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A description of Fleet in Lincolnshire

This work is dedicated to the memories of Alf Halgarth and his sister Joan Evans RIP.



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Fleet is at first glance a typical East Midlands fenland village in south Lincolnshire stretching from the salt marshes of the Wash deep into the Anglian fens. Norfolk and Cambridgeshire are closer than Lincoln some 60 miles distant. The Meridian passes through Fleet Fen, marked by a stone on Langarygate; a bench memorialises a young girl with a terminal condition who found solace at this spot before she died tragically in October 2009. Nearly 12 miles long but only 2 miles at its widest, the Fleet settlement filtered land was reclaimed from former tidal inlet. The some six miles a top priority and South Holland is virtually nil thanks phrase, the price of maintenance.



northward as from this sea is now distant. Management of water levels is continues today in the capable hands of Internal Drainage Board and flood risk to their sterling efforts. To coin a freedom (from flooding) is eternal



The chief industry is farming of brassicas and potatoes for super-flowers are also grown, especially of some 1800 most are ancient coastal route known as the Fleet Hargate. An old rhyme



arable crops like grain, markets; quantities of daffodils. Of the population concentrated around the *Hergate*, giving its name to records a hazardous past:



***Be you going, be you coming, (rhymes with woman)
Be you man, be you woman,
Be you early, be you late,
Be aware of Flete Hergate.***

Described as “*unprepossessing*” by Pevsner in 1964, the main street (*Old Main Road*) has been much improved by the planting of Rowan trees and general repairs of high standard to properties in the Conservation Area starting at the *Bull*. In the 1970s the new A17 by-passed the village leaving it a quiet backwater within convenient distance of Spalding, King’s Lynn, Boston, Wisbech and Peterborough. Fleet Hargate enjoys half-hourly bus services and is popular with retirees as well as young families. Boasting clean air, low crime and easy walking, Fleet offers many advantages to the discerning parent or grandparent: a delightful village school with 135 children, a Grade I Listed church and adjoining Conservation Area, Seth’s Mobility, adult-only caravan park, plant nurseries and livery stables. Barely a mile northeast is Fleet Hargate with a second Conservation Area and 2 traditional pubs, Baptist Chapel, Post Office, plantsmen, hairdressers, restaurant, adult-only caravan park, nursing homes, playing field, A17 Farm Cafe opposite the Anglia Motel with garden centre and restaurant seating 500.



Electorally Fleet consists of Fleet Hargate and Fleet Fen wards represented on the Parish Council which meets six times a year at Hargate Close Community Centre. Fleet is in

South Holland District, formerly East Spalding. In Parliament Fleet is Member for South Holland and The St Mary Magdalene has Sunday services at 9.15; Baptist Chapel Sundays at 9.30 and Holy Trinity Catholic Church on other times. *Fleet Baptist Choir* sings at Mothers and Toddlers Group meet at Stables Hall; *Fleet Welcome Group* once a month at Hargate Close Community Centre on Wednesday evenings. *Fleet Preservation Society* holds fund-raising events for the benefit of church, school and community. *Fenland Flywheelers* enjoy winter lectures and summer rallies for tractor fans. The *Fleet Dole* is distributed twice a year to pensioners; the *Fairfax Educational Foundation* offers help to students every autumn; The *Fleet Parish Charity* makes occasional grants. The Anglia Motel has many fundraising events for *Royal British Legion* and Veterans as well as RAF Cadets and other local charities. Every year a service of Remembrance is held at the War Memorial opposite the Bull.



Elloe, administered from Deepings. The Parish Church of Fleet Street Sundays 9.30 and hospitals and nursing homes. Thursday mornings at the Chapel



year to Deacon & Foundation students Fleet Parish



Walks are many and varied but always on the level. *Millennium Trails* and other footpaths are much favoured by ramblers and amblers. A designated cycle route is enjoyed by many. Horse-riding is also popular. Wild flowers like red campion, borage, yellow flag and poppies adorn the dykes and summer verges. Birds in the area include skylarks, green

woodpeckers, red kites, kingfishers, waterfowl and many others too numerous to mention. This is famous wildfowling country familiar to Sir Peter Scott and his marsh guide, "Kenzie" Thorpe, 'Lincolnshire Poacher' and a renowned naturalist in his own right as well as a gifted painter.¹ The largest multi-stemmed Western Red Cedar recorded in England adorns and perfumes the grounds of *Hovenden House* generous gift of the *Leonard Cheshire Foundation*. Road was also once a Worth family home, now a well-regarded nursing home. Sir Arthur Longmore, maternal grandfather of the present Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire with distinction as a pilot in World War One dropping bombs by hand over the side of the aircraft.



goldfinches, to mention. This is the largest multi-



of the Worth family to the *Field House* on Old Main

More History

According to an eminent American scholar, "England possesses the most remarkable set of records...in the world".² Fleet in Lincolnshire can claim to be one of the most remarkably recorded English "vills". Records pertaining to Fleet exist from the 11th century through almost every century to the present day. The Black Death inevitably left gaps, decimating populations and leaving church towers incomplete as at nearby Gedney where a grand octagonal base was duncely capped. Enterprising fenmen called Gadd and Garn survived,

Fleet was Anglo-Saxon for “*place to which the tide flows*”.⁴ The sea once flowed inland as far as the church to mingle with untidy watercourses.⁵ It is said underground freshwater still streams beneath the Hargate.⁶ A great source of wealth was salt from the swift tidal ingress.⁷ *Fleet River* is marked on old maps of the fen and ancient lock gates were found beneath Hallgate not far from Pinstock Lane (penstock=lock-gates).⁸ Air photos indicate a possible prehistoric salt industry in Fleet Fen.⁹ Early Iron Age pottery was found on the site of a tumulus near the church along with medieval shards.¹⁰ Complete pots of sophisticated



Romano-British design were excavated in the Fen and are in *Spalding Gentlemen’s Society Museum*. If Roman slaves cleared woods and embanked fens¹¹ this would account for the long arrow-straight roads in Fleet Fen. A map names the Ravens Bank as “*Roman road*”. Could *Raven* be a corruption of *Roman* as suggested by an early historian? Roman coins and boat timber were found near Ravens Clough on what is now *Little South Holland Drain*. “*A curious Roman pitcher*” was found beneath a cross near a chantry site¹² at Holbeach Hurn in 1828 and

sent to Boston for safekeeping. Could the chantry have replaced a Roman shrine? Holy places were often respected and replaced by a symbol of the new religion by incomers.

It’s Grim up North following the Romans with fellow Norsemen who called roads “gates” (= gait). A depiction of a Viking warship in Stow Minster reminds us that the Lincoln diocese extended from the Humber to Dorchester near Winchcombe¹³ when water was the quickest way to travel. A family named Jekyl settled in the fen and gave their name to several roads.¹⁴ *Bran’s Lands*, like *Ketel Abbey at Sutton*, exist on an old map; *Bran* or *Brand* and *Ketel* are Scandinavian. *Grymslond* (Grimsland) still occurs in a 14th century manuscript about Fleet. Fleet was part of *Elloe Wapentake* marked by the unique heart-shaped Elloe Stone at Moulton. *Wapentake* was a Norse assembly, *weapon-touch*, friendly contact.



1066 and all flat Norman Conquest brought new drainage skills and feudal discipline. *Domesday Book* recorded Earl Ælfgar/Algar having lands at Fleet. Algar gave his name to Algarkirk and was Earl of Mercia, an area identical to the old Lincoln diocese before 1072. His father was Leofric, husband of the famous Lady Godiva. Fleet recorded 1 fishery and 2 salt-pans along with 500 acres of meadow compared with only 30 at Gedney, 80 at Holbeach; by 1316 there were over 70 saltpans and Fleet was the centre of the local industry.¹⁵ Voracious demands for fuel to evaporate salt stripped the land for miles around and caused many disputes over turf rights.¹⁶

Ancient anathema Richard of Fleet was lord of the manor, owing fealty ultimately to the Warennes in Norfolk.¹⁷ Possibly crippled by the expense of pilgrimage to the Holy Land required of every knight¹⁸, Richard’s father Josce (or Joscelyn) had tried but failed to claim back Fleet church with its sizable income, given by Josce’s father Fulk to Castle Acre priory¹⁹ about the time of the first Crusade in 1098. In 1189 Richard and several local lords invaded Crowland Abbey lands with 3000 men and began cutting down trees and digging turves.²⁰ It took Richard several years to pay heavily for the release of his daughter from a

dubious “*espousal*”, suggesting a shortage of ready cash. Nonetheless Richard’s wife, Juliana, successfully pleaded with him for widows to be released from a tax on the death of their husbands.²¹ Richard’s charter guaranteeing this exemption is described as “**a fascinating charter**” as it contains an almost extinct curse: “**any infringers of this concession shall suffer perpetual anathema, and with Judas the traitor and the devil and his ministers shall be condemned to the**”²² Richard Acre.²³



Historians have speculated on the earthworks shown in in a field between system is clearly visible reference to “*Castelcroff Holbeche*” appears in a founded a hospital with a *Wynstowe*” stood near the the Templars in 1309 all Hospitallers.²⁷ *Wynstowe* gave its name to *Winslowgate*. The remains of the chapel are under the A17, *Washway* formerly known as *Saltenevgate* (Salt island road)²⁸ leading from the Whaplode saltmarshes at Saracen’s Head, no doubt named for a grizzly souvenir from a crusade displayed at a safe distance downwind of habitation. *The Star* and *Lamb & Flag* at Whaplode are crusader relics.

that Richard’s “*castle*” may have existed airphotos of the tumulus once standing Torrington Lane and Bensgate. A field near the suggested “*motte & bailey*”. A relating to “*Dominus Laurencius de Fleet* land register of 1316.²⁴ Richard chapel at Fleet.²⁵ The “*chapel of marketplace*.”²⁶ After the suppression of these possessions went to the Skirbeck

Templars Richard’s daughter Sara married Thomas de Moulton who became a great landowner, royal justice and drainage enthusiast before his death in 1240.²⁹ Sheep replaced salt as a major source of income.³⁰ In 1205 Thomas was granted a market at Fleet by King John who made a similar grant to Gedney’s lord for the same day; Thomas successfully challenged this royal ‘mistake’ and won the day for Fleet.³¹ In 1273 a later Thomas (of Gillesland, Lord of Holbeach) claimed ‘*wrecks of the sea from the said port of Flet*’.³² To many “*the desolate demon-haunted fens*”³³ were places to avoid. The watery quagmire of winter tide and turf became welcome summer meadow where a yearly Templars’ Fair was recorded in 1185, the only one in Elloe.³⁴ Leland recorded Fleet’s fair “*on St Magdalen’s Day*”,³⁵ this would have been 22nd July when large areas of marsh had dried out sufficiently to support large numbers of people and horses (and carts). Castle Acre monks listed an interesting charter by Thomas son of Lambert of Moulton, Sara and Thomas of Moulton’s grandson. Could the barn have been built on the site of the present Bull? ***Grant by Thomas son of Lambert of Moulton to Castle Acre, for salvation of his soul and those of his successors, of six acres of land in his marsh at Fleet, on which to build a barn in which their tithe of sheaves from Fleet may be stored, with right of free entry and exit for their carts and ploughs, and without there being any common right of pasture there.*** An annual fair would have needed dry storage space for all the goods to be sealed and sold, especially salt. It would also have been handy for the regular market.

It is likely that both Richard and Thomas were Knights Templar. The Templars were free of taxes and had many other privileges.³⁶ This elite band answered directly to the Pope and controlled most of the region with great Every year at an assembly the lord of the sealed the measures of salt³⁸ and other bubble of wax known as a “*bull*” giving the place.³⁹ When Latin was finally with other Papish customs the original lost. A possible Templars’ garden edged River along Maisdyke (*Templegate* in



efficiency.³⁷ manor goods with a its name to discarded meaning was the Fleet 1316)⁴⁰ later

called *The Roundabouts*. Richard's donation of 50 acres to the Templars was the largest acreage recorded as a single gift in the region.⁴¹ Elloe vills grew very rich and Fleet was bigger than Spalding by 1260.⁴²

A battle between the *Fletes* and *Litelburies*⁴³ may have given its name to Battle Bridge and Battleford Hall (the old Rectory). Holbeach church contains the tomb of a medieval Littlebury whose name survives at the Medical Centre in Fishpond Lane, Holbeach.

Worth their Salt A land register of Fleet called a *Terrier* was made in the reign of King Edward II in 1316 and transcribed for publication in 1920 by an American scholar, Nellie Neilson, of Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts. Having studied at Oxford and Cambridge Universities Professor Neilson became the first female president of the American Historical Association, highly regarded for her work on medieval economics.⁴⁴ The *Terrier*, written in medieval Latin, lists names and rentals at Fleet including salt pans and 'place' holders in apparently equal number. Did each salt pan support a market booth?

Market goods were many and varied: corn, malt, horses, mares, oxen, cows, skins, fresh, salted or tanned, fresh or salted meats, hogs, piglets, fresh or salted salmon, sheep, goats, pigs, fleeces, pelts, goats, deer, lamp skins, kids, hares, rabbits, foxes, cats, squirrels, bales of cloth, whole cloths, flax webs, canvas, worsted, Irish cloths, silk cloth, 'chief' of cendal afforced, casks of wine, casks of ashes, casks and loads of honey, sacks of wool, trusses and loads of cloth, hay, lead, tar, tallow and grease, wood, alum, both coperous and 'vertegrece', herrings, sand-eels, sea-fish, boards, millstones, turves, salt, steel cheese, butter, nails, iron for shoeing horses, and for clouting carts, tin, brass, copper, lime, flax, hemp and oil.⁴⁵ Carting such goods was an industry in itself.

Familiar names like *Josie Neel*, *Robert Cott*, *William Brown* spring from the page as if nothing has changed in seven hundred years; less familiar are *Margareta Puddyng*, *Eudo Trol* and *Thomas Hodidodi* although there is a reference to land known as *Huddy Duddies* in an auction notice of 1803. Perhaps there is an ancient connection with *Oddo and Doddo*, made Dukes of Mercia by the king according to Leland.⁴⁶ The Neals are still on Nealsgate; Mrs Neal gave lace-making demonstrations in Fleet church in recent years.

There is an intriguing reference to a "*milkhous*" and a *Robertus Braunche*,⁴⁷ probably connected to Branches Lane and a 1376 Purbeck marble monument to Robert Branche at Lynn.⁴⁸ *Fleet Motstowe* seemed to be the centre of the salt industry (*Mot* = meet, *stowe* = storage place) with jurisdiction over Holbeach and Gedney.⁴⁹ The market was close to the Hargate where there was also a toll (*toloneum*).⁵⁰ This no doubt paid for the upkeep of the wide causeway raised above the marsh and turnpiked four centuries later.⁵¹ The sixteenth century *John Leland* refers to Fleet market as existing in the recent past "*in memoriam hominum*" and a fair on *St Magdalen's Day*.⁵²

All Washed Up

vulnerable to heavy Unwary travellers feckless King John treasure here, for safer crossings. rickety crossings to thieves and a reliable causeway saved a long trek back via Westgate,



Bridges were tides and storms. apart from the could have lost creating urgent need Uncertain tides and afforded rich pickings scavengers. Building against such hazards down Eastgate and now defunct. For

many years a small circular building known as *Fleet Jail* stood opposite the Bull; it was brick-built and windowless. Possibly it may also have served as the toll booth. The foundations of a new-build now occupy the site. Nearby was a pit handy for road repairs; it is now under the War Memorial. In the fen 240 acres of woodland were recorded: *Dominus ccxl acras in Fletewode*.⁵³ There was also a *Litelwode* of six acres.⁵⁴ In 2009 there is no wood.

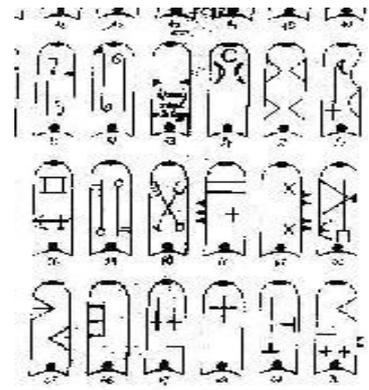
What's in a Name? Professor Neilson probably never visited Fleet or perhaps she would not have confused gates and gotes;⁵⁵ *gate* means *way* whereas a *gote* is a *gowt* or *flood-gate* (AS *geotan*).⁵⁶ A possible misinterpretation of "*infra villam bulliatorum*"⁵⁷ deserves further discussion. Long hours in the British Museum Reading Room would not be everyone's idea of a holiday but it was the Neilson vacation of choice - even in wartime - for this highly regarded American academic who did not marry. For light relief she enjoyed skating, skiing and mountain-climbing when not poring over musty documents poorly written in medieval pidgin-Latin.

Fuzziness about medieval names is easily understood when English was not yet fully-fledged but a fascinating, if infuriating, hybrid medley. Clerks with dodgy scribal skills often mis-heard French or Latin names. A local accent could transform a "k" into a "g", as in *Picot/Pigott*, *Jekyl/Jiggle*, *Hackbeach/Hagbeach*. Some letters were interchangeable such as *h*, *i*, *j*, and *w* or *v*. A Viking lord called *Sweyn* became *Swain* before degenerating into *Swine*, possibly the revenge of the vanquished. An inky smudge could transmute an "o" into "a": William the Conqueror's trusted ally *Croun*, *Craon*, (and even *Credun*), could become *Crone* or *Crane*. The 1316 land held by *Laurence de Brexis*⁵⁸ transmuted into *Breeches* in 1731, *Beausolace* (possibly a distortion of Beaujolais) became *Belsores*, *Belsshare*, then *Belchers*.⁵⁹ An intriguing "*Manor of Beausolace*" in Lincolnshire was gifted by "*Thomas de Multone the Elder*" to his future daughter in law, Edmunda.⁶⁰

Other names invite speculation: *Whittedike* or *Wythydyke* in 1316 becomes *Wheedyke* in 1731 and *Weydike* now. Could this have originated as *Withy-dyke*, *withies* being *willows*? *Withies* were essential for many everyday objects from baskets to fences. Almost a continuation, *Hurdletree Bank* traverses Holbeach and Whaplode to Moulton. Both words "*withy*" and "*hurdle*" are Old English relating to willow and its uses.

Chantries occur in several places hard to identify. They were built to commemorate loved ones and the bereaved paid to have prayers chanted for their souls by special priests. Payments in 1316 were made in several ways apart from salt with goods such as pepper, cumin or hens, or services as described by Neilson.⁶¹

Due to lack of male heirs Fleet had divided into three manors: Dominorum, FitzWalter and Harrington, each with their own hall. Salterns were still valuable. A “*hill and yard*” (*hoga et area* in 1316 Latin)⁶² supplied income and insurance against eternal damnation with regular supplies to various religious houses.⁶³ A saltern called “*Devil’s Hill*” gave its name to a drain still in existence in 2009. Wildfowl and fish provided a good living for the independent “*fen slodger*” who used stilts to get about. These “*Fen Tigers*” were even suspected of having webbed feet! At a time when swans were considered a right royal feast many rich people were granted the privilege of marking swans for their own use.⁶⁴ Religious houses and clerics including Skirbeck Hospitallers and Fleet parsons enjoyed such perks.



The 16th century John Leland’s survey for Henry VIII refers to Sir Thomas Moulton’s castle in the fen as a ruin. The Moulton family had found rich pickings in many places through various advantageous marriages. By a series of deft moves the first Thomas gained an empire of property and estates after taking wardship of two daughters of the Royal Justiciar Richard de Lucy, arranging their marriages to his sons before himself wedding their widowed mother on the death of his first wife, Sara. One of his descendants, also Thomas de Moulton, married into the wealthy and widespread *de Vaux* family⁶⁵ who probably gave their name to Foxes Low(e) Road in Holbeach as well as Vauxhall in London and elsewhere.

In 1563 a survey of Fleet bridges and drains for the Commissioners of Sewers was carried out.⁶⁶ No longer Latin, but quaint Elizabethan English was written as it was spoken: “*A verdyth off the sewers off the dygraves inqueste wythe in the weapontade off Ellowe...*” (A verdict of the sewers of the dykereeves’ inquest within the wapentake of Elloe). This is relatively easy reading and the real puzzle is the exact location of the various bridges and dykes. Boundaries remained largely unchanged for centuries. “*ther ys within the towne of Flette viij brygkes*” (there is within the town of Fleet 8 bridges). Reference is made to “*the three lordes of Flette*” (not to mention *Olbyche*). The survey is critical of standards of maintenance, finding many drains “*deffecketyffe*” and was probably needed after the dissolution of the monasteries led to the disappearance of many traditional institutions formerly taking care of land and people.

Vermuyden and his seventeenth century Dutch drainage engineers corrected much of the damage and almost completed the work of the Romans, Danes and Normans. New dykes created new lands rich in essential minerals for arable crops. Investment in newly reclaimed land was becoming fashionable among the well-to-do. Absentee landlords became common. Fleet land with its high returns was popular with the aristocracy and landed gentry.

An Elizabethan complaint about Fleet Haven receiving coal intended for Boston indicates the continuing existence of “*said creake called fflate haven*”.⁶⁷ Bricks would have been a useful cargo to replace the coal used to bake them. Early recycling destroyed “*beacon hills*” atop the Roman bank to reclaim their bricks⁶⁸ indicating a shortage at some point.

The Age of Enlightenment - for some, while others existed like troglodyte cave-dwellers in the gloom resulting from the embrickment of windows under a punitive Window Tax (1696-1851). Such homes were heavily dependent upon candles, also taxed.⁶⁹ A new *Terrier of Fleet* appeared in 1731,⁷⁰ coincidentally the same year a New Receiver General of

the Window Tax was appointed at a grand salary of £400 a year⁷¹ and stagecoaches began linking places as never before, enabling the nationwide distribution of a new journal called *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The Bull was said to be such a link and tales abound of Dick Turpin stabling his horse there and hiding in the chimney. If only the 17th century staircase could speak!

This *Terrier* reads like a local “celeb” list of various lords and ladies and famous names like Joseph Banks (probably uncle of the great botanist born 1744); Maurice Johnson, founder of *The Spalding Gentlemen's Society*, second oldest learned society in England, co-founder with William Stukeley (also listed) of *The Royal Society of Antiquaries*; Samuel Frothingham, eminent Quaker mathematician and inventor of a unique clock. Eminent for less worthy reasons the Hervey/Harvey family including the Earl of Bristol owned land at Fleet. This notorious branch of the family was described later as having “300 years of ‘opulence, intrigue and scandal’”.⁷² Drugs were part of the family's downfall and it is possible opium was shipped through the Hervey's port of Bristol to Spalding, once described as “the opium capital of the fens”.⁷³ The opium derivative, laudanum, was much used in quelling dissent among the peasantry and also as a sedative called “Mr Godfrey's Cordial” for squalling babies left in the care of village crones while mothers toiled in the fields.⁷⁴ Curiously, opium was less expensive than imported rhubarb!⁷⁵



Mary Hervey/Harvey married Thomas Deacon of Peterborough who founded a school there. His name, (with Thomas Fairfax), is remembered in a Fleet educational trust and an impressive memorial in Peterborough cathedral. His widow Mary, referred to as “Widow Lady of the *Dominorum Mannour*” in the *Terrier*, left money for a school at Fleet with alms for the poor of the village. Her will is a telling description of eighteenth century furniture and fashions.⁷⁶ Another land holder was Abraham Deboo of Thorney who left £2 to “the french poor of

Thorney”⁷⁷ where memorials to French and Flemish drainage workers abound.

The renowned antiquary Revd William Stukeley described his childhood visits to the woods at Fleet from his home in Holbeach nearby.⁷⁸ Could these woods have been the remnants of the former 240 acres of woodland in 1316? The 1731 *Terrier* refers to 25 acres called *Oakwood* in that area held by Joseph Banks who had another 4 acres called *Oakes* near *The Wood House*. Another 15 or so acres of *Woodground* occur near Branches Lane. In 1803 an auction notice refers to two acres of woodland “with growing trees”. According to 20th century sources a 10 acre wood was cut down by a woman for her pigs on Hazelwood Lane at the turn of that century.

Cottages were owned by rich gentlemen such as William Embling/Emblem (whose name lives on coaches) and the eccentric Beaupre Bell who shared his Norfolk mansion with horses and other animals.⁷⁹

In 1731 there was a *hill containing one rood* near the *Angel Inn*; a marginal note has *Saltern?* It was held by Thomas Essington, the inn by *John Green Esqr*, the shortened term for *Esquire*. This was virtually an official term for a man who had enough money to warrant it and indicated the head of a household with social responsibilities. Nowadays it is used by American lawyers, male or female, to indicate their professional status. Another reference to a former saltern is near the church: *Hill Pasture*. Amidst *Woodground* is *Devil's*

Hill, apparently in 1731 just a name rather than a working saltern; used as a southern location it has an intriguing opposite boundary point northward called *Lumbard's Cross*. There is a reference to *Lombard's Cross* in 1803. *Jekyl* becomes *Jeggell* in 1731 whereas *Parson's Bottom* and *Doll's Pingle* are names to conjure with!

As was the custom a barber-surgeon lived at the *Bull*; named Michael Johnson his headstone is in Fleet church. Perhaps there was a heightened demand for local surgery when Fleet Hargate was 'very dangerous for passengers' before being turnpiked in 1764.⁸⁰

Victorian Steam and Team A poster advertising an auction at the *Bull* in December 1803 includes the *Rose & Crown* and a brick yard on Lowgate as well as several "new inclosures suitable for building". New cottages



included *Jasmine Cottage* on the Hargate in 1819, now Grade II listed. A new rectory was built to the design of Benjamin Ferrey in 1854 described by Pevsner as "forbidding"; it replaced an old "parsonage". Horse farms and blacksmiths were still commonplace. With few opportunities for work away



from the village most people became farm labourers or domestic servants. Many people employed servants. With 24 rooms and 4 acres of gardens Fleet Rectory gave bed and board to a large was uncertain. maps prepared His 20 year old leaving a baby that on his churchyard was "brick by brick" Hargate in The handsome *House* was home to the new schoolmaster. The school is in the Conservation Area and was popular as "the Reading Room" for whist drives until sold in the early 1990s by the Church to a private buyer. A new school was built at Wood Lane in 1878 and another in Fleet Fen the same year.⁸¹



team but security in old age In 1838 Reverend Dods had for his purchase of Fleet lands. wife, Mary, had died in 1812 daughter. Local tradition has it instructions the school in the moved to the 1842. *Ivy*



Reverend Jerram, rewarded the loyalty of two servants with the generous gift of a cottage: after three decades of faithful service at the Rectory. Mr and Mrs Jackson were able to open a coffee shop at their new home, *Carfax*, on the corner of Lowgate and Hargate.⁸² A drinking trough outside *Carfax* and the village hall near the church were also believed to have been gifted to the village by Mary who died in 1854 within a



year of her father. Living accommodation for two single people existed within the hall on either side. The hall with its “cottages” was sold in the early 1990s and converted into a house; monies from the sale went to the *Fleet Parish Charity*. Three other houses were built within the curtilage.

The impressive Holbeach Union Work House, *Fleet Hospital*, on Fleet Road described by Pevsner as “*latish classical*” opened in 1835; Grade 2 Listed, it is in a suspended state of conversion to apartments. Other successful



conversions include a barn now called *Leadenham House* and a chapel on Mill Bank featured in a property programme on Channel 5. *Leadenham House* is opposite *Fleet House*, formerly *Beechurst*, home of Miss Tinsley. Nearby is the General Baptist Chapel founded in 1681 and rebuilt in 1876.



The railway came to Fleet and opened up a world of possibilities with jobs away from the farm and days out. Produce could arrive in the capital fresh from field and fen. ‘*Wild Goose Man*’ Kenzie may have shot a few hundred brace of assorted game but Fleet Coy and Walton’s goose farm accounted for thousands of London dinners. A light

railway was built to carry goods from Worth farms to the Great Northern and Midlands Railway station on Eastgate/Hallgate. Goods included milk from cows no longer seen at Fleet. A public house at the station was *The New Inn*. After closure it was *The Old New Inn*. A seventeenth century building, it was replaced with a fine new house in 2009. The station house became a private dwelling and the station yard a lorry park.



War and Peace A dairy operated from Winslowgate. Could this have occupied the same site mentioned in 1316? East Elloe Rural District Council Isolation Hospital was built in 1910 for 10 patients for £900 off the Washway/A17;⁸³ it is now a private house. Over the old Bull pit were a hairdresser and cobbler. Across the road on the corner stood the War



Memorial recording Fleet men who fell in the First and Second World War. The first to go to war from Fleet in 1939 was late Alf Halgarth who served on the Parish, District and County Councils. “*the last Ran Tan in Lincolnshire*” at House on the Hargate occupied in his lifetime by two elderly



served and Wars. The was the to serve on He told of Linden

spinsters, “the Misses Hilton”. Previous occupants had offended villagers who responded by banging pots and pans and shouting at them. Formerly a pair of cottages *Linden House* stands next to the site of the old jail. Alf’s mother and her brother and sister each lived over a hundred years. “Uncle Les” was a large character known for his mordant humour, telling visitors: *My first wife died but the second wouldn’t*. Well into his nineties he amazed everyone by cycling many miles daily to visit a lady friend.

Alf’s mother, Ethel, nee Freeman, remembered starting school at a brand new building in Holbeach (c1896) and the overpowering smell of fresh-cut timber. Despite her great age Mrs Halgarth recalled with passionate resentment as the youngest child “*cutting chaff in the barn*” when her father, a farmer, died, her exclusion from the family’s last Goodbye still raw. She also spoke about *Royal Oak Day* on her birthday in May (29th) when schoolchildren wore oak leaves to commemorate the restoration of King Charles II. Children without oak leaves were stung with nettles by the others. The Halgarths were Chapel people but Alf was buried in the parish churchyard unlike his mother and sister. His stone bears the sisterly comment: *There was only one Alf*. A true Christian, Joan Halgarth married a Baptist



minister and is commemorated in a window at the chapel as well as among the graves. Nonconformists were regarded with suspicion by the Establishment and often suffered discrimination in jobs and housing.⁸⁴ Baptists tended to be overlooked in favour of Anglicans although well-served by a strong Chapel culture. The foundation stone of the present building on Old Main Road was laid in 1876.



At the Gedney end of the old Hargate is the occupied by the local “bobby” who patrolled bicycle. Opposite is the spacious five acre bought by Fleet Parish Council for the



former Police house the village with his parish field, allotments village in 1976.

The 1960s saw the closure of the railways and HGVs taking their place for haulage. Reflecting the old carting industry most of the nation’s fresh produce is carried on Lincolnshire highways. Mayfair Close and Penricsway on Old Main Road were previously lorry yards, the latter a horse farm with smithy before that. Near the church is a former blacksmith’s shop, a small brick building next to the former inn, *The Crooket Billet*; a billet was a beam. *Seth’s Mobility* provides wheelchairs in place of a steam threshing machine that once made tea for village festivities. The nearby Village Hall was the venue for social events often ending with a procession along footpaths to the *Seven Acre* field by the church. Wartime saw the field reclaimed for food production before tulips became a main crop to be replaced by daffodils. A new rectory was built in the



Seventies and London family Battleford Hall contributed greatly missed called *The Ravensdyke*



a bought as a holiday home. The Lathams much to the history of Fleet and were when they left. Along Bengate was a pub *Steam Whistle* now a green barn. Facing Bridge also known as *Saturdaybridge*,

travellers received respite at *The Ravensclough* inn, now a private house; *clough* meant sluice. Further south was *The Golden Ball* inn now considered to belong to Holbeach St Johns.

On the Hargate opposite the Chapel was the *Angel Inn* before it became a grocer's shop known as Crosby's with a *Restaurant*. *The Bowling* Mayfair Close. *The Rose* crown were official stamps twice survived plans to brick built barn. On the *Bells* on Roman Bank



post office, now *The Willows Green* inn no longer exists near *and Crown* still thrives; the rose and indicating duty paid. The *Bull* has change it. *Old Barn Court* replaced a marsh north of the A17 *The Five* remains only as a house name.

Pacific Fleet Peacetime has seen many changes. At the junction with Hocklesgate is the former bakery; further along Old Main Road is a former butcher's shop both victims of modern marketing economics. Smart new developments replace old orchards and strawberry fields. However the shifting sands and treacherous waters that betrayed King John in 1216 can still prove costly to hapless venturers eight centuries later. Without local knowledge and adequate support the most confident entrepreneur can sink his profits along with his new-build foundations. A West Country developer notoriously lost money, his own and the taxpayers', by raising site levels to cope with drainage. Taking no such risks a local builder hammered three piles, one on top of the other, into the subsoil for stability at Penricsway (named for a favourite hound). Brownfield sites have stood the test of time but are inevitably scarce. Ever feisty and resolutely independent, fenlanders continue to portray in microcosm the characteristics of our island race, yet mingling with incomers as tide and spring once together lapped the reeds of Fleet Haven. Superficially similar to other fen villages amid tranquil oceans of sea-green cabbages beneath vast, ever-changing cloudscapes, Fleet is unique in history and provenance with an exclusive appeal both mysterious and enticing.



***Be you going, be you coming,
Be you man, be you woman,
Be you early, be you late,
Be aware of Flete Hergate.***



For more church history and other details including *Minutes of Fleet PC 1924-1976* see website: <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/woolyweb/jmbw/index.html>

Further related documents are available upon request.

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