.

The provision of services increased rapidly so by the middle of the next century the inhabitants of Reepham and Hackford were well provided for. The town of Reepham had all the services that would be expected from a local market town. All needs were catered for, ranging from the people supplying the local brewing and malting industry with barrels, to those who made hats and dresses for the local female population. The town was well served by bakers, butchers, grocers, confectioners, cabinetmakers, gardeners and drapers. There was even a hairdresser. The parish was also served by a number of inns and taverns, most in the town but at least one, the Lamb Beer House, stood in the countryside. Links with Norwich, and thence the outside world, were maintained by a coach and carrier service.

Local people believed it was the purity of the water which led to the excellence of the local ales. Although there were several brewers and maltsters in the parish, the **Birchams** were the major producers, so much so that when they were bought out in 1878, they had 50 associated pubs. In the parish generally though there was very little industrial activity. Like the worsted weavers of previous centuries, tanning also seemed to have disappeared from the parish, although there were tanneries in the local area.

At the beginning of the 19th century the poor children of Hackford were reported to have been receiving a sufficient education. They attended a mix of Sunday school, evening school and day school. In 1837, however, the **Rev. Holley** established a school in the Old Poor House consisting of a boys' school and a girls' school and a house where the schoolmasters and mistresses could live. By 1844 the rector's daughter had begun to hold a Sunday school in the school building. These were church schools for the children of Hackford and Whitwell. The children of Reepham parish had to wait until 1847 when St Mary's School was set up. An inspector's report

in 1869 said the National School was conducted in a highly satisfactory manner. The Methodists had also set up a schoolroom when they built the chapel in 1817.

**Goodwin Kilburn** had run a day and boarding school in Reepham since 1836, when in 1846 he decided to sell up and emigrate. A **Mrs Woolmer** also ran a school for girls. The pauper children received an education in the workhouse. The poor Hackford children at this time went to Buxton. Their education must have been a somewhat patchy one for there seems to have been a problem in keeping and finding suitable mistresses.

A Poor House had existed in Reepham for the inhabitants of Hackford for many years, but, by the 1840s, the poor of Reepham and Hackford were sent to the Aylsham Union Workhouse,<sup>1</sup> which also included the old Gilbert Union workhouses at Buxton and Oulton until the new workhouse was built in 1849. Hackford parish paid around £100 annually towards the cost of housing its paupers. Some of the older inhabitants were receiving outdoor relief, which allowed them to live in their own homes. This came to around 2/6d per week. There were also several charities, which provided relief by paying out money for emigration and for people who had sudden illnesses and accidents. Most of the charity payouts were under the control of **William Bircham**.

In April 1846 smallpox made its appearance in Hackford and the workhouse medical officer was asked to vaccinate the inhabitants. They protested. The outbreak continued and by October it had been decided to give extra money so all in the Reepham area could be vaccinated.

Life must have been miserable for the poor of Reepham and Hackford, with the majority living in little more than hovels. However, the more able poor and the lower-middle classes were able to emigrate to a better life in the colonies. **Goodwin Kilburn**, the schoolmaster, is an example of this trend. He was 36, married with two small children, when he put the following advert in the *Norfolk Chronicle*. He was not the only local to emigrate between 1836–1842. The St Stephen's charity had paid for some people in Reepham to go to America and it also paid for a **Widow Beales** to go to Ireland.

---

<sup>1</sup> Union workhouses served a "union" of parishes and these larger workhouses replaced the smaller parish workhouses.

## REEPHAM

To Be Sold By Auction  
By Mr J VERDON  
Wed 21 Oct 1846

Neat and modern Household  
Furniture and other effects of  
Mr G Kilburn who is removing  
to a distant country.

Catalogues had on the premises  
and of the auctioneer,  
Great Witchingham.

### TO SCHOOL MASTERS

The house and premises where  
a profitable school has been  
carried on for the last 10 years  
are now to be let  
with immediate possession.

Enquire of Mr Kilburn on premises.

*[Errata: Transcription of the newspaper entry regarding Goodwin Kilburn should read "to a distant county" not "country".]*

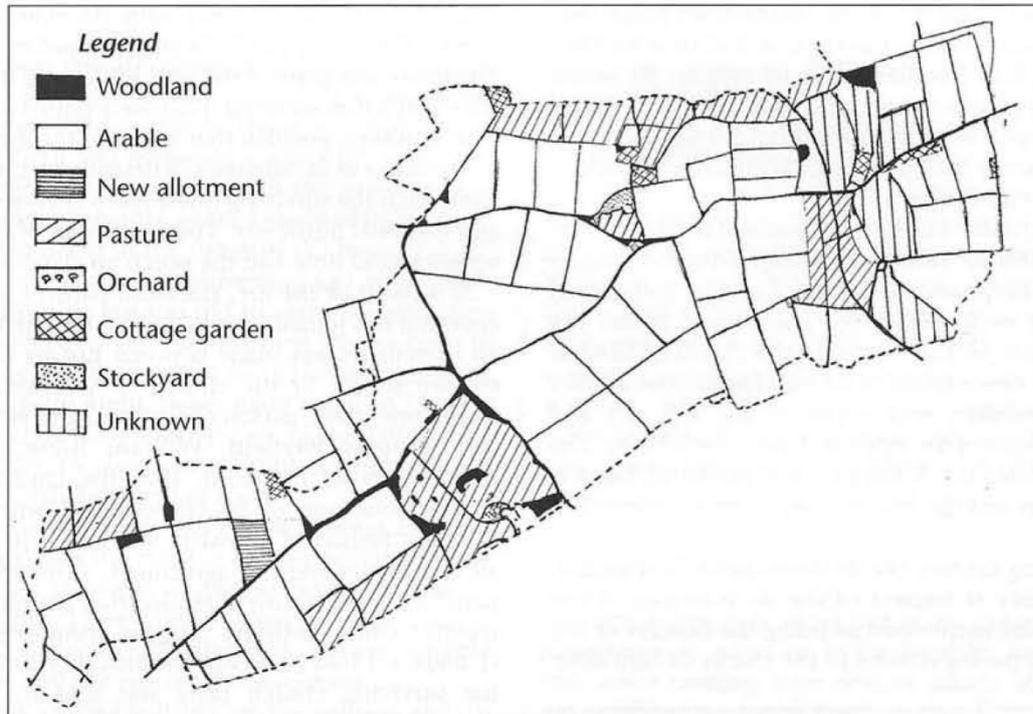
In common with the rest of Norfolk, by the 19th century Hackford was celebrated for the growth of its barley. Other crops grown included turnips, peas and beans, clover and wheat. A certain amount was kept under grass, especially by the river and stream margins. Stock keeping was also important and provided some local employment in the form of drovers, tanners and cattle dealers. The annual stock fair continued to take place on 29th June. In 1804 William Bircham, who farmed 840 acres of the parish, was the major landowner. He improved his soil by marling and liming, used a six-year rotation but did not have any of the new threshing or drill machines. By 1846 the major landowners included the **Rev. J. Bedingfeld Collyer**, who owned 182 acres and resided at Hackford Hall, the **Rev. J. Humphrey**, who owned 144 acres, and **John Sewell**, who farmed 108 acres. Most of the land seemed to be farmed by small tenant farmers. Hackford escaped the wholesale destruction of machinery and property, which the rest of Norfolk suffered during the Swing Riots.

Maybe this was because the small tenant farmers could only afford to farm in the traditional way.

By the 19th century around 23% of the local population were employed in agriculture on a permanent basis, although many more were employed doing seasonal work. Children were able to earn as much as 5d a day bird scaring, while gangs of women were employed hoeing, planting beans and thinning turnips. Many of the local clergymen were concerned for the morality and welfare of the field-working women especially as the gang masters were “rough bullying fellows who would bluster and swear”. A number of Hackford women, once the fieldwork was done, earned a few more pence by weaving straw hats. In 1804 a farm labourer would earn 1/6d daily rising to 4/6d at harvest.

During the last millennium Hackford has been an essentially rural parish dependent on the small market town of Reepham for its infrastructure. This has remained largely unchanged although recent changes in mobility have brought Norwich and the wider world into commuting distance, thereby bringing new sources of money into the parish.

*From the Reepham Society Magazine, Millennium Edition, April 2001*



*Land use in Hackford 1846 (based on the Tithe Apportionment Map).*



*An aerial view of Reepham's three churches. The last remnant of Hackford church can just be seen at the right of the clump of yews. The photograph can be dated by some differences from a present-day view. For instance, York House (top left) can be seen in the process of restoration in the background.*



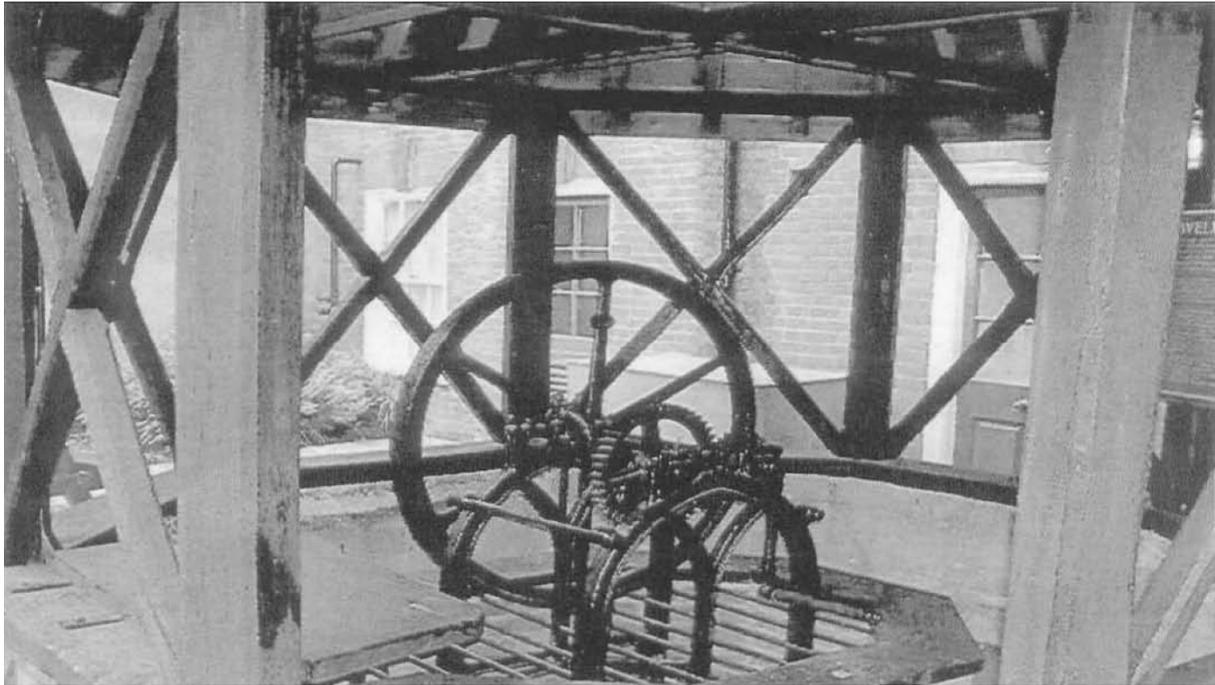
*Hackford Hall. In 1846, at the time of the Tithe Apportionments, this was home to the Venerable John Bedingfield Collyer, Archdeacon of Norwich.*



*Pettywell Place, now lived in by Howard and Margaret Blandford-Baker, was formerly owned by the Eglington family. In 1846 it was owned by John Sewell but occupied by Margaret Rodham.*



*This plaque adorns the wall in the yard of the Old Brewery. It marks the site of the former Bircham's Brewery erected by William Bircham in 1839.*



*There was no piped water supply to Reepham until the 1950s. This well, which has now been restored, also in the Old Brewery yard, was the source of water for the brewing of Reepham Ale until 1876.*