

COLDHAM HALL AND THE SAILING FRATERNITY

Despite the fact that in his book "A month on the Norfolk Broads" (1887) Rye could not understand why Coldham Hall should be the earthly paradise of skippers of yachts and wherries, the fact that it was so goes back to the early part of the nineteenth century.

Why Coldham Hall was so named is somewhat of a mystery but it could well have been. built during the eighteenth century as a shooting lodge before becoming a public house catering for the busy wherry trade. Mr. Harry Last, who came to Coldham when his father-in-law, Mr. W. Breach, took over the inn and the boatyard in 1922, gave me this account of the legend behind its name:-

"Coldham Hall is said to have been named by Queen Anne who came down the river one day from Norwich by boat for a pleasure cruise. She went into the inn and summoned the landlord to ask him what he could offer to eat. He came stumping into the room with a walking stick. "We haven't much here, Your Majesty," he said, 'except these," and raising his stick he thumped on the great smoked hams which hung in a row from the oak beam above his head.

The Queen ate cold ham and enjoyed it. Why had she come to Coldham Hall at all? Some say to shelter from the storm, others, well, even a queen can miss her footing, can't she? The water joke is a good one but not exactly new.'

Regattas were held locally by the end of the eighteenth century as the Norwich Mercury reported on the 8th August 1801:-

"On Thursday .the annual regatta was attended by a considerable number of boats and the party passed the day at Postwick Grove with the harmony and festivity which has for so many years distinguished the votaries of the God of the Yare."

1

About 1830, amateur oarsmen started to hold rowing matches and by 1840 some had started competitive sailing, Coldham Hall and Cantley being their favourite waters. Competition became very keen as well as expensive as builders developed faster yachts. In 1836 a very well-known yacht called the 'Maria' won a cup at Coldham Hall, and for several years afterwards was winning trophies at Oulton Broad and at Wrexham (see letter to the Editor of the E.D.P. of 18th May 1984). In 1840 Mr. R. Gostling, the landlord of the Coldham Hall Inn, advertised in the Norwich Mercury that a regatta would be held at Coldham on

COLDHAM HALL AND
SAILING

the 14th September and that boats not exceeding 19 feet would sail for "a splendid silver cup". In the following year the event was held on the 19th July when two "handsome silver cups" were to be sailed for.

In July 1847 there was a prominent advertisement in the Norwich Mercury for the regatta to be held on Monday the 26th. Again two handsome silver cups were to be sailed for under rules to be produced at the time of entrance. At least three boats had to be entered to make a race and the owners had to provide the names of their crews and no owner could enter more than one boat for each of the trophies. Entries had to be declared by ten o'clock in the morning and boats were to start precisely at twelve noon. There was to be a dinner after the sailing and, it was added, the "aqua tic Sports will present more than the usual attraction and there will be a variety of other entertainments". The notice goes on to say that "An Excellent Band will be in attendance and the amusements of the evening will conclude with a Grand Display of Fireworks".

It could well have been that the landlord of the Inn sponsored the entire event as the final part of the advertisement reads thus:-

"R. Gostling respectfully announces his regatta for the present year and begs to assure his Friends and the Public that every effort will be directed to promote their comfort and amusement hoping thereby to ensure a continuance of their liberal patronage

"Wines Spirits Ales & Porter Etc. of the First Quality." By 1884 regattas had become an annual event and this is how the Norwich Mercury reported the racing in their issue of 24th September 1842:-

"COLDHAM HALL REGATTA. This annual regatta took place on Monday se'night when two handsome silver cups were sailed for, the first being for 19 foot boats. Four starters viz. Coriander (Mr. Balls), Amina (Mr. Dallison), Sylph (Mr. Steward) and Kathleen (N. & C. Thompson Esqrs). After a well contested match Amina won, beating the Sylph which came in second, by nearly a minute. The second match was sailed by 16 feet boats and four starters viz. Pearl (Mr. Woolsey), Pheonix (Mr. Barker), Young Henry and Rosine (Messrs Saey(?) and Steward). This was quite a parliamentary match the Pearl and Phoenix paired off, went ahead of the other two and had a sharp struggle for the first place at the finish, which was won by the Pearl beating her competitor by 6 yards. The Young Henry and Rosine paired off, kept a respectable distance and had a close trial for No.3. After the matches about twenty gentlemen sat down to dinner and the cups were filled with wine by the winners and the company having paid due homage to Bacchus

adjourned to the green to witness the rustic sports. The company were entertained at intervals by a military band and the evenings amusements concluded with a display of fireworks. There was a stiff breeze throughout the day."

I have quoted this in full as the proceedings must have provided the village as a whole with much anticipated entertainment, especially towards the end of the day when they would have been able to listen to the band and watch the fireworks. At this time there was very little public entertainment for ordinary people and one has to imagine the merrymaking. that went on both on and off the water. There would no doubt have been rowing races and pillow fights on the greasy pole, and the publican would have done a roaring trade. Regattas must have continued as the village school log book shows for the 19th June 1879 "numbers low in consequence of a Boat Race being held on this river". Surlingham Regatta is mentioned in January 1882 (was there winter sailing?) and a regatta at Surlingham Ferry took place in June 1885 when some children failed to attend school.

In about 1935 a group of yachtsmen formed a committee with the object of promoting an annual regatta at Coldham Hall and a subscription list was opened to provide trophies for the various types of craft then racing. All but one of these cups are raced for today and a regatta is still held under the aegis of the Norfolk and Suffolk Yachting Association which was founded in 1894. It is organised jointly by the Coldham Hall Sailing Club and the Norwich Frostbite Sailing Club, but the committee does include two representatives from the village. This, the first of the Broadland "open" sailing regattas, takes place over a weekend at the beginning of May.

The Coldham Hall Sailing Club was founded in 1951 by Mr. H. Last, the then landlord of the inn, and local sailing enthusiasts. The club is still in being today and remains based at Coldham. The club is particularly well known for staging its annual passage race for traditional Broads' sailing cruisers - the course being to Breydon Water and back.

The sport of sailing was not the only pastime at Coldham Hall. Up to 1925 there was a skittle alley covered by a corrugated iron roof with a wall at the end lined with straw and hessian to stop the balls. Skittle teams went from pub to pub and enjoyed competitions similar to those playing darts today. There was also an alley at Bramerton Woods End but the advent of the "London" dart **board** replaced the old game. Quoits (pronounced locally as "kites"), were also played at Coldham Hall years ago, and these were thrown at an iron stake set in the centre of a cart wheel rim filled with damp clay. The quoits were about the size of a large saucer, made of cast-iron and very heavy to throw. If dropped on the clay the quoits would stick there.

APPENDIX

Trophies presented by the Coldham Hall Open Regatta Committee:-

Race for local boats.

Solid silver Challenge Cup with "Harp" handles. The
"Peter .Daynes" cup first sailed for in 1955.

Wayfarer and Enterprise Dinghies.

Plated silver Challenge Cup with handles, oblong style.
First sailed for in 1961.

Waveney One Design Class.

Solid silver goblet. Called the Challenge Cup for
Waveney One Designs, it was presented by Mr. John Lloyd in
1935.

Waveney One Design Class.

The "Lofty" Marshall Memorial Cup for Waveney One Designs
was presented by Mrs. Marshall in 1983.

Norfolk One Design Dinghies.

Solid silver cup with Irish Handles. This Challenge Cup was
presented by the Regatta Committee in 1935.

Handicap race for Broads River Cruisers.

Silver goblet. The "Merlin" Challenge Cup for Cruisers.
First sailed for in 1946. An earlier trophy called the
Nerina Cup was won outright in 1946 by Mr. George Levine
who replaced this by the trophy sailed for today.

Broads One Design Class ("Brown Boats").

Solid silver Challenge Cup with harp shaped handles
presented by the Committee in 1969.

Combined Allcomers Race.

Solid silver Challenge Cup with fluted base. First sailed
for in 1938.

Team Race.

English pewter half gallon Tankard. The first team race was
held in 1951.

Trophies awarded to the winners taking part in the Yare
Navigation Race for traditional Broads Sailing Cruisers. This
event has been held annually in September since 1975 and the
round trip from Coldham Hall covers about thirty miles. The race
is held under the flag of the Coldham Hall Sailing Club.

Norwich Brewery Trophy.

Overall winner on handicap.

COLDHAM HALL AND SAILING

Moonraker Trophy.

Awarded to the fastest boat covering the distance.

Wilberforce Smith Trophy.

Winning boat not exceeding 24 feet.

Schweppes Trophy.

Winning boat over 24 feet and up to 28 feet.

~V'V|
/

SURUNGHAM - COLDHAM HALL

The Inn goes back to the early part of the nineteenth century and has been extensively altered during the last twenty years. As with the other riverside public houses it would have been built originally to cater for the huge volume of river traffic which passed up and down the Yare before the coming of the railways.

The rowing ferry crossed the river from the quay at the Coldham Hall Inn to a landing at Brundall on the opposite bank where there was a ferry bell. The ferry went with the pub and was certainly in operation in 1861 when Robert Francis is listed as the proprietor of the Inn and the ferry. Again in 1883 Edward Browne is described as a corn merchant, fishing boat and ferry boat proprietor.

There was, and still is, a boatyard at Coldham, and it was here that some of the old ferry floats were built and repaired. There is a sunken wherry on one side of the ferry dock used for the rowing ferry, and on the other side is the sunken chain ferry.

When the Great Eastern Railway built their station at Brundall village, people from the Surlingham and Rockland areas were able to use the ferry, walk across the marsh, and catch a train to either Norwich or to Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Later ferry boats were needed in later years so that cycles could be carried over as well. The late Mr Resneld Clough told me that in about 1912 he often worked the ferry at weekends when traffic was particularly busy. The charge was a penny each way and the boat would carry as many as fourteen people. From midday Saturday until about 10 p.m. on the Sunday he would take about thirty-five shillings in fares - for which he was paid ten shillings. This means he would have carried over four hundred people across the river, and presumably most of them would have walked to and from the station doing their shopping or

visiting in Norwich.

Before the last war, Mr Last told me, he had his regular customers - in the mornings there would be the children who went to school in Norwich, together with those who worked in offices or factories either in Norwich or Cantley. These of course had to be fetched at the end of the

The Rowing Ferries

Floating Bridges



day. Years ago, because of the good wages paid, a number of Surlingham men worked at the sugar beet refinery in the winter months, during what was known as the "campaign", travelling by train to Cantley station. As operations were carried on twenty-four hours a day this meant that shift workers had to be catered for. Passengers were charged a penny but this went up to twopenny after the war.

In the early 'thirties Dr McElvie of Brundall served the village as a family doctor. The ferry was used by those wanting to attend his surgery or fetch medicines and, in cases of emergency, the doctor himself would have to be brought across to visit his patient. On occasions market garden produce was also sent to Brundall station. Mr Bob Clough remembers that his father used his greenhouses to grow out of season beans which would be packed up and sent to wholesalers in Manchester - where they fetched as much as six shillings a pound. Mr Last confirmed this and said that they had to row up river to the Yore Hotel (a considerable distance), where the produce was collected by a porter with a trolley.

Mr Geoffrey Clough, of Surlingham, a lifetime supporter of Norwich City Football Club, told me that he always used the ferry in the 'thirties



Coldham Hall Ferry Stage

Floating Bridges

The Rowing Ferries

Mary Upton and Coldham Hall

In 1922 my father, Harry Last, came up to Coldham Hall from Oulton Broad with my grandfather (Billy Breach) and the family. Both men were shipwrights, and also my uncle, Harry Breach, who worked with them in the earlier years. The pub was connected to the yard, so they had to take that on as well. (It was Morgan's Brewery at that time.) Between them they held the licence nearly equally for 51 years.

They built and repaired sailing and motor craft, and maintained the road ferries, which were towed to the yard. There were three such ferries on the Y are at that time, and I think I am right in saying that they built two of them.

There were no electrical tools in those days, as we did not actually get 'put on' electricity until around the early '50's. There were oil lamps and tilley lamps, hurricane lamps and even candles in jam-jars, and then acetylene gas lighting made from carbide, and later they generated their own electricity - sometimes the engine would falter and out would come the candles and lamps again, until the engine was fixed - all part of life!

Cooking in the earlier years was on a black cooking range which had to be kept clean with, I think it was called, "Zebo" black cleaner. Cooking was also done on a four-burner oil stove with an oven on the top which incidentally cooked very well.

The wicks on the lamps and stoves had to have regular attention, because if they happened to smoke it caused a greasy sooty mess everywhere, which hung like black cobwebs. The first refrigerator also ran on paraffin. There were built-in coppers in the kitchens in those very early days.

Despite all this my mother and grandmother used to cater for residents.

We ran a Ferry across the river, as not many people had cars and they used to go over to Brundall to the doctor's or to catch a train, for a penny a crossing.

For several years a boat called *The Doris* used to come down from Norwich full of passengers for afternoon teas in the tearoom (which was later used as a workshop but which unfortunately was pulled down when the pub was taken over). It was quite a common sight to see two or more trading wherries moored at the quay overnight, waiting for the dawn, and possibly the tide, and the wherry men enjoyed a pint or two of mild beer, at a few pence a pint, and had a game of crib.

Water had to be pumped by hand for general use, but the drinking water was carted in a tank from the Brickmakers' Arms (which is now a private house) at the top of the lane.

There was originally a Skittle Alley, but this was also turned

into a workshop. We had a lovely old penny-in-the-slot barrel organ in the Smoke Room, which was very popular with the holidaymakers on the Broads.

During the Second World War my father was a foreman at Broom's Boatyard, where they were on Admiralty work, whilst my grandfather ran the pub.

Just a few years before the War my father, who was a member of the Frostbite Sailing Club, and some of the local yachtsmen got together with the Frostbites to revive the old Coldham Hall Regatta (which during the War years was put on hold!) and in 1951 he and some customers and sailing enthusiasts formed the present-day Coldham Hall Sailing Club, of which my grandfather, Billy Breach, was the first President.

My husband Jimmy had his own job at the Norwich Union, but he still helped run the pub in later years with my father, mother, my aunt Evelyn Pegg and myself. He was also Treasurer of the Coldham Hall Sailing Club for over forty years.

It was a hard working life, but we all enjoyed it and made many friends.

