

IMAGINED LAND : Report on the Tasburgh Community Historical Research

The historical research element of the project was carried out under the guidance of NAHRG, via two organizers (Tony Bradstreet and Dr John Alban) and five mentors (NAHRG members, Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell, Rod Cooke, Iona Foliard, Lyn McKinney and Adrienne Watts), working closely with nineteen volunteers from Tasburgh and split into two working groups:

- the 'People' Group, comprising twelve volunteers and led by Dr John Alban
- the 'Landscape' Group, comprising seven volunteers and led by Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell

The research undertaken by both groups was mainly carried out in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO), which is particularly rich in archival material relating to Tasburgh. The NRO was a direct partner in the project and made favourable arrangements for the volunteers to work as groups, also providing a group photography permit at a very generous rate. Thanks are due to the County Archivist, Gary Tuson, for facilitating all this and for his unfailing support of the project. One volunteer's research within the 'People' strand was carried out using sources held by the Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Millennium Library in Norwich.

After project planning meetings were held during the early months of 2017, the research began in earnest in late March, with the following programme:

28 March: initial Group Meeting at the NRO (this also included persons interested in the Burnham Norton element of the project, which is about to start)

4 & 5 May: Separate Study Days at the NRO for the 'People' and 'Landscape' strands

May/June: volunteers undertaking research in the NRO and elsewhere

17 May: Palaeography training for the 'People' strand volunteers at Tasburgh

30 May & 6 June: 'Landscape' Group meetings at Tasburgh

10 June: 'Discovery Day' at Tasburgh, at which there were presentations on the research findings

12 July: Exhibition at Tasburgh

Research Topics relating to the 'People' strand included : historical newspapers – 'Hitting the Headlines'; the life of Revd Henry Edmund Preston (1804-96), Rector of Tasburgh, 1837-96; manors in Tasburgh; nonconformity in Tasburgh; occupations of residents in nineteenth-century Tasburgh; parish chest and Poor Law Guardians: Depwade Union minute book, 7 February 1853 to 14 August 1854; probate records, pre-1858; title deeds.

Each of the topics was chosen and researched by an individual volunteer, who subsequently prepared a research report, which was monitored by Dr John Alban before being finalized. The reports were then edited by the project management to provide the basis for the texts of the panels in the exhibition. The unedited versions of the reports were posted on the Imagined Land website, as works of general reference.

Following the study day at the NRO in May, the group working on the 'Landscape' strand concentrated on the developments to settlement morphology during the first half of the nineteenth century. The main sources were Faden's map of Norfolk (1797) and a series of parish and estate maps illustrating subsequent changes that occurred within Tasburgh between 1818 and 1840. During this period most of the remaining common land was enclosed and the local pattern of routeways took on a recognisably modern form.

The group mounted a display for the exhibition held on 12 July showing how settlement in the parish had developed from Saxon times to the mid-nineteenth century. This illustrated the effects of enclosure of the commons and the nineteenth-century changes in land tenure following the decline in manorial influence. It also touched on how these developments had impacted on ordinary folk using census records and how land management changes influenced the state of cultivation in the parish.

The Tasburgh community volunteer researchers varied in their previous experience of historical research and for many this was their first real taste of such work. The results that both 'strands' produced were very impressive given the rather short timescale to which they had to work. Hopefully, the exhibition material will remain available for the use of the community in the future.

Although the exhibition was the main tangible outcome for the volunteers, some of them have been inspired to continue their researches and there is great interest in the possibility of setting up a local history group. Many of the discoveries made by the researchers have also inspired those community members who opted to undertake creative interpretations of Tasburgh's history.

John Alban & Brendan Chester-Kadwell