



NELSON'S COUNTY

PART TWO

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE TRIPPITT

In the second part of Mike Trippitt's travels to Norfolk with Campervan George we discover where Lord Nelson was born, and find the beach where the Queen's horses come to train

Our third morning in Norfolk, birthplace of England's most famous sailor, Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, dawns crisp and bright. The sun rises again into a clear azure sky. Around me campers stir, Deepdale Backpackers site slowly shows signs of life and another new day begins.

George and I leave early to continue east, but stop almost immediately at Burnham Overy Staithe, a sleepy village with an attractive quay. The village pub, 'The Hero', hints at the Nelson connection, but it is down at the waterfront where the sense of history is strongest. For it is here, among the fishermen's cottages and the muddy waters of north Norfolk, that the young Horatio Nelson learned to sail.

Nelson was born just up the road at Burnham Thorpe on 29th September 1758. His father was the village rector and Nelson himself returned to the village regularly right up to his death. There are six Burnhams in north Norfolk:

Burnham Deepdale, Burnham Market, Burnham Norton, Burnham Thorpe, Burnham Overy Town, as well as Burnham Overy Staithe. I hope to find Nelson's birthplace later on my trip, but for now I am content to watch the calm rippling waters rise with the tide, as members of the local sailing club rig their dinghies and head out for a gentle sail.

The road from Thornham onto Brancaster and Burnham Overy Staithe, through the gentle agricultural countryside of north Norfolk is a rewarding drivers' road. It is loved by cyclists because it is flat, and by campers, campervanners and motorhome owners, because it is easy to get to, easy to travel along and so easy to enjoy.

Each village has cottages and houses, shops and churches built in the traditional, local brick and flint style dating back centuries. It's replicated in modern developments, so even though Norfolk is growing, its character is not lost. It has an increasing second home population,

Campervan George

Campervan George is a 2016 VW T6 converted by Camper King and supplied by Needingworth Campers. See www.camperking.co.uk and www.needingworthcampers.com.

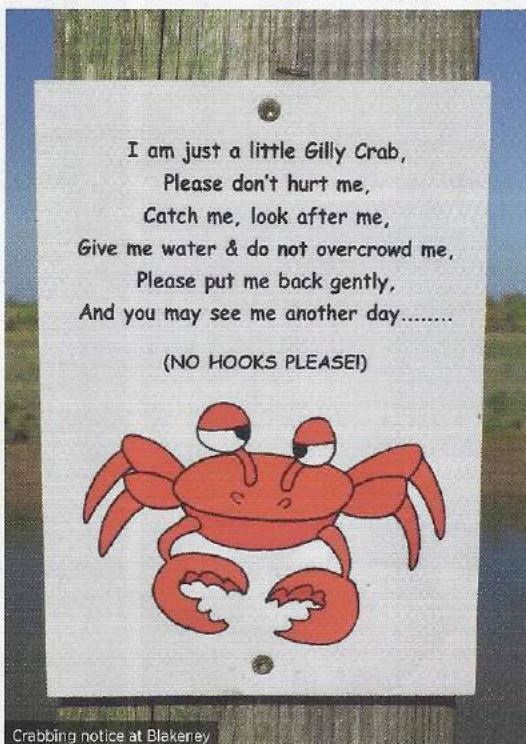
Named after 'George' in the book *Three Men In a Boat*, he has the technology of the today, but the soul of the sixties.



All Saints church in Burnham Thorpe



Nelson's birthplace complete with plaque



Crabbing notice at Blakeney



Inside the Lookout at Holkham

“AMONG THE FISHERMEN’S COTTAGES AND THE MUDDY WATERS OF NORTH NORFOLK, THE YOUNG HORATIO NELSON LEARNED TO SAIL.”

and the attractive Burnham Market with its artisans, fashionable restaurants and chic boutiques, is regarded locally as Chelsea-on-Sea.

After Burnham Overy Staithe we drive as far east as we’re going on this tour, to the delightful village of Blakeney. Once again, the harbour dominates this former port. Blakeney Point, made by shingle pushed up the coast from further south is home to England’s largest seal colony. Boat trips take tourists out from nearby Morston Quay.

Blakeney harbour is cocooned by the shingle spit and salt marshes, providing a home for an abundance of wildlife. It is the only harbour in England where there are no mooring fees. Anyone has a right to put a boat here without charge.

The village is compact and unspoiled, though it gets busy in good weather. It’s a favourite spot for youngsters to spend an hour or two crabbing. They’ve been doing it here for decades. Several shops sell those essential lines, weights, buckets and bacon. Notices at the quayside remind folk to treat crab carefully, and to put them back once the fun is over.

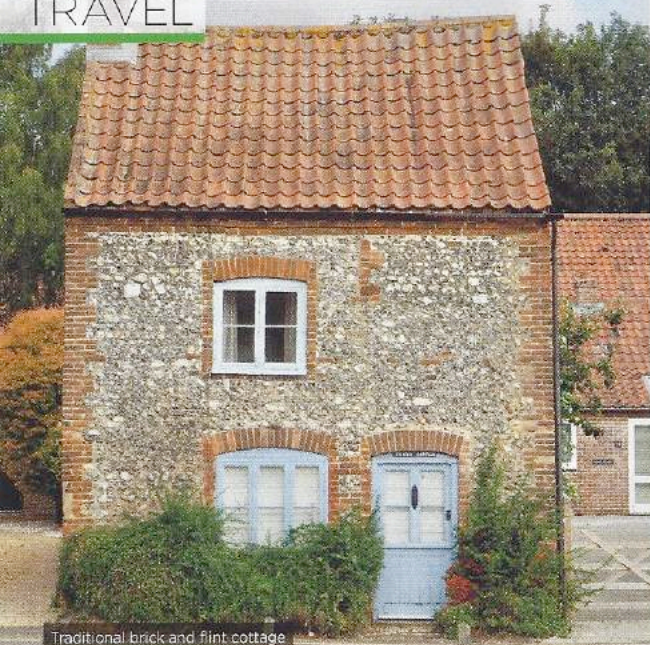
Many people come to Blakeney to walk. The Norfolk Coast Path passes through the village and marshes. By linking with Peddars Way further west at Holme-next-the-Sea and continuing on to Weybourne, it provides ninety-

two miles of trail through contrasting coastline. For the less adventurous, and for the thirsty, a short walk through the marshes to the village pub at Cley-next-the-Sea is often enough.

East Anglia is renowned for open vistas and vast sandy beaches. Arguably the pick of these is the private beach on the Holkham Estate. Though owned by The Earl of Leicester rather than the Crown it is open to the public. Its horseshoe beach transforms into a shallow lagoon when the tide is high. Gwyneth Paltrow famously walked across the sands at Holkham in the closing scenes of the film *Shakespeare In Love*.

But the actor is not the only famous visitor here. Annually, in early July the Household Cavalry leave their London Barracks for a week of exercising and training on Holkham Beach. ‘Summer Camp’ draws local folk and tourists down through the woods and dunes to get a glimpse of over 100 horses training and frolicking in the Norfolk surf.

After a walk on the beach and a brief stop at the



Traditional brick and flint cottage



Reflections at Burnham Overy Staithe



The lake on the Holkam Estate



George at Burnham Overy Staithe

visitor centre and hide, George and I go up the long parkland drive to the eighteenth-century Palladian hall. Holkam Hall is the residence of the aristocratic Coke family and at the heart of a thriving estate business. Parts of the house can be toured, but even without venturing inside Holkam is a charming place. The views across its park and lake are sublime.

By way of a contrast, we end the day at Wells-next-the-Sea. It's the largest harbour town on this stretch of coast and has miles of golden sand and adjoining woods. There's a campsite nearby and a light railway to run visitors to and from the town.

“THE ROAD FROM THORNHAM ONTO BRANCASTER AND BURNHAM OVERY STAITHE IS EASY TO GET TO, EASY TO TRAVEL ALONG AND SO EASY TO ENJOY.”

Wells Lifeboat Station stands tall and dominant at the harbour entrance. It was once said that it “shines out like a good deed in a naughty world.” At the quay a nineteenth-century sailing coaster Albatross now serves as a restaurant and bar. Just ahead a floating pontoon accommodates visiting vessels.

In truth, Wells is an uncomfortable mix of everything that is good about north Norfolk's coast: golden sands; beach huts; woodland and harbour, and everything that is not so good: amusements; souvenir shops and the pervasive smell of fish and chips. Some of it, though not all of it, will please everyone.

Before leaving Norfolk, we drive to Burnham Thorpe, just a couple of miles from our campsite. The village pub was called The Plough Inn in Nelson's time, though was re-named in his honour after his death. It is said that he shared a meal in an upstairs room before departing for Trafalgar.

A navigable tidal river ebbed and flowed here in the eighteenth century, and the names of some houses give an idea of what the village would have been like back then: School House, The



The Shooting Box, was Nelson actually born here?

“HOLKHAM IS A CHARMING PLACE. THE VIEWS ACROSS ITS PARK AND LAKE ARE SUBLIME.”

Forge, The Old Post Office, The Old Bakery. Today it is a quiet village that shuns the limelight. There's no Nelson Museum, no Nelson Gift Shop and no Lady Hamilton's Tea Room, and it is better for that. But there is a plaque in the wall where the old rectory in which Nelson was born once stood. If only I could find it. "Excuse me," I say to a lady with a cheery face who walks by, whilst I'm gazing at the village sign. "Can you tell me where the old rectory was?" Holly Smith lives in the village. Her ancestors have lived here since the seventeen-hundreds. She tells me so much about Nelson and his association with the village. I am amazed. "Are you a professional tour guide?" I ask. "No," says Holly laughing. "I've brought my children up in the village. We celebrate Trafalgar Day and have a party in the hall every year. We tell all of our children about the history, because you can't live in Burnham

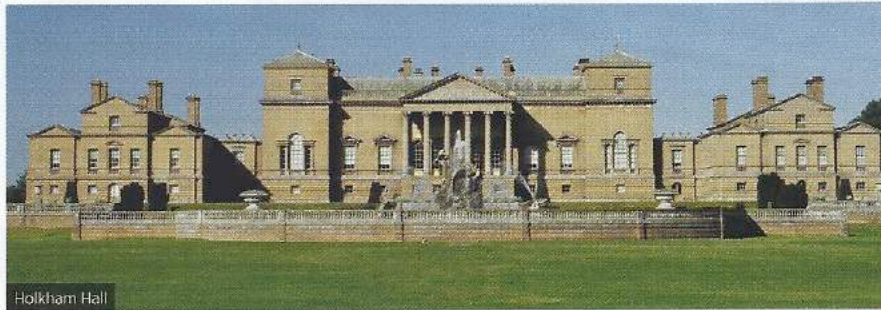




Wells-Next-The-Sea



Village sign



Holkham Hall



Wells-Next-The-Sea again

“WE TELL OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE HISTORY, BECAUSE YOU CAN’T LIVE IN BURNHAM THORPE AND NOT KNOW ALL ABOUT NELSON.”

Camping

We travelled 153 miles in North Norfolk and stayed at: **The Sandringham Estate Caravan and Motorhome Club Site** Glucksburg Woods, Sandringham, Norfolk, PE35 6EZ
Marshview Camping 72 South Beach Rd, Heacham, Hunstanton, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 7BB
Deepdale Backpackers & Camping Deepdale Farm, Burnham Deepdale, Norfolk, PE31 8DD

Thorpe and not know all about Nelson.” Holly directs me to the site of the old rectory, though tells me it was demolished when it became unfit for human habitation following Nelson’s father’s death. But she also tells me something more intriguing. “There is a rumour, believed by some local people, that at the time he was born the rectory was under redecoration. So instead of being born in the rectory he was actually born in The Shooting Box, (a substantial home) which is about a quarter [of a] mile further towards the village.” I find the plaque in the old wall. It’s a modest monument for such a figure of national importance, and whether or not it is in the right place I cannot say. But the striking contrast of his

humble beginnings with his glorious and much-lamented death adds a fascination to the story of our nation’s greatest maritime hero.

As I make my way westward toward home I reflect on my time in Norfolk. Nelson’s county has shown itself to be full of outstanding natural coastal beauty and fine heritage. The Royal Family will be back here at Christmas. So too in the future George and I, perhaps for a weekend, or just for a day on the beach. We’ll also come back to Burnham Thorpe. Was baby Horatio Nelson born in the Rectory, or, as some would have it, in a house up the road. There’s still some digging to be done and another story to uncover. ■