

CELEBRATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NAYLAND WITH WISSINGTON CONSERVATION SOCIETY

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In the 1960s there was public concern over the pace of development in historic towns and villages and in order to protect them many were designated areas of special architectural and historic interest. They were called Conservation Areas and Nayland was designated a Conservation Area in 1973.

About this time the late Blair Lees who lived at Stour House in Court Street was appointed Parish Recorder for Nayland by the Suffolk Local History Council. Discussions in the Anchor Inn with his neighbour Wendy Sparrow led to the creation of the *Nayland Record*, a quarterly historical journal which they produced for about ten years. They discussed how Nayland was changing and decided to find out if there was interest in the village for a "preservation" society.

In the first edition of the *Nayland Record* which was put through every door in the village readers were invited to return a slip if they were interested in forming a society. In all, 57 replies were received and an inaugural meeting was planned to be held in the Village Hall on the 6th June 1974. Meanwhile discussions were taking place with friends in the Anchor and the first recruits were found. In the beginning there was a group of five who subsequently formed the original committee. These were Blair Lees, Joan Moore, Francis Fowke, John Randall and Wendy Sparrow.

Michael Archer, Secretary of the Dedham Vale Society, came to the inaugural meeting in June to give advice on setting up an amenity society. There was much enthusiasm for the idea and it was agreed there was a need to preserve and improve the charm and antiquity of Nayland. A motion was therefore carried that an amenity society should be formed. It was felt that the society would encompass more than just preservation and it was agreed it should be called the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society.

The original group of five were proposed for the committee and Blair Lees was elected Chairman, Francis Fowke, Treasurer, Joan Moore, Secretary, John Randall and Wendy Sparrow, committee. Two more committee members, Fred Hammond and Roy Berry, subsequently joined them.

The Society was registered with the Civic Trust and Charity Commission. Its aims were and still remain: (a) to stimulate public interest in Nayland, (b) to promote high standards of planning and architecture and (c) to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest.

During the first year membership increased to 109 and the number has steadily increased to nearly 300. Of the founding members there are now only 4 surviving, namely, Jean Dryden who was on the committee some years ago (her late husband Angus was an early treasurer), June Freeman, Linda Clapham and Wendy Sparrow. Ken Willingale, who sadly died earlier this year was also a founder member.

COURT KNOLL

Over recent years Court Knoll has been the subject of a major project but back in 1974 when the Society was established, few people knew much about its history. To walkers on the footpath it appeared to be just a field with a ditch around it. The committee decided to erect an information board and after gaining all the necessary information and permissions it was finally erected in 1978. In 2021 it was decided by the current committee to refurbish the sign and it was removed and renovated. Two committee members who attended the original unveiling in 1978 also did the unveiling of the restored sign some 40 years later!

In between these events a great deal happened at Court Knoll. In 1924 a group of local historians had carried out an archaeological dig there when they discovered the remains of a Norman building which was rich in Roman and medieval material. The site was scheduled as an Ancient Monument in 1962.

Despite periodic interest after that first dig in 1924 there was no further action until 1998 when The Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project instigated an Archaeological and Historical Study, carrying out a survey to identify what remained on the site. Eventually in 2001 a Fieldwalking Project was organised with the Conservation Society which involved a geophysical survey, a search of documentary sources and systematic fieldwalking by many village volunteers. There was no actual digging on this occasion. Some prehistoric, Roman and medieval pottery was found as well as building materials such as roof tiles, Roman tile, limestone and sandstone, medieval glass, clay pipes etc. The large quantity of Roman tile found suggested that this came from a high status Roman building in the area and was used in the construction of later buildings on Court Knoll.

The Society's Secretary, Andora Carver, promoted the idea of a major excavation which took place in 2016 involving more experts and more than 70 volunteers from Nayland and beyond. A licence to excavate was granted by English Heritage for six weeks. Seven trenches were dug on the knoll and there were a huge number of finds which were analysed with the help of volunteers. The project, which is still continuing, has cost in excess of £35,000 to date. An exhibition was held in 2018 when the project leader gave a detailed report on the progress of the enormous amount of work involved in analysing the finds, some of which were on display. They included late Saxon fragments, early medieval pottery, metalwork, Roman tiles and 2 silver coins, one dating from 1216.

On the final afternoon of the dig in October 2016 evidence of a human burial was found and a particle of bone taken from the grave was sent for carbon dating – it was dated as being between 969 – 1018, i.e. the late Saxon period. As the licence for the dig expired that day no further excavation could be carried out to find out more. The trenches were then filled in, much to the frustration of many people! Analysis of the recovered finds is still being undertaken but it is hoped that a final report will be published within the next eighteen months and in due course an information board will be erected within the vicinity of Court Knoll.



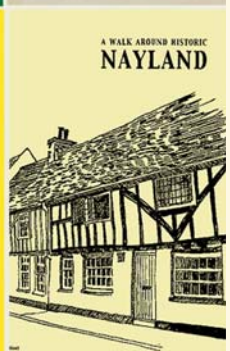
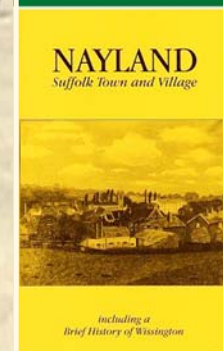
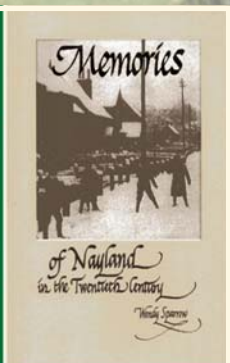
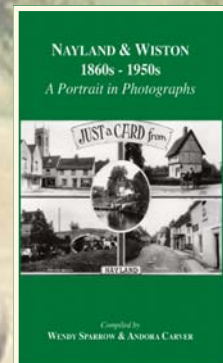
EXHIBITIONS & PUBLICATIONS

In 1974 the committee immediately set to work and many ideas for working party projects and activities were discussed. In the first month of its existence the Society held its first exhibition of old photographs and documents of Nayland at the August Community Council Fair on Webb's Meadow. Norfolk's Buses loaned the Society one of their vehicles which was fitted out with display boards. Visitors went in the front door and left through the emergency door at the back. This created a lot of interest and was great fun for the committee.

There have been many exhibitions in the past 50 years. In 1976 the bicentenary of the birth of John Constable was celebrated by the village and the Society contributed a display. In 1985 a successful photographic competition and display was mounted and in the following year an art competition was organised and judged by the Royal portrait painter, Richard Stone.

In 1987 a major Past and Present exhibition was held in the Church Hall during the Civic Trust's National Environment week. Many interesting items were loaned by residents and the Suffolk Record Office. By then the Society had acquired its own display boards which are still in use today!

The 1980s was a busy decade and it was decided that it was time Nayland should have its first printed history book. Many people know that Dr Sidney Slade, our GP in the early years of the 20th century, (1911–1937) did a vast amount of research into Nayland's history but his work was never published. The booklet, *Nayland*, published by the Society in 1984 was a slim volume written by several residents and its contents owed much to Dr Slade. This was followed by a larger publication in 1991, *Nayland Suffolk Town and Village*, again written by several residents, some of whom were invited to the newly created Radio Suffolk studio in Ipswich to talk about it. This led to *A Walk Around Historic Nayland*, in 2000 and *The Portrait of Nayland* published in 2002. *Memories of Nayland* in 2006 is a collection of memories from members of many old Nayland families.





OPEN GARDENS

One of the Society's major achievements has been the annual **Open Gardens** event. The committee were discussing ways to raise funds in the Spring of 1978. Fred Hammond suggested asking residents if they would like to open their gardens. It was agreed this was an excellent idea and it was decided to hold the event on Sunday 16th July. In that first year there were 11 gardens open: Mr and Mrs Randall at 18 Heycroft Way, Mr and Mrs Gordon Padget on Harpers Estate; Dr and Mrs Cloudsley-Smith at Sargeants, Bear Street; Mr and Mrs Findlay at 54 Bear Street, Mrs Southall at 38 Bear Street, Mr and Mrs Dryden, 30 Stoke Road, Mr and Mrs Horlock at Stream House, Fen Street; Brigadier and Mrs Litton at The White House, Church Lane; Mr and Mrs Hines at the Post Office and Mr and Mrs Fowke at Knollgate, Court Street. The ticket to visit all the gardens cost an exorbitant 50p. The eleventh garden was Parkers in Bear Street where Mr and Mrs Milne-Redhead lived and, as well as opening their garden, which they did for the next seven years, they very kindly offered the use of their barn for the teas.

An important part of the day was, and still is of course, tea and cakes. The three lady members of the committee (Joan Moore, Linda Clapham and Wendy Sparrow) remembered baking for days before and the almost medieval conditions of the barn – a far cry from the modern conveniences of the village hall. In that first year there was no idea what the response would be. However, the sun shone and the crowds came! Needless to say the cakes ran out!

Many people will remember Edgar Milne-Redhead, a distinguished botanist and conservationist who worked at Kew for many years. He was made an MBE for his work and lived at Parkers for about 20 years. He and his wife Olive were great supporters of the Society from its inception and Edgar became a Life President.

The committee agreed the occasion had been a huge success and a net profit of £90 had been made which was used to pay for a spirit duplicator for office use. It was decided to hold a similar function the following year and over subsequent years many different gardens have opened in all parts of the village including Wiston.

As the years went by the number of visitors and profits have increased. People come from far and wide and many still return year after year. Donations from the proceeds have been made to various conservation bodies and projects, including the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, restoration projects for Nayland and Wiston churches, Pakenham Mill, Colchester Castle, Hadleigh Deanery Tower and others. To celebrate the Millennium a record 30 gardens were open when about £2,000 was raised.

For over 40 years this event had taken place until Covid struck when for two years the event went online. In 2022 there was a welcome return to many village events including Open Gardens but the following year the event was cancelled for the first time ever because for various reasons there was a shortage of gardens being offered. In the Society's 50th year it is hoped the event will be a special occasion.

PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVE

In 2010 the Society purchased by auction some of the late David May's large collection of old postcards of the area which included many of Nayland and Wiston. As part of the Society's 40th Anniversary celebrations in 2014 these postcards of Nayland were added to other family collections kindly donated to the Society over the years to form a historic archive and are available to view digitally on the Society's website or in albums at some meetings.

Also included in the archive is a collection of deeds and documents donated by Usha Taylor on behalf of her late husband Keith.

The David May Collection



People, Events and the River



Buildings and Street Scenes



East Anglian Sanatorium and Wiston

The Historic Collections



The Walsh Collection



Mrs Fenn Collection



The Thorpe Collection

HORKESLEY LOCK

One of the first aims of the newly formed society in 1974 was to clear up the old lock site but it was not until 1995 that the site was restored with the help of the society.

In the 1970s Horkesley Lock pool was just a muddy pond near Court Knoll. Few people were aware of its history. The official right of way from Court Street ended at the pool but until the early part of the 20th century it was possible to cross the river into Horkesley.

Horkesley Lock was one of several built as a result of the Stour Navigation Act of 1705 when the river was made navigable from Sudbury to Manningtree. Commercial barge traffic was a common sight through Nayland until the navigation declined, partly because of the railways. There were two bridges, one from the footpath onto the island where the Lock keeper lived and the main one over the lock connecting the footpath to Horkesley on the Essex side of the river. When the navigation ceased about 1920 the locks gradually fell down. From 1919 Nayland Parish Council wrote several times to Great Horkesley Parish Council about the dangerous condition of the bridge across the river appealing for its repair, to no avail. The matter was raised again in the 1960s but the County Surveyor of Essex said the cost could not be justified.

When the Society was formed in 1974 it began by clearing up the site and consulted with the water authority and other bodies but the scheme had to be abandoned because of the lack of finance and voluntary help. However, in the 1980s the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project which had been set up to promote the AONB were interested in carrying out a scheme at the site and during 1994 and 1995 the site was restored by the then National Rivers Authority at a cost of £70,000: the trees were thinned and pollarded and the central area was dredged and reconnected to the river by digging out the inlet and outlet channels. Two new bridges were built, almost in the same positions as the old ones. The larger one went over the river where the lock had been and the smaller one onto the island where the lock cottage had been. As soon as the bridges were in place the old footpath was restored creating a circular walk which is now well used by walkers.

At the conclusion of the project the Society's volunteers and many residents including families and children planted many trees around the pool. Since 1995 the society has kept a watchful eye on the site and some necessary repairs have been carried out to the main bridge by Essex County Council. However, sadly the pool seems to be reverting to the condition it was in before it was rescued.



MEETINGS

At the first general meeting in October 1974 a talk was given by the Chairman of the River Stour Trust, and ever since then there have been many talks by local and national guest speakers, on topics including planning, history, art and architecture, nature conservation to name but a few. Films from the East Anglian Archive have also been shown.

One highlight was a talk by David Walsh about the Stour Valley Railway and a proposed extension to go through Nayland which never happened, another by John Slater on the relationship between Modern Farming and Conservation. One entertaining evening was about the History of Morris Dancing with a live demonstration by Mount Bures Morris Men. There has been no shortage of interesting talks. The Society continues to hold four speaker meetings each year in the village hall.

As well as talks, since 1974 members have enjoyed outings to places of local interest, such as Sutton Hoo, historic churches and houses and the annual guided footpath walks also continue each Spring.

PLANNING & HIGHWAYS

One important aspect of the society's activities has been planning and by 1976 it was establishing a good working relationship with local authorities, landowners and farmers. The committee review every planning application in the parish and it has commented on hundreds of planning applications from proposed new development to trees and in 2003 contributed to a project to survey unlisted buildings and other features of historical and architectural interest which formed the basis of the Babergh District Council Local List which was adopted by the Babergh Planning Committee in 2004.

In 1980 the society conducted its first traffic survey, monitoring heavy lorries which travelled through Nayland. It was felt that heavy lorries were endangering property and were a danger to residents' safety and a petition campaigning against them was organised which was signed by most residents. The society also wrote to the Common Market Commission opposing the EEC proposal to increase the maximum load for heavy lorries from 32 – 40 tonnes. Through the years it has worked with the Parish, District and County Councils on environmental matters including traffic calming. Attempts to reduce the speed of traffic to 20 mph have not as yet been successful but this issue is ongoing.



1995 – 21st ANNIVERSARY

In June 1995 the Society celebrated its 21st birthday with an exhibition in the Church Hall over the weekend 10th/11th June, Open Gardens on Sunday, the 11th, and a reception and meeting on the 13th in the Village Hall. The exhibition described how the society began and its first 21 years. A commemorative mug was on sale. For the Open Gardens event in this anniversary year there were 18 gardens open to the public in Nayland and Wiston and £800 was raised.

During recent years the Society has continued to support various projects connected with the environment and wildlife conservation, some examples are:

- Funding the resiting of the George V trough in the High Street back to its original position;
- Contributing to the cost of entrance gates to Webb's Meadow; funding gates at entrance to Court Knoll from Court Street;
- Repairs to Scout Hut; Donations to Village Hall refurbishment in 2000.

Regular donations have also been made to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the Suffolk Preservation Society, St Marys Church Wiston for repairs to church fabric and to St James' for security of the Constable painting and window guards. Also, the Society arranged conservation of Coronation Altar Frontal and the William IV coat of arms over the north door of St James'. Donations have been made to St Edmundsbury Cathedral Tower Appeal.

When what was believed to be a Doodle bug was dredged from the river in 2000, the Society arranged for storage until it was housed on permanent loan to the Flying Bomb Museum near Southend.

For the Millennium the Society participated in the village's celebrations with a major history exhibition in the Village Hall, coinciding with a special Open Gardens weekend when 30 gardens were open.

Other miscellaneous activities include:

- In 2011 following the unexpected removal of the K6 telephone box in Bear Street negotiations led to the decommissioned box from Wiston being adopted by the Society; it was restored and is now used as a book and magazine exchange in Bear Street.
- In 2012 the Society purchased by auction an original sketch of the design of the stone reredos made for the John Constable painting in St James's Church, a copy hangs in the church.
- In 2014 the Society initiated a popular and well used permissive footpath alongside the Nayland to Stoke Road on Tendring Hall land which has added greatly to walkers' enjoyment and safety.
- In 2020 the Society organised the erection of 31 Swift boxes on residents' houses.
- In 2021 a 15-minute film about the '*History of Nayland*' was commissioned by the Society.
- In 2022/23 the Society acquired two books written by the Reverend William Jones, Nayland minister in the 18th century who was a musician and theologian of national importance, one by auction and the other was donated by a member. A display case was specially made for the books to be displayed in St James's Church.



TEST PITS

Another interesting archaeology project took place in 2012. The Society's Secretary, Andora Carver, arranged for Nayland to be one of 6 locations in the area chosen for research by Cambridge University in collaboration with the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project and the Society. One metre square pits were dug in 33 gardens and open spaces all over Nayland by local volunteers and all finds processed by the University. It was a very enjoyable and successful community event which was followed by a second in 2014 when 16 more pits were dug. There were many interesting finds, which revealed evidence of Neolithic, bronze age, Roman and late Anglo Saxon settlements. More than a

It can be seen that in the first 50 years of its existence the Society has been very active and can be proud that it has achieved all its aims for Nayland and Wiston which it set out in 1974. From small beginnings it has gone from strength to strength and hopefully will continue to do so, keeping a watchful eye on Nayland and Wiston's welfare and ensuring that they both retain their unique character.

The Society's first Chairman and Life President, Blair Lees, sadly died in 1989 and did not live to celebrate the Society's 21st anniversary but he would undoubtedly be very proud of what the Society has achieved and that it has become such an established part of the community.



NAYLAND MEADOW

Perhaps the biggest project undertaken in the Society's history was the purchase in 2005 of the seventeen acre field beside the River Stour after a very well supported fundraising campaign. Over 90 villagers and friends raised the purchase price of £65,000 in a little over 4 months. The Nayland with Wissington Land Company Ltd, a registered charity, was formed to own and manage the land for the parish in perpetuity. It was decided that the land should revert to grassland under the DEFRA Suffolk River Valley ESA scheme. This involved seeding with a meadow mixture and an annual regime of hay cutting following by sheep grazing. A mixture of flowers and grasses was sown on the margin between the fence and the river bank.

In 2012 a further area of land adjacent to the meadow was acquired with funding supplied by many residents of the village.

