

## Wretham Info

(THANKS MUST GO TO MELINDA RAKER, FOR THE USE OF INFORMATION FROM HER BOOK, WRETHAM, 900 YEARS OF A NORFOLK ESTATE AND TO EVERYONE WHO HAS HELPED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS SITE).

In Ancient Records Wretham has been written in various ways, for example Wrotham, weretham, Wertham.

### Wretham Hall.

A fine mansion in it's time standing in a well wooded park of 600 acres, in the parish of West Wretham. It was destroyed by fire on Boxing Day 1906. The Nobles had rebuilt the mansion known as Wretham Hall, by 1914. The Hall in the past has been used for Barnado's children, then the RAF, Czechs, French Canadians and Americans.



Sir John Dewrance C.B.E. was born on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1858. He married Isabelle Anne who was the grand-daughter of Richard Trevithick, the engineer, who on Christmas Eve 1800 hitched his "Puffing Billy" to the first carriage load of passengers ever hauled by steam. Sir John Dewrance was also an engineer and became chairman of the company that first exploited the Kentish coalfields.

His obituary stated that he was chairman of the well-known firm of Babcock & Wilcox Ltd and he was the sole proprietor of Dewrance & Co. Engineers. He went to reside at Wretham Hall in 1926. His principle recreation was shooting. Although he did not take a very active part in local affairs, he was interested in, and a good supporter of, local sports. He was president of the Thetford ex-servicemen's club, vice-president of the local branch of the British Legion, vice-president of the Thetford Chamber of Trade and of the Thetford YMCA.

The report of Sir John's funeral from the newspaper of the day stated that "people came from all parts of the country to pay a last tribute.... The coffin was conveyed from Wretham Hall to the church in a farm wagon drawn by four fine Suffolk horses. The interior of the wagon had been lined with flowers.... from the church to the grave the coffin was borne by eight gamekeepers on the Wretham estate – Messrs W Brown (head keeper), A Brown, J. Brown, C. Richardson, Geo. Prewer, Ralph Brett, A. Alexander and S. Reeve. The singing was led by the village choir, the service conducted by the Bishop of Norwich, assisted by the Rector of Wretham, Rev. Gerwyn Rhys, the Rev. A.E. Alston (of Truro, formerly Rector of Wretham) and the Rector of Merton (Rev. E.I. Stanley Thomas). Also present at the funeral were Sir Saxton and Lady Noble (previous owners of the Estate). Walter, Arthur and Jimmy Brown were brothers – their other brother, Frank, had the tenancy of the village shop.

Arthur Mee in his book "Norfolk" of 1940 paid tribute to Sir John Dewrance. "There lies in this churchyard a man of great courage and brainpower who served his generation well and deserves the gratitude of posterity, for he was an inventor and a pioneer, Sir John Dewrance. He was an engineer, and won a gold medal early in his working life by a paper on the corrosion of marine boilers, and before his work was done he had taken out over a hundred patents for engineering inventions. A man of far-reaching ideas, he saw the possibilities of Kent coal long before most men and risked his reputation and his fortune in seeking Kent coal when then scheme seemed nothing but a costly dream, and coal-shafts nothing but holes to pour money down. He was chairman of the original companies for

the development of the Kent coalfield and it is gratifying that he lived to see them bringing thousands of tons of coal to the surface. He married a granddaughter of Richard Trevithick and it must have been a source of satisfaction to him that Kent, which gave Sir John himself a great reward, also gave Trevithick a little hope in his last days and a free man's grave to lie in."

Sir John Dewrance erected the Stud Farm Buildings together with "The Head Groom's Bungalow" on the estate.

### The Village Sign.

The money for the Village sign was raised in 1977 by residents of the village. Melinda Raker drew up the preliminary designs to include the ram's head, the partridges, the chovy and the forestry. David Fitt suggested the inclusion of the which. Harry Stebbings of Great Hockham finalised the design and made the sign itself. Mike Woodrow and Mike Pickering built the base.

#### The Ram's Head.



The Estate of East Wretham at the time of the Domesday Book was owned by Ralph de Toesni. He was standard bearer to William the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings, and for his services was given 19 lordships in Norfolk, the largest in Wretham he gave to the abbey of Bec (France). According to Blomefield, from the Register of the abbey of Bec "When the harvest work was finished by the tenants, they were to have an acre of barley, and a ram let loose in the midst of them; if they caught him, he was their property but if he escaped then the Lord claimed him". This ram hunting disappeared about 1780. Eton college who owned much of the estate, continued this custom at Eton for many years.

#### Partridges.



The shooting at Wretham was well known – especially in the 1800's.

#### The Beetle.

At Wretham, there is a particular kind of Beetle, about double the size of a ladybird, known locally as "chovies". The chovies come out in myriads early in the summer.

#### The Witch.



Traditions of witchcraft persisted at Wretham (as with most other villages) until the 19<sup>th</sup> century

#### The Rectory.

(Now the Lodge)



Built in 1810, in the 1960's a wing to the rear of the house was demolished. The Reverend Edward Constable Alston was incumbent from 1929 until 1936. He held the British tench and rudd largest fish records in the same year. The Rudd record lasted for many years.

The last Rector to live there was the Reverend Sharpe, until mid-1950's. In 1954 it was reverted to private ownership of those who owned the Manor Farm- at that time - the Metropolitan Railway Company.

Sold at auction in 1961.

The Brick Works.

Sited on Peddars Way. Local Materials were used to make bricks, drain and roof tiles, pammments, clay lump, tiles and flower pots for the estate. The Dairy House and Keepers House at West Wretham are made from Wretham Gault brick, which mellows to the grey colour seen today. These, clay lump, and flints are indigenous building materials for Wretham. Some of the brick workings still remain.

The Airfield.

A memorial stands outside the king's House in Thetford dedicated to the men of the 359<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 67<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, United States 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. It was presented to the people of Thetford and East Wretham on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1985. The Group flew its last mission on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1945 having completed 346, and left for the United States in November 1945. The Airfield was taken back by the RAF and later used as a Polish settlement camp. Much of the land was sold off in the 1950's, although some of the original huts are those still in use.

The Nature Reserve.

The Norfolk Naturalists Trust was founded in 1926, and became the first such organisation in the country. Now know as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, it is one of the largest of the country wildlife trusts, owning and managing 2,500 hectares. The Trust employed its first warden at Wretham in 1970. The reserve was designated a site of Special Scientific Interest in 1954

Stonebridge

Stonebridge was named after the bridge made by the Romans to carry Peddars Way across a stream. The shop/post office and the Dog & Partridge Pub had been unchanged until very recently. The shop/post office has now been made into private properties.



### The Pingo Trails.

What is a Pingo? The word 'pingo' comes from an Eskimo word meaning 'hill'. Pingos today are found in arctic regions. They are buried ice mounds fed by ground water, which grow every winter during the summer the frozen topsoil melts and slowly slumps off the mound gradually forming a surrounding rim or rampart. When the climate warms up the pingo melts and becomes a crater like pond.



Wretham pingo pond was formed at the end of the last ice age, 10,000 years ago.

Water levels in the pingo depressions fluctuate seasonally, generally decreasing in the summer. At this location where the site is grazed intermittently by park white cattle

proliferate species include lesser marshwort, blue water speedwell, brooklime, redshank, foxtail and common hemp. Swarms of pingos are found in the Stow Bedon, Thompson and Hockham areas.

This all forms part of a larger wildlife information and enhancement scheme in the area under the 'Little Ouse Water transfer scheme' for Breckland Growers Ltd.

The project has been part financed by the 'European Community and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food' (MAFF, now DEFRA) under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

For more information visit:

[www.brecklandgrowers.co.uk](http://www.brecklandgrowers.co.uk)

MILLENNIUM ROW

To mark the new millennium, the village planted a new row of trees, on the roadside of the village. Here is a photo of the trees in 2004 and the sign to mark the event





## **Millennium Row**

**These trees were planted  
to celebrate the new  
millennium.**

**A.D. 2000**