

- **History of Wortham**

***Contributed by long-time Wortham resident, Nicholas Smith.***

Although Roman remains have been found in the Parish, the oldest feature in this widespread Suffolk border village is the Round Tower at the Church, being Saxon in origin. It is the largest in the kingdom and measures 29 feet in diameter. This far-flung village is spread over 2,750 acres, with over 250 acres of common land and comprises five hamlets, Long Green, The Marsh, Magpie Green, the Ling and The Brook.

Wortham has been the subject of publicity since 1912, when Katherine Doughty's book was published by Bodley Head. 'The Betts of Wortham' recounts the history of this remarkable family who lived at The Manor House for over 400 years (1480-1905). The material for this book (now out of print) came from a hoard of manuscripts and parchments dating from 1272 to mid-Victorian times (currently held in Chicago University) which were discovered in 1905 when The Manor House was cleared ready for sale after 425 years of continuous family occupation. This great house stands on an ancient Low Road site and is recorded in The Domesday Book.

It was in the depression of the 1920's that Wortham next came to the attention of the English public when a local landowner was actively involved in what has become known as the Tithe Wars. A long running legal battle involved hundreds of farmers in East Anglia and beyond. Oswald Mosley's black shirts came down to Wortham in 1934 to 'support' the cause. The dispute was over taxes imposed on landowners. One active participant in the fight against what were seen as unfair taxes was Mrs Rowland Rash. She is better known today as Doreen Wallace, the author of over 50 books, one of which 'The Tithe War' told the whole story in every detail.

A monument commemorating the Tithe Wars still stands on the Redgrave Road about half a mile west of Wortham Church

Some 45 years passed before Wortham came into the public limelight again. This time Ronald Fletcher's book of 1978, "The Biography of a Victorian Village", by Batsford, highlighted the Parish and its remarkable Rector Richard Cobbold, who was incumbent here for over 50 years. His legacy was a remarkable record of life in this important period (1823-1877) when the industrial revolution was having such a huge effect on the countryside as a whole. Cobbold was a painter, poet, writer and recorder extraordinaire. Not only did he paint the houses, cottages and farmsteads, over 100 in all, but also many of their occupants. All were bound together in several great volumes and are now being researched in greater depth and whilst Fletcher's book is a useful commercial reference to Cobbold's Wortham, it hardly scratches the surface of what we now realise is a most comprehensive record of Victorian Village life. A group of Suffolk local historians continue to work on this remarkable mans works and hope to publish an accurate and all embracing book in years to come.

*Editor's note. Copies of Ronald Fletcher's book about Wortham's most famous resident, the Rev. Richard Cobbold, are available from used book suppliers. If you have Internet access try searching on [www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk) or [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com).*

- **History of Burgate**

*Compiled by Terry Quinn from the interesting booklet, "Echoes from the past life of Burgate, Suffolk," by Percival Oakley Hill, one time Rector of Burgate. There is no date on the book but it is believed to have been published in the 1930s. My thanks to Chris Williams of Burgate who loaned me his copy of the book.*

Burgate is a small village of little more than 2000 acres. Yet, it has an unexpectedly important place in the history of England. The village is mentioned in the Domesday Book as Buregata, Burgata, Buregate and later in the 12<sup>th</sup> century – Burgate. Buregata is derived from a combination of the Anglo-Saxon *burigan* or *gugan* meaning to bury, and the Danish word *gata*, a going away. The combination is believed to signify "The way to the Burying." (However... see below)

Percival Oakley Hill, one time Rector of Burgate, recorded that the body of Saint Edmund, King and martyr, on its way to Bury St Edmunds from Scole, was diverted through Burgate for an overnight stay. He tells us that from Burgate Church, the solemn procession crossed either Great Green or Little Green on its way back to the Bury Road, then known as Ikelynggeweye.

During the centuries that followed, Burgate was fairly typical of rural Suffolk communities with life revolving around parish priest and noble, knight and dame, yeoman and peasant. Yet its history is peppered with names that had much wider significance in English history. Burgate's overlord was Robert de Vere, an executor of the Magna Carta. His successor, the second Aubrey de Vere, was the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Oxford. Sir Peter de Burgate was one of the first in England to be honoured with the Knighthood of the Order of the Bath in 1306. There's more. Queen Mary's Ambassador to Spain, who was sent to bring back her Consort Philip, was Lord of the Manor of Burgate and its Patron. Another Lord of the Manor was the Lord Keeper for Queen Elizabeth 1. And Sir Nicholas Bacon, his successor as Lord of the Manor, was the first Englishman to receive the title of Baronet. In more recent times Lord Chief Justice Holt, became Lord of the Manor when his father purchased the title.

In later centuries, the recorded history of Burgate tells of regular fund raising through Church Ale sales in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that resulted in drunks in the church, the murder of the Rector in 1513 and a ghost that appeared in the glebe land next to the rectory. Some believed it was the ghost of the murderer who was hanged on the 'Great Sycamore' tree that gave its name to Sycamore Road.

The boundaries between Burgate and Wortham were not precise until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and led to some curious anomalies. A house at the intersection of the Mellis Road and the Bury Road was recorded in both parishes. Not unusual perhaps. But in this instance, the part of the house that was on the Wortham side was in Burgate and the Burgate side was in Wortham. It gets worse. On Wortham's Long Green there was a small part of Burgate completely surrounded by Wortham. This little Burgate island included four houses, a shop and a chapel known as Wortham Chapel. Burgate Chapel near Great Green, was in Wortham. Therefore Wortham Chapel was in Burgate and Burgate Chapel was in Wortham.

In 1884, management by a succession of Lords of the Manor ended when Parish Councils were established. For some 90 years, Burgate was not large enough to warrant a PC and four people were appointed to hold parish meetings. In 1973, it was agreed that Burgate should be grouped with Wortham to form a joint parish council.

**Postscript.** Eminent local historian Clive Paine disagrees with the Rev. Hill on the origins of the village name. He says that the name Burgate derives from the gate of a burg. Burg often means a Roman or Iron Age fort. His sources give the spelling of the name as Burgata in 1086, Burgat in 1204 and Burgate since 1254. Clive also says it is not true that St Edmund was killed near Hoxne and there is no evidence that the funeral procession. Historians now believe that he died south of Bury.