



## **SAMPLE PAGES**

The 44-page, A4 handbook for Norfolk's Seaside Heritage, with text, photographs, maps, a chronology and a reading list, is available for purchase, price £15.00 including postage and packing.

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## Norfolk's Seaside Heritage

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Thursday September 1st-Sunday September 4th 2011  
interesting breaks with interesting people

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*Above: Great Yarmouth: Gem Cinema (2009)*





*Above: Mundesley: Grand Hotel (2011)*

visitors at Mundesley included three inns, a number of lodging houses, bathing machines and a warm bath, but the main occupation was fishing for herring, crab and lobster and despite the lack of a jetty there was some traffic in grain, coal and timber. There was sufficient trade for the population to double from 204 in 1801 to 436 in 1831.

The Norfolk & Suffolk Railway line from North Walsham (jointly owned by the Great Eastern Railway and the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway) opened in 1898; the continuation to Cromer Beach station opened on August 3rd 1908. Mundesley station had with three platforms, each six hundred feet long, and generous goods facilities.

The impact of this anticipation of a thriving holiday trade was substantial. The East Coast Estates Company was established by an architect with the unfortunate name Mr E M Silley. Streets were laid out on the West Cliff and given the name Cliftonville. Two brickworks opened, the Mundesley Brick & Tile Company and Willemments Tile Company.

Three substantial hotels were built along the clifftops, the **Clarence Hotel** predating the railway (1891), the **Grand Hotel** (1897) and the **Manor Hotel** (built around an earlier dwelling to a design by Bullard & Sons of Norwich, 1900). By 1912 there were also six boarding houses. The population of Mundesley parish increased from 411 in 1891 to 680 in 1901.

bartered away...the mistake we made was that we had trusted to foreign representations and we had been deceived by them.”

The mayor wound up the meeting in stirring style: “Let us go heart and soul with local men, in whom we have greatest confidence, and put our shoulders to the wheel.”

A new building was designed in 1875 by John Norton & Philip Edward Masey and the foundation stone was laid by Lord Suffield. John Norton (1823-1904) was a Bristol-based church and country-house architect, a pupil of Benjamin Ferrey, who also worked for the Crystal Palace estate at Sydenham and is best known for the elaborate Indian interiors at Elveden Hall, Suffolk. Philip Edward Masey (1823-1897) was probably connected with the barrister Thomas Adair Masey, London-based chairman of the Great Yarmouth Aquarium and the Tynemouth Aquarium & Winter Garden Company, for whom Norton and Masey were also architects.

The unprepossessing building that opened in 1876 failed to attract visitors. A contemporary commented that “wretched management was not an unimportant factor”: the magistrates’ refusal of a drama licence was unhelpful; apart from watching the fish which – to be fair – included sharks, giant crabs, conger eels, turtles, porpoises and octopi, with crocodiles, alligators and seals in large ponds, the entertainments on offer were the skating rink, military bands, refreshments and a reading room. The Prince of Wales visited in 1881. The place closed down in 1882.

The *Eastern Evening News* columnist Peggotty described in 1970 the remaining evidence of the original Aquarium decoration at the time that the Forte Group installed a suspended ceiling in the main hall and refurbished the entire building. In what had been the Grand Saloon, 193 feet by 60 feet, Doulton tiling depicting freshwater birds on one side and sea-birds on the other remain. The eighteen tanks, 50 feet by 15 feet, containing up to 26,600 gallons, have long gone and the tiles have been hidden since the balcony was installed in the 1920s. During the 1970 alterations, a bread-oven was discovered in the basement, extending thirty feet under Euston Road.

The building reopened as the **Royal Aquarium**, extended at the cost of a further £10,000 by Bottle & Olley in 1883 with a faience façade manufactured by Gibbs & Canning of Tamworth. The driving force of the enterprise was the new manager, an Edgware Road caterer, John William Nightingale. He engaged such celebrities as Sir Ernest Shackleton, Oscar Wilde, General William Booth and David Lloyd George, and became a power in the Great Yarmouth entertainment industry: by the time he died in 1911, he had purchased the Royal Aquarium, bought and replaced the old wooden Britannia Pier and also owned the Theatre Royal, the Royal Assembly Rooms and the Royal and Victoria Hotels.

In 1925 the aquarium tanks were stripped out and a second “Little Theatre” auditorium added. The Forte Group acquired first the Britannia Pier in 1965, and then the Royal

Peter Jay gave up his lease and ran a rival circus at the Pleasure Beach from 1991 to 1997. In Yarmouth, a non-animal circus season in 1996 flopped, and Peter Jay announced the building would be converted to an entertainment complex after one more circus season: massive public support for circus persuaded him to continue, however, and animals were gradually phased out over the 1998-2000 seasons. Since then, non-animal circus seasons have continued successfully.

A short distance from the seafront on Regent Road stands the **Regent Cinema**, built in 1914 for the Wisbech estate-agent Francis Holmes Cooper's Eastern Counties Electric Theatres Ltd by Francis Burdett Ward. It has a particularly dignified classical façade, with Ionic giant columns and a Diocletian window; within is an impressive staircase, now altered, the former café with a plaster frieze of *putti* and garlands, and the auditorium decorated with rococo plasterwork, with boxes supported by cast-iron columns. The original proscenium is masked by an extension presumably required by conversion to Cinema-scope. The Regent closed as a cinema in September 1982, and has since operated as a bingo club.



*Above:* Great Yarmouth: Regent Cinema (2011)



The M&GNJR struggled against two particular difficulties – an excess of single-track mileage (over 60%) and heavy gradients across the grain of the landscape. Normal services were laborious, and holiday specials spent much of their travelling time waiting in loops for approaching trains to clear the route. The line was colloquially known as “Muddle and Get Nowhere”.

Though most of the M&GNR closed in 1959, trains continued to operate between Melton Constable and Sheringham until April 1964.

Distinctive as well as eccentric, the M&GNR came to be much loved by enthusiasts. Until the 1929 its locomotives wore a golden ochre livery and its carriages were either built of teak or painted to look as if they were. The section between Sheringham and Weybourne reopened as a museum line in 1976, and was extended to Holt in 1989.

The proposed **Holt, Melton Constable & Fakenham Railway** plans to reinstate continuous railway from Holt to Melton Constable, the core of the M&GNR system, continuing on to the M&GNR main line to Fakenham, where it would ultimately connect with the extended **Mid-Norfolk Railway**, currently a preserved line operating the former Great Eastern Railway line between Wymondham and Dereham, which has possession of the



*Above: Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway: Cromer Beach Station (2011)*

## Background reading

### Seaside history

Simon H Adamson, *Seaside Piers* (Batsford 1977)

Allan Brodie, Andrew Sargent & Gary Winter, *Seaside Holidays in the Past* (English Heritage 2005)

Allan Brodie & Gary Winter, *England's Seaside Resorts* (English Heritage 2009)

Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside: architecture, society and nature* (Reakton 2006)

Kenneth Lindley, *Seaside Architecture* (Hugh Evelyn 1973)

Lynn F Pearson, *The People's Palaces: the story of the seaside pleasure buildings of 1870-1914* (Barracuda 1991)

John K Walton, *British Piers* (Thames & Hudson 1987)

John K Walton, *The English Seaside Resort, a social history 1750-1914* (Leicester University Press 1983)

Peter Williams, *The English Seaside and its architecture* (National Monuments Record 2005)

### Cromer

— ? —, *Cobbles to Cupolas: an introduction to the buildings of Cromer town centre* (Cromer Preservation Society 2005)

Martin Warren, *Around Cromer* (Sutton 1995; Lucas 2001)

Martin Warren, *Cromer: the chronicle of a watering place* (Poppyland 2001)

### Poppyland

Elizabeth Jones, *Poppyland in Pictures* (Poppyland Publishing 1983)

### Great Yarmouth

Kathryn Ferry, “‘The maker of modern Yarmouth’: J W Cockrill” IN Kathryn Perry (ed), *Powerhouses of Provincial Architecture* (Victorian Society 2009), pp 44-58

Frank Meeres, *A History of Great Yarmouth* (Phillimore 2007)

C R Temple, *Great Yarmouth and Gorleston: a pictorial history* (Phillimore 1993)