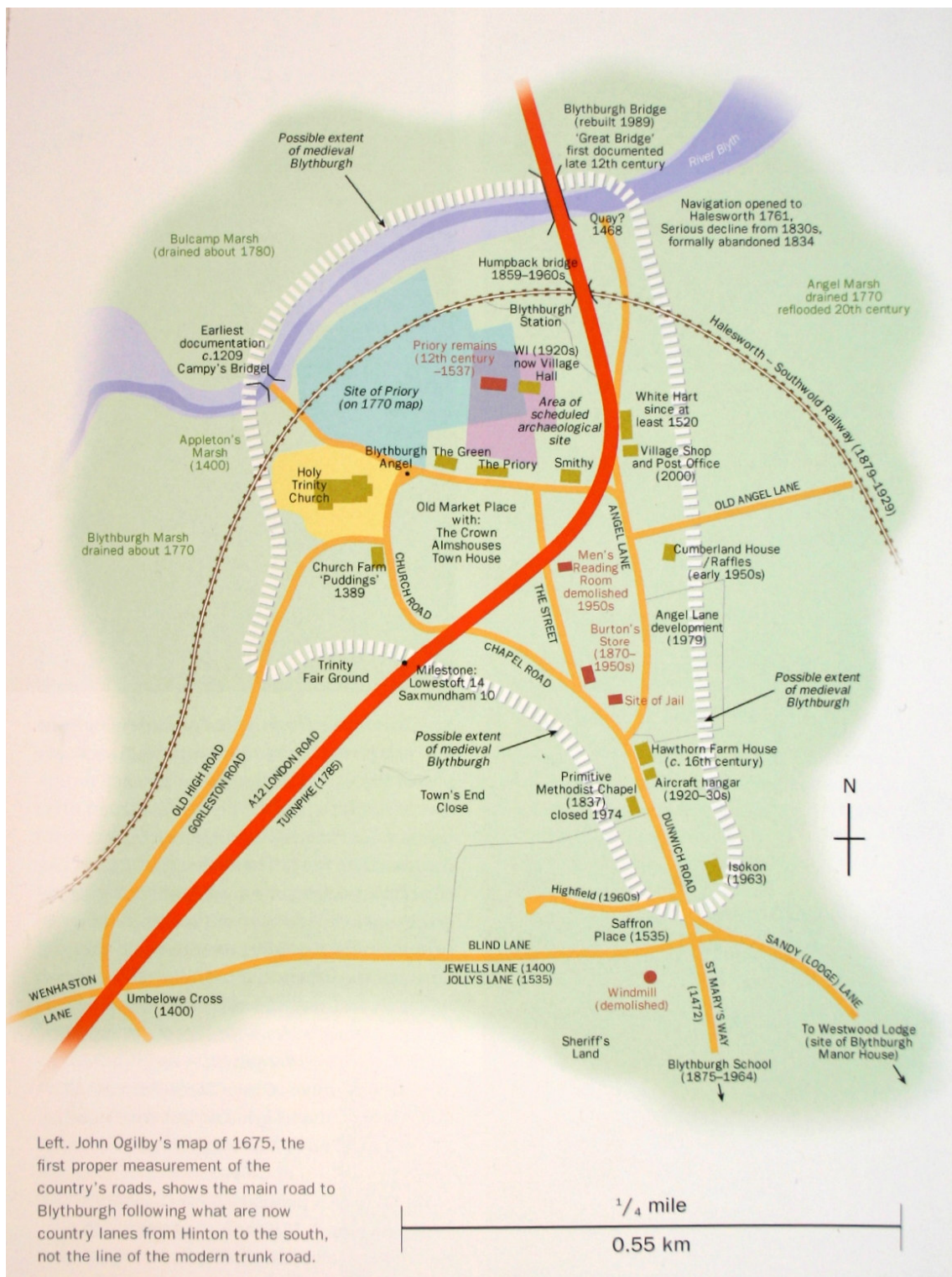
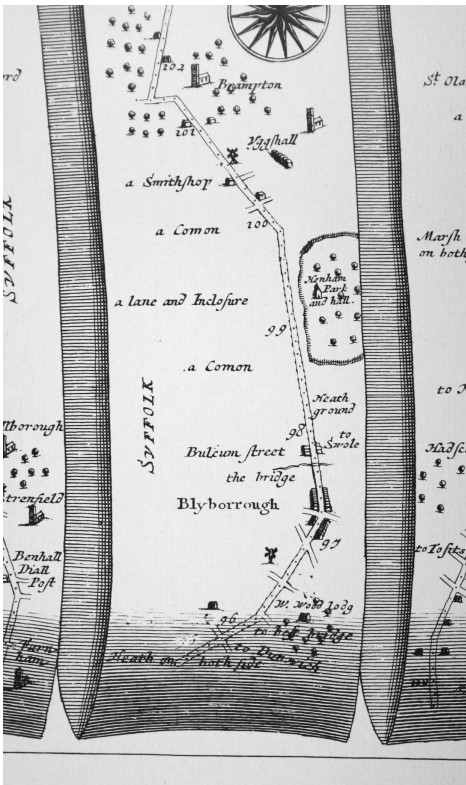


A WALK THROUGH BLYTHBURGH VILLAGE



This map is from the booklet *Blythburgh. A Suffolk Village*, on sale in the church and the village shop.



Starting a walk through Blythburgh at the water tower on DUNWICH ROAD south of the village may not seem the obvious place to begin. But it is a reminder, as the 1675 map shows, that this was once the main road to Blythburgh. Before a new turnpike cut through the village in 1785 (it is now the A12) the north-south route was more important. It ran through the Sandlings, the aptly named coastal strip of light soil. If you look eastwards from the water tower there is a fine panoramic view of the Blyth estuary. Where pigs are now raised in enclosed fields there were once extensive tracts of heather and gorse. The Toby's Walks picnic site on the A12 south of Blythburgh will give you an idea of what such a landscape looked like. You can also get an impression of the strategic location of Blythburgh, on a slight but significant promontory on a river estuary at an important crossing point. Perhaps the 'burgh' in the name indicates that the first Saxon settlement was a fortified camp where the parish church now stands.

John Ogilby's Map of 1675

Blythburgh has grown slowly since the 1950s, along the roads and lanes south of the A12. If you compare the aerial view of about 1930 with the present day you can see just how much infilling there has been. But on the church side of the A12 there has been no significant development for 100 years. There are still many gaps between the buildings. Blythburgh was no doubt once a compact crowded community but a disastrous fire of 1674 destroyed most of the centre. There are now few very old buildings in Blythburgh.

At the bottom of the picture is an ancient crossroads. BLIND LANE to the left leads to Wenhaston and LODGE/SANDY LANE to the right goes to Westwood Lodge, on the site of Blythburgh's medieval manor house. Take LODGE LANE for a 5km walk to Walberswick and Southwold, or a shorter circuit along the river bank back to the White Hart inn. Behind the group of cottages at the corner of BLIND LANE is



Blythburgh Mill, already a ruin. On the opposite corner is Mill Farm and beyond it Hawthorn Farm. Most of the farm buildings have now gone and the houses are private residences. Then DUNWICH ROAD splits, with ANGEL LANE to the right and CHAPEL ROAD to the left. THE STREET leads northwards from CHAPEL ROAD and was once continuous as far as PRIORY ROAD. Now it has to cross the A12. PRIORY ROAD running east-west in the background marks the edge of the precinct of Blythburgh Priory which occupied the space between the road and the river Blyth to the north.



Blythburgh in about 1930 looking north from Dunwich Road

One of the first buildings you come across on the right in DUNWICH ROAD is the old school, located quite a long way from the centre of the village. Closed in 1964 it is now divided into two dwellings. It opened in 1875 for 145 pupils. A second classroom was added later when the numbers of local children were swelled by those from the Union Workhouse at Bulcamp across the river in the north of the parish.

In the row of three pairs of semi-detached cottages beyond the school, the centre pair was built in 2006 on the site of a dwelling created in the 1920s from an old Great Eastern Railway passenger carriage. When the cladding was removed in 1993 the original structure was so complete that the coach was removed to the Mid Norfolk Railway for restoration. Quite 'The Last Train from Blythburgh!'



'The Last Train from Blythburgh!'



The Old School

Soon you come to an ancient crossroads with BLIND LANE to the left and LODGE/SANDY LANE on the right. Blythburgh Mill was behind the group of cottages at the corner of BLIND LANE.



The Mill in 1936

There are documentary references to mills in Blythburgh as far back as 1400. There was a Prior's Mill whose site is uncertain. It was dismantled in 1782 to replace the mill on the DUNWICH ROAD site which was dilapidated. The mill was demolished in 1937 by pulling it over with a traction engine.



The Mill in about 1875

Mill Farmhouse on the right has lost all of its farm buildings. Next door is 'Isokon' designed by the architects Jennifer and Colin Jones for Jennifer's parents Jack and Molly Pritchard. Jack Pritchard (1899-1992) was one of the great champions of 1930's modernism and his house is a rare rural example of the modern movement in twentieth-century architecture. The house was named after his company and the word is derived from 'Isometric Unit Construction.'



Isokon (1963)



Mill Farmhouse and Lodge Lane



Lark Rise

Another house designed for retirement was 'Lark Rise' now well hidden behind its fence and high hedge. It was completed in 1964 for composer William Alwyn (1905-1985) and Mary (fellow-composer Doreen Carwithen who died in 2003) whom he married in 1975. Alwyn was a pioneer composer of film music and the most prolific British composer in that field from the late 1930s to the 1950s, completing more than 200 scores for documentaries and features. He also composed symphonies, choral works and opera, and wrote poetry and painted, especially during his Blythburgh period. His

'Naiades' (1971) a fantasy sonata for flute and harp, was inspired by the view of the Blyth estuary from his house.

On the other side of the road is HIGHFIELDS a local authority development of the 1960s. On the corner is a bus shelter. Don't wait there. Only the school bus comes this way.

Then there is the forlorn sight of the Primitive Methodist Chapel. The movement was launched in 1807 and found a ready response among the poor farm-workers of East Anglia. A chapel was built in Blythburgh in 1837. This building dates from 1860 and finally closed its doors in 1974. In the early-twentieth-century scene there are cottages beyond the chapel and at the end of the road that have since been demolished.



Primitive Methodist Chapel (1860)

On the right, just before the road junction, is Hawthorn Farmhouse. Behind its brick facade it is a timber-framed building of about 1600, grade II listed. It is something of an enigma. When first built it may have had a non-domestic function although it seems to have been converted into a dwelling soon after. Some of the farm buildings survive including a corrugated-iron shed removed from elsewhere which was used as a hanger for the light aircraft of Douglas Corsellis who stayed at Westwood Lodge with his family in the 1920s. His aerial photographs illustrate a history of Blythburgh published in 1935. Corsellis died in a plane crash in 1930.



Dunwich Road in the early twentieth century



Hawthorn Farmhouse



Hawthorn Farm Barns



Wolsey House, once Hempland

Facing you at the end of DUNWICH ROAD is Wolsey House, designed in the 1980s by Southwold architect Brian Haward. It was originally called 'Hempland' as a reference to a crop once grown there. But, as so often happens, a new owner preferred another name. A local tradition says that Blythburgh Jail was once on the site. No documentary evidence has so far come to light but Blythburgh certainly had a jail. In 1660 seven Quakers from Beccles were imprisoned there. It was still standing in 1754.



Angel Lane

The road forks right at the junction into ANGEL LANE. The six houses in the layby were completed in 1979. Their residents enjoy fine views over the Blyth estuary. But asking for directions can be misleading. ANGEL LANE is among the village roads that has had another local name: MALT OFFICE LANE. That may refer to a long lost building or activity for which there is now no other evidence.



Chapel Road

Turn left and you are in Chapel Road. More confusion. It's not where the chapel is! Compare the view of the cottages on the right with one taken about one hundred years ago. Now there are solar panels and satellite dishes and the properties are presented in more individualistic ways. Nevertheless, the early scene may score more highly for neatness.



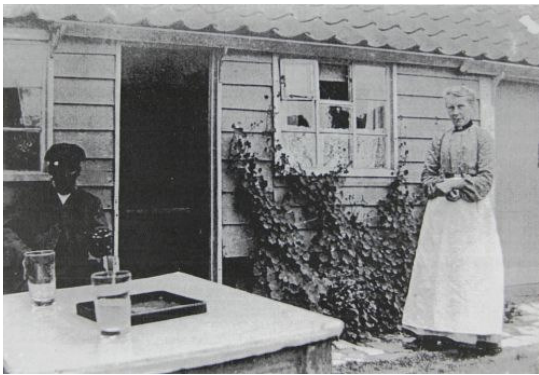
Chapel Road across nearly one hundred years

At the corner with the A12 is the old Post Office Stores. It served the village for many years and after it closed a new post office and shop opened next to the White Hart in June 2000.



Blythburgh's Old Post Office and Stores

Cross over the A12 into CHURCH ROAD and on the right is a wooden building in front of Rose Cottage. Before the Second World War the Fisk family lived there and ran a tea room.



Later the hut became known as 'The Studio' when the artist William Benner had the cottage.

The Tea Room in the 1920s



Church Road



Following CHURCH ROAD you will see Church Farmhouse on the left. It is a timber-framed building of the seventeenth century, grade II listed. Once thatched, it had a range of barns behind it. The composer Martin Shaw and his wife Joan rented the house in 1944 and gave it the name 'Puddings'. They had been inspired by Janet Becker's 'Blythburgh' published in 1935 which speculated that the name attached to the property reflected a tradition that women living outside the priory precinct cooked food for the canons. In fact the name is more likely to be that of John Pudding who was a tenant of

Church Farm

the priory in 1389. Guards RSM Peter Wright became the farm's tenant when he returned from the war having won the Victoria Cross at Salerno in Italy. The farmhouse was divided into two properties in 2005.



Beyond Church Farmhouse turn left into CHURCH LANE, once the HIGH ROAD also known as GORLESTON ROAD. As a low-lying narrow lane running close to the marsh with mainly early-twentieth-century cottages at its far end it is difficult to imagine that before the eighteenth-century turnpike was built, this was the main road through the village from the Ipswich direction.

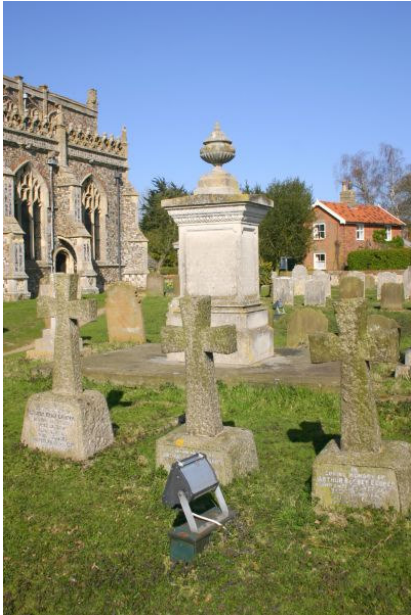
Daisy Bank cottages in Church Lane



From CHURCH LANE a flight of steps leads to Blythburgh churchyard. Blythburgh was one of the earliest centres of Christianity in eastern England. In 654 the bodies of the Christian East Anglian King Anna and his son were brought here after they fell in battle with Penda the pagan king of Mercia. Blythburgh had one of the richest churches in Suffolk in the eleventh-century Domesday survey. There were two daughter churches and the present parish church is descended from one of those. The rich parent church, at a different location behind PRIORY ROAD, was granted to Augustinian canons by King Henry I early in the twelfth century. The priory existed until dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1537.

Blythburgh Church

Blythburgh's large and originally richly decorated church can give the impression that the community must have been large and wealthy when it was rebuilt from about 1420 to 1460. In fact Blythburgh at the time was not populous or prosperous. The church is a symbol of the belief of individuals in purgatory and their concern for the fate of their souls. To be remembered by the living was all important and to secure their prayers some deliberately conspicuous expenditure was necessary! So they spent money on the church itself, or on its furnishings, for example the payment by John and Katherine Masin for the font.



Cooper Family Grave



Chantry Cottage seen across the Churchyard

In the churchyard notice the prominent memorials of the Cooper family, farmers at Westwood Lodge in the nineteenth century. Ernest Read Cooper was Town Clerk of Southwold and a prolific writer on Suffolk coastal subjects. You might also spot the headstone of George Whincop who died in 1847 'upwards of 50 years blacksmith of this parish'. He witnessed no fewer than 37 marriages in the church. A George Wincop witnessed the sale of a wife in Blythburgh in 1789.

Across the churchyard in CHURCH ROAD is Chantry Cottage. The cottage's name has changed several times. It was built in the early nineteenth century by a Halesworth tradesman and he obtained a license for its use as a Nonconformist Meeting House.



On the chancel end of the church is an inscription celebrating the end of rebuilding in the fifteenth century. The Lombardic letters have been interpreted as 'To the honour of Blessed Jesus, the Holy Trinity, Mary and Saint Anne, this chancel has been rebuilt'.

Blythburgh Church East End

On the small green at the turn into PRIORY ROAD is Blythburgh's Angel Sign celebrating the Millennium. It was created by Graham Chaplin at his forge in Buxhall from an idea by villagers Ray and Joan Sinclair- Brown. To the left a narrow lane descends to the river. This once important route led to 'Campys Bridge'. Today you can enjoy a quiet rest beside the Blyth but it was once much busier. The Blyth Navigation opened in 1761 enabling shallow-draught wherries to reach Halesworth. Blockage of Southwold harbour by silt was a problem to which continuing drainage of the marshes may have contributed. The Navigation was wound up locally in the 1880s and closed formally in 1934. Across the river to the north-west is the Blyth View residential development in the former Blythburgh Hospital, once Bulcamp House of Industry, opened in 1766, and a notorious workhouse from the 1830s.

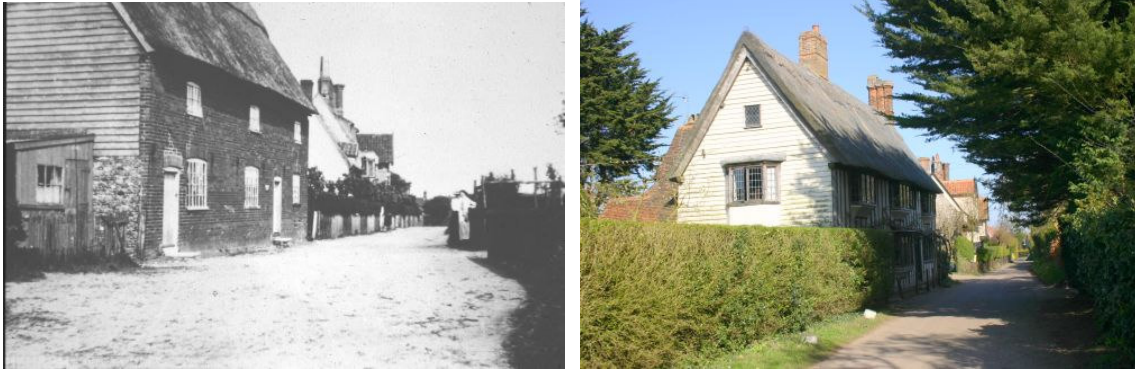


Millennium Sign



River Blyth below the Church

The two picturesque houses in PRIORY ROAD, The Green and The Priory, in their present form are not as old as they look. They are early-twentieth-century creations based on older properties by Royal Academicians, Ernest Crofts and John Seymour Lucas.



The Green before and after reconstruction

Ernest Crofts (1847-1911) created The Green from a pair of old cottages one of which is believed to have once been a butcher's shop. Crofts is known for his large-scale historical paintings including military subjects. He has a memorial in the church.

Crofts's neighbour at The Priory was John Seymour Lucas (1849-1923). His field was portraiture, English historical events, and genre scenes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was prolific. No fewer than 214 of his canvases were exhibited at the Royal Academy where he was elected academician in 1898.



The Priory soon after reconstruction and in 2010

The Priory takes its name from Blythburgh Priory, the fragmentary ruins of which are in the garden behind the house. There is no public access. An excavation in 2009 confirmed the site as the location of

Blythburgh's original seventh-century church. Before its dissolution in 1537 and the robbing of the fabric over later centuries for building material, the priory had a large church with a central tower. This church, seen together with the parish church, must have made medieval Blythburgh an impressive place.

The enigmatic 'chapel' is part of the house and alterations by Seymour Lucas complicate its interpretation. It contains medieval fabric and it was at one time a cottage. If it is part of the priory it is the only fragment of that range of buildings still in use.



'The Chapel' at The Priory

Further down PRIORY ROAD are Forge Cottage and Priory Lodge. They once formed the village smithy with the names Vulcan Cottage and Traverse Cottage respectively. The traverse was where horses were shod.



Forge once Vulcan Cottage



Priory Lodge once Traverse Cottage

Opposite The Priory on the other side of PRIORY ROAD there are gardens enclosed by PRIORY ROAD, CHURCH ROAD and THE STREET. Blythburgh's market place was possibly located there. By the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 Blythburgh had already been granted the right to hold a market. Eventually there were three additional annual fairs. But the start of Blythburgh's decline can probably be dated as far back as the fourteenth century and a fire in 1676 was especially damaging. The number of dwelling houses fell to no more than 21 and the population was just 124. Many properties were never rebuilt. The market, moribund by the mid-fifteenth century, no longer existed. Most of Blythburgh's buildings are of a later date and there are gaps between them perhaps once occupied by medieval houses.



Blythburgh Smithy in Priory Road

Opposite Forge Cottage turn into THE STREET. It was once a bustling thoroughfare with a number of businesses along it. It has been suggested that at its northern end it led to the priory gatehouse. Heading south you will see White Cottage on the right hand side, a grade II listed building of the seventeenth century. A tradition that links it with the Crown Inn of the sixteenth century cannot be substantiated.



The Street towards Forge Cottage



White Cottage formerly The Crown Inn

On the corner of the A12 there is Lion House. This too had an alcoholic past and its lean-to housed an off-license. The lean-to was removed in 1992.



Lion House, London Road



The 'Off-License' before demolition

Crossing the A12, on the left-hand side of THE STREET was the Men's Reading Room. The site is now part of the garden of Farthings. The institution finally succumbed, it is said, to the arrival of ITV in the village.

In THE STREET in the 1920s were Heath's dairy and William Burton's wheelright's, carpentry and decorating business. He would also make you a coffin and bury you.



Next door was Blythburgh's only purpose-built shop, established in 1870 by James Burton and his wife Lucy. It was later run by the Hawkes family and finally closed in the 1950s. The author Eric Blair (George Orwell) claimed that he was the son of a Blythburgh shopkeeper named Burton, whenever he was arrested by the police whilst living with the down-and-outs researching a book.

Burton's Stores in The Street



Burton's Stores then became a Bed and Breakfast called Little Thorbyns.

Little Thorbyns

Retrace your steps to LONDON ROAD, the A12. It is noticeable that there are large gaps between the properties fronting it, an indication that since the route through the village was established in 1785 no great economic activity has grown up along it.



At the ANGEL LANE junction is Farthings, from 1945 to 1952 the home of composer Martin Shaw and his wife, already mentioned in connection with Church Farmhouse. They changed the name of the cottage from Blyth Cottage to Farthings, which it still retains. The composer's great friend, Ralph Vaughan Williams, wrote that the house's name suited Martin, retired organist of St Martin's, since "I owe you five farthings, Say the bells of St Martin's".

Angel Lane



This early view of the ANGEL LANE junction shows cottages on the left that now have names but are still sometimes called STATION ROAD cottages recognising their position on the stretch of LONDON ROAD leading to Blythburgh station. Farthings, before later additions and a change of name, is on the right.

Station Road cottages and Angel Lane

Blythburgh's new village shop opened in June 2000 in an old shed next to the White Hart and was run in conjunction with the pub. It was commended by HRH Prince Charles as an example of 'The Pub is the Hub' theme. Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall visited the shop in 2008. The link with the pub ended with the closure of the shop in September 2011. It reopened as an independent venture in February 2012.



Blythburgh Post Office and Village Shop



The White Hart

The White Hart next door is a more venerable institution. The present building, listed grade II*, dates from the early to mid sixteenth century with a mid-seventeenth-century brick gable and a painted brick front of the mid nineteenth century. As the largest secular building in the village it has been used as a court house (the sessions were held in Blythburgh), for livestock sales, and even the sale of a wife – the landlord was a witness.

Holiday accommodation was built next to the White Hart in 1999.

This cottage next to the White Hart, now gone, was photographed in 1930. At that time there was a petrol pump outside the pub.



White Hart early twentieth century



Cottage next to White Hart



White Hart early twentieth century



White Hart and old hump-backed bridge

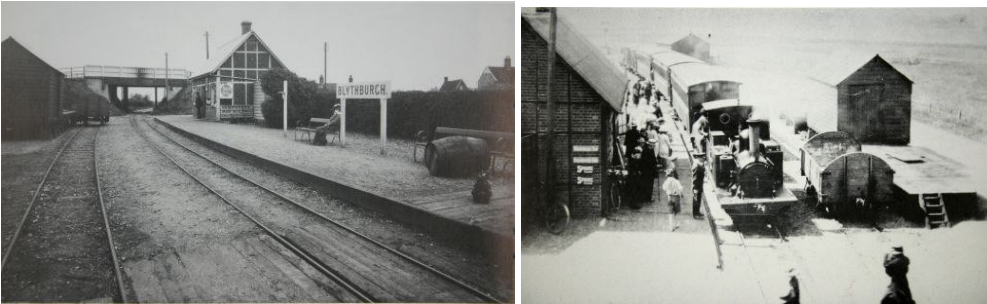
A short distance to the north, Blythburgh Bridge carries LONDON ROAD over the river Blyth. The earliest documentary reference to the bridge is a priory charter of about 1200. The prior was responsible for the repair of the bridge until the dissolution of the priory in 1537. The bridge was rebuilt in 1549 and again in 1759 for the Blyth Navigation. A hump-backed bridge was built over the Southwold Railway ready for its opening in 1879. The latest reconstruction was in 1989.

On the other side of the road is the site of Blythburgh station on the Southwold Railway.



The line operated from 1879 to 1929. Now only a coal shed covered in ivy and brambles remains. There are fine riverside walks along the old railway embankment.

Blythburgh station with the church in the background



Blythburgh station showing the London Road bridge and a view from the bridge



Next to the old station yard is Blythburgh Village Hall. The hall was originally the Women's Institute's, founded in the 1920s, but on the closure of the local WI was transferred to the Parish Council in 2000. The maintenance and updating of the hall is unusually complicated because the building is located on the Blythburgh Priory scheduled archaeological site. The building is well-used and is known for its sprung dance-floor.

Blythburgh Village Hall

Further south is The Old Customs House but this must be a fanciful name. There is a reference in a nineteenth-century Ipswich newspaper to a new-built cottage opposite the White Hart.

That ends this short tour. We hope you have enjoyed it and will refresh yourselves by supporting the White Hart and Blythburgh's village shop.



This guide was written by Alan Mackley who took new photographs in April 2010. Archive material came from a collection made for a Church exhibition and thanks are due to John Allen, John Crane, Pat Fisk, Joan Hurren, Thomas Lond-Caulk, Richard Maslen and Jonathon Pritchard for pictures used here.