

Innkeepers and Blacksmiths of Blakeney

The Allen Connection

by Pamela Peake

Synopsis: Blacksmiths and innkeepers were at the heart of every successful Victorian village and with four blacksmiths in the family and 40 years at the King's Arms, the Allens were undoubtedly major players. Their integration into the community, family fortunes and vicissitudes, provides the glue to a story of the role of blacksmiths, innkeepers and their premises. From 1861 till just beyond the twentieth century Domesday, it reveals a rather surprising perspective of Blakeney at a time of significant change.

Introduction

The gift of a set of Kenneth Allen Papers, a veritable gold mine of information on the villages of the Haven, was the stimulus to take a look at the Allen family in Blakeney and place them in a context (see page 12). Who were they, how long had they been there and how did they fit in? Remarkably, a clue to Kenneth's own perception of his paternal family history in the village can be found amongst his papers in the carefully, hand written transcript of the 1861 census.

Robert and Hannah Allen, Kenneth Allen's great grandparents, were the first of the Allen family to settle in Blakeney when they arrived with three sons in 1861. Although none of them were born in the immediate area, they were none the less, essentially Norfolk people. Robert was the new innkeeper at the King's Arms and his eldest son, Robert Henry, was a young blacksmith.

A powerful combination by any reckoning as father and son, innkeeper and blacksmith respectively, represented two of the essential trades and crafts required for mid nineteenth century village self sufficiency. Completing this picture of a self sufficient Victorian village would be the two other essential craftsmen, a carpenter or wheelwright and a shoe and bootmaker while a second tradesman would be the grocer or more often than not, a general store keeper such as a grocer and draper.

This was at a time when the rural economy was at its strongest. Blakeney, with its dual economy was more than a village, rather a small vibrant seaport town and all the above trades and crafts were present, many times over. However it would be wrong to suppose that such vibrancy existed in isolation, this was not the case. The proximity of Wiveton and Cley, also sharing the Haven, contributed to a strong inter-

dependence. Not for nothing were Blakeney and Cley teamed together as a Head Port between the years of 1786-1853, after which registration of vessels moved first to Wells then in 1882 to Lynn.

The change in status reflected the gradual decline of shipping, as the harbour silted up, and as people moved away to find work in larger towns and cities. It was a double calamity for Blakeney, leaving behind a mix of an ageing community and a work force trying to adapt to change.

The Allen family featured prominently in this scenario of events, arriving as part of the significant in-migrants who kept essential trades and services functioning, while locals with local knowledge tended to maintain maritime occupations.¹ Thus the Allen story is as much about village innkeepers and blacksmiths as it is about their family history. It provides an insight into Blakeney towards the end of the Victorian period and the ensuing Edwardian era from the perception of land based trades and services that experienced much change.

The starting point for this article is a picture of the village in the 1860s, on the eve of Robert and Hannah Allen's arrival it then follows their fortunes as they established another generation of innkeepers and blacksmiths.

Blakeney in the early sixties

The Census for 1861 provides a detailed picture of Blakeney; it portrays a small, bustling coastal seaport inhabited by 1,021 people, although 68 of them were away from home on census night and of these 52 were mariners and women at sea. The 300 dwellings in the village were predominantly in the High Street with an overflow into Pigg (now Westgate) Street and further west at Greencroft. Not all were occupied, 43 had either occupants absent

or were clearly listed as dilapidated. The building boom that had followed the Inclosure Act of 1824 and the dredging of the New Cut was over and only one new cottage was in the process of being built.²

There was a church and three chapels serving the community, a National School attended by 130 children and a panoply of grocers, shopkeepers, tradesmen, craftsmen, bakers, milliners, dressmakers, tailors, shoemakers, four inns and two beerhouses. Merchants, farmers, master mariners, ship owners, pilots and port officials completed the picture of a small, self sufficient port that had regular contact by land and sea with the rest of the country.

Then in early February, just a few weeks before the census was made, the Rector R H Tillard had described the status of widows in the village when he requested aid for widows after the infamous lifeboat disaster.³ According to Tillard, the majority of the 50 widows in Blakeney had lost their husbands to some casualty connected with the sea. This scene was further highlighted in a directory of 1864 which stated that vessels of 150 tons reached the quay where spring tides rose about ten feet. That year alone saw the arrival of 184 coasting vessels registering 9,502 tons and another 14 of various tonnage from Baltic and Mediterranean ports. Vessels sailing outwards in the same year numbered slightly less, 120, registering 6,613 tons.

This view of Blakeney in the early 1860s would have contrasted sharply with the extensive quay-side activity at Ipswich in Suffolk for this was where Robert and Hannah Allen were living when they made the decision to leave. Furthermore, Blakeney although infinitely quieter, was possibly more attractive as it was in their home county and would bring them closer to Hannah's relatives who were nearby in Cromer.

Arrival of the Allens

Robert Allen of Coltishall married Hannah Curtis of Cromer on the 13th February 1840 in the parish church of Coltishall.⁴ Both were described as being of full age; Hannah, the daughter of Joseph Curtis, farmer, was a servant at the time of her marriage while Robert gave his occupation as baliff. Eleven years later Robert was farming 140 acres, employing 6 labourers and still living in Coltishall where his family had increased by two daughters and two sons.

Three more sons are known to have been born during the following five years and from their births it can be seen that Robert and Hannah were on the move. The first of these sons, James, was born in Horstead, across the Bure from Coltishall followed by Joe in Woodton,

South Norfolk, where Robert was still farming.⁵ Then in 1855 when Herbert Hercules's birth was registered by his mother, she gave her husband's occupation as 'Innkeeper' and their address as New Cut (sounds familiar), St. Peter, Ipswich in Suffolk.⁵ The family was now complete with seven children born over a period of fifteen years as follows:

Cecilia Curtis Allen	1840
Robert Henry Allen	1843
Anna Ann Allen	1845
Henry Mayes Allen	1848
James Charles Mayes Allen	1851
Joe Curtis Allen	1853
Herbert Hercules Allen	1855

What had caused Robert to leave Coltishall in the first place, and what had prompted him to exchange farming in rural Norfolk for inn keeping on the quay-side in the county town of neighbouring Suffolk? Fascinating questions that have been addressed by many historians exploring the drift from rural communities to urban developments as population levels doubled between 1800 and 1850 then doubled again by the end of the century.^{1 & 6}

Whether the family was still together in Ipswich during this time is not known, but certainly the eldest sons may well have moved off to apprenticeships and the daughters into service. By 1861 Robert and Hannah were at the King's Arms in Blakeney with only three of their sons, Robert Henry who was 18 years of age and a blacksmith plus two of the younger boys, James and Joe. Again Robert was listed as innkeeper and this was the occupation he was to pursue until he died some twenty years later. Thus the Allens were part of the 'significant in-migrants' maintaining the vitality of the 'Sales and Service Trades' in Blakeney.⁷ But why Blakeney and what had become of all their other children?

Often family and friends were involved in migratory moves of this nature, providing information, contacts and support. Was it Hannah's family, whose father and brother were blacksmiths, who alerted them to the impending vacancy? Or had Robert heard of the opportunities afforded by Blakeney from the brewery, the newspapers or mariners passing through Ipswich on their way between London and ports further north along the east coast? Surely he would have needed business contacts, introductions and the goodwill that is passed on in the trade.

The King's Arms

At the east end of the quay were three inns, the Calthorpe Arms, Ship Inn and White Horse, all situated in the High Street, as was the Anchor beerhouse. This would have made the position of the King's Arms at the western end of the quay

more attractive, especially with all the additional outbuildings that went with the property. There was even space for a smithy there.

John Easter, the outgoing licensee at the King's Arms had been there for 24 years. Both he and his wife Johanna Nurse were originally from Weybourne and had earlier spent many years in Cley as innkeepers before they left the George and Dragon in 1836 and moved across the Glaven to Blakeney. By 1861 John was 71 and retired, furthermore he was a widower, as Johanna had died the previous year, and recently his son John, had perished in the doomed lifeboat rescue. John Easter was to live a few more years, occupying a dwelling amongst the outhouses of the King's Arms, tending his eight acres.

For Robert and Hannah their nearest competition was the Jolly Farmers, a beerhouse, just a few doors away to the south in Pigg (now Westgate) Street. This was licensed to Henry Baldwin, who ran it alongside his business as a ship's carpenter. Although the establishment had a short life and has long since passed from memory, its development from a private house selling beer at the door, then to a beerhouse and back to a private house can be traced through three generations of one family. There is a lovely twist in the story for the Jolly Farmers became the home of Herbert Hercules and the brew house became the property of his brother, Robert Henry Allen.

The King's Arms was supposedly formed from three fishermen's cottages, possibly in 1760 as indicated by the pantiles on the roof. The inn sat gable end onto the street with a large yard to the south. Another continuous range of outbuildings formed the western and southern boundaries. The premises were large enough to accommodate the entire Allen family, servants and various itinerant lodgers, yet seemingly only four of their children were ever recorded living there, that is the three sons noted in the 1861 census and their youngest, Herbert Hercules, who was there by 1871. But before their first year was out, Robert and Hannah were to lose two of their boys, namely James and Joe.

An epidemic of scarlet fever

It was not unusual for parents at this time to lose young children, indeed as many as 25% of all infants died before their first birthday.⁸ James and Joe however were older, aged 9 and 7 respectively, and died just 8 days apart suggesting that something had happened that was common to both.

Moreover, the exceptionally high number of burials of young children recorded in the Blakeney Burial Registers at this time suggests

that the factor was possibly a contagious disease. Whatever it was, and discounting the very young who were more likely to have died from natural causes, it affected especially those aged between 2 and 9 years. A total of 18 youngsters died between October and the end of the year, but no more were buried until the following March (Table 1).

Amongst those who died were three sets of children from the same family home, namely the Allen and Baines brothers and the Elsy children. In addition, some were close neighbours, like the Elsy children and William Tomlin who shared and played in the same or adjacent yards. Yet, many families had other children in the same house who were unaffected, but they were almost always aged 10 years and over.

The death certificates for James Allen and Thomas Cornelius Elsy, who both had a sibling dying at the same time, gave the cause of death as scarlet fever.⁹ It is not unreasonable to conclude that there had been an epidemic passing through the community.

The nature of the disease

Scarlet fever, also known as scarlatina in older literature, was one of the Victorian "filth diseases", diphtheria, tuberculosis, typhoid and cholera completing the group.⁸ The first three were all respiratory diseases while typhoid and cholera, which were the most feared, were diseases associated with dirty water. All of these filth diseases flourished in Victorian Britain in the overcrowded areas of urbanisation where epidemics flared up, taking their toll as they passed through the communities. These diseases were no respecter of persons, young and old, poor and not so poor were affected as was shown by the untimely death of Prince Albert who contracted typhoid and died barely two months after James and Joe Allen succumbed to scarlet fever.

Scarlet fever spreads most commonly between people by infection from respiratory droplets in the air, with a higher incidence during winter and spring and where there is crowding and close contact. Young children are particularly susceptible. Nowadays, in Britain, epidemics of scarlet fever are almost unheard of as it is easily treated with antibiotics and by house quarantine, but not so in the Blakeney of 1861.

Recent analysis has shown a correlation between raised wheat prices during the interval when a woman was pregnant caused increased susceptibility in the subsequent offspring.¹⁰ In this situation wheat prices are indicative of food prices generally, so food is implicated and the effect would be more noticeable during economic depression. Was this the reason why there was a higher than normal number of deaths amongst one year olds and under during August and September 1861 (Table 1) ?

Date of burial	Name	Age
Aug 22nd	Mary E Anthony	2 mths
Aug 30th	George Cushing	6 mths
Sep 5th	Ann E Cushing	4 mths
Sep 6th	Henry B Jordan	3 mths
Sep 13th	Phoebe Woodhouse	1 yr 4 mths
Sep 13th	Mary A Holmes	1 yr 3 mths
Sep 18th	Elijah Woodhouse	1 yr
Sep 22nd	Robert W Russell	1 yr 1 mth
Oct 5th	Margaret Thompson	5 yrs
Oct 28th	Jane E Carr	1 yr 3 mths
Oct 31st	Robert J Starling	5 mths
Oct 31st	James C M Allen	9 yrs
Oct 31st	Abihu Barwick	6 yrs
Nov 6th	Matilda M Cooke	9 yrs
Nov 7th	Henry M Mann	4 yrs
Nov 7th	Joe C Allen	7 yrs
Nov 8th	Esther Cushing	3 yrs
Nov 17th	Murrell Baines	4 yrs
Nov 22nd	Elizabeth A Rust	2 yrs
Nov 22nd	James W Baines	2 yrs
Nov 25th	Louisa H Mann	3 yrs
Dec 6th	Herbert Pye	3 yrs
Dec 9th	Walter Harvey	3 yrs
Dec 10th	Mary A Betts	8 mths
Dec 13th	Parry Bond	5 yrs
Dec 15th	Mary A Elsy	9 yrs
Dec 15th	William Tomlin	5 yrs
Dec 20th	Thomas C Elsy	2 yrs
Dec 27th	John Starling	3 yrs
Mar 16th	Samuel D Shorting	3 mths
Mar 23rd	Henry W Overton	2 yrs

Table 1. The children and infants buried in Blakeney churchyard, late 1861 and early 1862.

Domestic housing – the problem?

Just as the King's Arms was built around a yard so was the bulk of the domestic housing in the village. Blakeney became a magnet for people on the move, looking for work and accommodation, was it a crisis in the making? New housing stock had been hastily erected in existing vacant spaces and on garden ground behind houses fronting the street. Now there was a concentration of people living and working in confined spaces.

Several families often shared all the facilities of a common yard such as the well, privies and collection points for refuse. The rise in small businesses operating from homes meant that any available space, such as attic or cellar, would have been used for storage or even as

workrooms. Houses that had rooms opening to the street often operated as shops. This overcrowding and constant movement of adults and children between home, work place and shop facilitated the spread of diseases. The pattern is clearly visible in the Blakeney School log book that shows the range of diseases regularly sweeping the villages of Glandford, Wiveton and Blakeney.¹¹

It was not necessarily the houses that were the problem, rather the rate of growth and the consequent overcrowding. This was also at a time when the miasmatic theory of disease still prevailed and very little attention was paid to public health at a local level.⁸ On a wider scale there was major loss of life from filth and bad ventilation during the nineteenth century with labourers generally having the lowest life expectancy followed by tradesmen then the professionals.

Three weddings and three funerals

On a much happier note, Robert and Hannah were able to enjoy the marriage of three of their children locally, two in Blakeney and one in Stiffkey and anticipate the prospect of being surrounded by another generation of Allens. Robert Henry, their eldest son, was the first when he married Alice Loads on Xmas Day 1873. She was the daughter of a fisherman, Michael Loads, himself the descendant of a long established family in the village.

Perhaps it was the very fact that it was Xmas Day that enabled his sister and brother, Cecilia and Henry Allen, to be present for their signatures are there in the parish register as witnesses. But where had they come from? Not until 1881 is there a clue, at which time Cecilia, who appears never to have married, was located as a lodger in St. Marylebone, London. She had obviously gone into service and gave her occupation as housemaid. Henry, on the other hand, was a Foreman Tailor, having learnt his craft in Cromer in the early 60s when living with his grandparents; he probably served his apprenticeship with his uncle James Curtis.¹² Henry was married with several children and lived in St Pancras, not far from Cecilia and it becomes very tempting to picture them arriving in Blakeney for the wedding by the *London Packet* rather than travelling overland!

Anna Ann Allen also left her signature in the registers when she married Frederick K Grindell in 1876 and had her elder brother Robert as a witness, but their subsequent whereabouts is a complete mystery despite an exhaustive search. A year later, Herbert Hercules married Charlotte Anderson of Beetly in the parish church at Stiffkey.¹³ On that occasion there were no Allen signatures as witnesses.

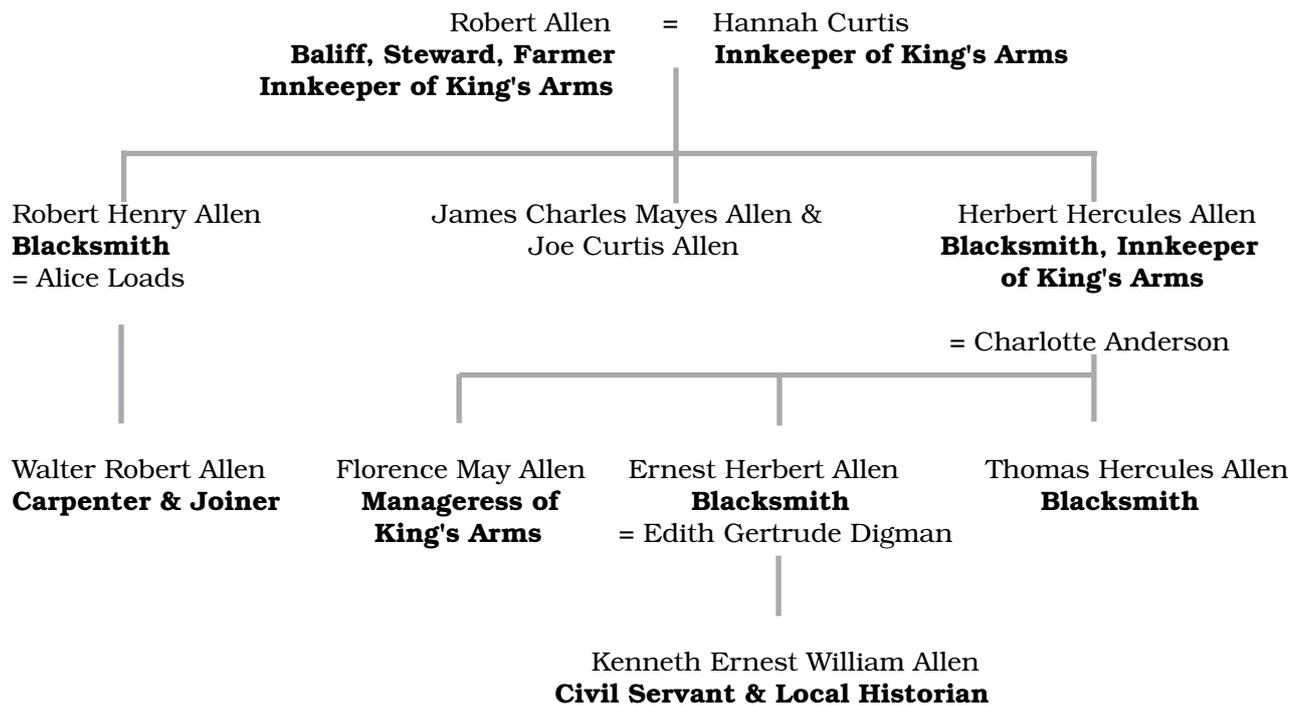


Figure 1. An outline family tree showing occupations.

Robert and Hannah had arrived in Blakeney when they were in their early 40s and lived to be hosts at the King’s Arms for twenty years before Robert died in December 1881. This was barely three months after his eldest son, a blacksmith, died aged 34, leaving Alice a widow with three young children, the youngest, Walter Robert, being no more than a toddler. Hannah continued looking after the King’s Arms presumably with the help of her son, Herbert Hercules who took over the license when she died in 1884. In 1901 it was his daughter Florence who was manageress of the inn with her two bachelor brothers Ernest and Thomas living there. Herbert still held the license, but had moved just a few doors away in Westgate (Pigg) Street next door to Walter.

All the key players in the family have now been introduced and their kinship and occupations are shown in Figure 1.

The family connection with the King’s Arms came to an end in 1901. The new license was granted to Henry Turner in March and in the following year, and almost to the day, it was taken over by William E King, the recently retired coast guard who had spent much of his service in Morston.¹⁴

Village Innkeepers

Long family associations with the inns and beerhouses in Blakeney were not uncommon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Robert Allen and his family had been at the King’s Arms, John Pye and John Bowles had been landlords of their respective inns, see Table 2.

William Hooke, coxswain of the first Blakeney RNLI lifeboat was briefly at the Ship Inn from 1861 till 1871. He combined the roles of innkeeper with tug master, although in the latter years it was his wife who held the license. Meanwhile at the top of the High Street, William Wells had married Sarah Sands, the widow of the previous landlord of the Calthorpe Arms, and moved in. By 1871 the couple had moved down the High Street to the quay and into the Crown and Anchor. With them on both occasions was her father, Richard Mayes, the old Harbour Master now aged 90 and long since retired.

Another series of family connections is shown by the brothers George and Herbert Long who later, in the twentieth century, took over from their respective in-laws, Anthony Brown and Sarah Vurley. They were operating across the street from one another and only a stone’s throw from Mariners Hill where they had been born, the sons of George and Catherine Long. George senior was a fisherman but probably better remembered as the coxswain of the lifeboat, following

Date	Anchor	Calthorpe Arms	Crown and Anchor	Kings Arms	The Ship	The White Horse
1861	John Bowles	William Wells		Robert Allen	Wm H Hooke	John Pye
1871	John Bowles	Thomas Mitchell	William Wells	Robert Allen	Joseph Pyman	John Pye
1881	John Bowles	Thomas Mitchell	James Pinchen	Robert Allen	Thomas Pyman	John Pye
1891	John Overman	Thomas Cozens	James Pinchen	Herley Allen	W Ezra Bond	John Forsdick
1901	Anthony Brown	Laura McMahon	Benjamin Curle	Florence Allen	W Ezra Bond	John Scott
1910	Anthony Brown	Emma Coe	John Curle	William King	Ezra Bond	Sarah Vurley
	Closed 1953	Closed 1968	Closed 1920		Closed 1967	

Table 2. Blakeney licensees recorded at the time of the decennial censuses between 1861 and 1901, then in Valuation Listing for 1910, followed by dates of closure for those that gave up the struggle. The Jolly Farmers is ignored because of its brief existence.

on from William Hooke. Herbert or Herbert Charles Long, to give him his full name was of course better known as Charlie Long, husband of Susie, last Harbour Master and last coxswain of the Blakeney Lifeboat.¹⁵

Village Blacksmiths

Village self-sufficiency was never in doubt during the nineteenth century. All the necessary crafts and trades were represented serving the needs of both the agricultural and maritime trades. Blacksmiths were plentiful, judging from the individuals named in the census returns (Table 3). There were general smiths, tin smiths, braziers working with brass, iron bar moulders working in the foundry, journeymen passing through and so on. Many names occur only once in the censuses, as there was a continual turnover with the in-migrants filling the gaps and keeping the smithies working, then there are the names of young village apprentices who generally moved away once their apprenticeships had been served.

What the censuses do not reveal are the locations of the smithies or the nature of the work undertaken and there is no mention of a farrier. Why did the number of blacksmiths increase towards the end of the century when the maritime trade was in terminal decline? Did the increasing mechanisation of farming provide an opportunity to use their skills? And where are the photographs of the blacksmiths or farriers at work which most villages seem to be able to produce?

Fortunately the Directories provide some answers, for Blakeney there were three families that dominated the scene from the 1830s to the 1930s namely Pond, Allen and Smith.

The Allen family had two sets of brothers that were village blacksmiths, Robert Henry and Herbert Hercules being the first, followed by Ernest and Thomas, the sons of Herbert. Their collective working years began in 1861 with Robert and continued into the twentieth century until Ernest, his nephew, retired; Thomas having moved away earlier to live in Norwich. When Robert Henry arrived, William Starling Pond was the established smith, while Ernest Allen, the last blacksmith of the family, witnessed the rise of James Curry Smith. For a short while Samuel Pyke appeared to be in competition with Herbert but he died early in 1901, aged 42; perhaps it was his business that Curry Smith stepped into.

The Pond family

In 1864 William Starling Pond, another relatively young blacksmith, was running his own business at the same time as Robert Allen. Whereas Robert was just starting out, William had inherited the family business set up by his grandfather, William Pond. This business had been in existence since the 1820s at least, when the blacksmith's shop in the High Street, together with several messuages, were claimed then awarded to William Pond at the time of the Inclosure.² He listed his business in every directory published between 1830 and 1854 where his services were described at various times as a general smith, brazier, tin smith, and ironmonger.

Year	Name	Age	Occupation	Place of birth
1841	Samuel Bell	50	blacksmith	
	Robert Mitchell	30	smith	
	William Parson	65	smith	
	William Pond	55	smith	
	Thomas Spence	80	smith	
1851	William Lee	49	smith	Hempstead
	Daniel Pitcher	30	brazier	Hunworth
	William Pond	65	blacksmith	Langham
	William S Pond	16	smith learner	Blakeney
1861	Robert Allen	18	blacksmith	Coltishall
	James Earl	28	brazier	Foulsham
	William Lee	58	blacksmith	Hempstead
1871	George Abel	36	blacksmith	Wells
	Robert Allen	25	blacksmith	Coltishall
	Herbert Allen	15	blacksmith	Ipswich
	Joshua Dew	19	apprentice	Blakeney
	William S Pond	36	blacksmith	Blakeney
	William Savage	15	apprentice	Burnham
	Frederick Wisker	21	journeyman blacksmith	Blakeney
1881	Robert Allen	37	blacksmith	Coltishall
	Herbert Allen	25	smith	Ipswich
	Albert Brighty	26	blacksmith	Mattishall
	George W Cooke	39	fireman blacksmith	Langham
	Walter J Hurrell	18	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Richard Newbegin	19	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Samuel Pyke	22	blacksmith	Morston
	William Warman	28	iron moulder	Norwich
1891	Herbert Allen	36	blacksmith/innkeeper	Ipswich
	Albert Brighty	36	blacksmith	Mattishall
	Robert M Frost	20	blacksmith	Walsingham
	James Jarvis	22	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Samuel Pyke	32	blacksmith	Cley
	Edward Shepherd	26	blacksmith	Walsingham
	Curry Smith	23	blacksmith	Stiffkey
	Samuel Thompson	44	brazier	Blakeney
	William Warman	37	iron moulder	Norwich
1901	Herbert Allen	45	blacksmith	Ipswich
	Ernest Allen	22	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Thomas Allen	20	blacksmith	Blakeney
	James E Bond	20	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Albert Brighty	46	blacksmith	Matishall
	Horace Brighty	21	blacksmith	Blakeney
	Samuel Gotts	19	blacksmith	Morston
	Isaac Mann	18	iron moulder	Blakeney
	Edward Shepherd	36	blacksmith	Walsingham
	James Smith	34	blacksmith	Stiffkey

Table 3. Blakeney blacksmiths recorded in the censuses. Parish of birth was not recorded in 1841 and Samuel Pyke was obviously confused.



Photograph 1. Thomas Hercules Allen is on the extreme left, flying high over the hurdles which are not too dissimilar to the Norfolk five bar gate.

Photograph provided by Paul Allen Barker.

elusive crane on the quay that is only ever briefly glimpsed in early postcards? Page after page and month by month, it tells the same story. Finally, for January 1880, there is an entry that reads "Rent of Premises at £10 up to 11th October 1879". At this stage, the Allens were just tenants of their smithy, but where was it situated?

The continuity of the family businesses was suddenly jeopardised when Robert Henry and his father died within a few months of each other. Herbert was effectively left to help his aged mother at the King's Arms and taking control at the blacksmith shop besides having a very young family of his own. It was not until 1901 that the names of Ernest and Thomas, his sons, appear as young 20 year-old blacksmiths. Indeed, Herbert is never glimpsed again in the records, only his wife as Mrs H Allen widow in 1910.²⁰

Ernest and Thomas were keen sportsmen and have been captured in many team photographs, particularly cricket and football, while the agility of Thomas at the annual sport's day was demonstrated as he flew over the hurdles (Photograph 1). This continuing interest in sports was maintained by Ernest who was an Honorary Secretary of the Regatta Sports in August 1914 when the newspapers reported "This old established North Norfolk aquatic fixture was duly brought off in most depressing circumstances. Owing to the national peril, but little interest was taken, and with the wet weather this evaporated".¹⁸ Nonetheless, first prize of a pig was won by M Long on the "hori-

zontal greased pole" and J Bond took second prize with 10lb of beef. And a programme of athletic events was carried out on the golf marsh, so far as the weather permitted.

Shortly after 1901, Thomas seems to have forsaken Blakeney and moved to Norwich where his wife Mildred had a confectionery business. Did he see the change looming and move off to better prospects? Although they spent most of their working life in Norwich, Thomas and Mildred returned after the second world war to spend their retirement in Blakeney living in Miranda Cottage in Little Lane.¹⁹

James Curry Smith

Meanwhile Albert Brighty had arrived in Blakeney in the 1880s as a young blacksmith and was later joined by his brother-in-law, James Curry Smith. Both men had sons who also became blacksmiths and it was not long before both families were living next door to each other in the yard adjacent to Russell's bakery at the top of the High Street. The yard has been known at various times as Nurse's Yd, Smith's Yd and even Curry's Yd. Jane Nurse was the owner of the properties while the Brighty and Smith families were her tenants.

Then in 1916, Kelly's Directory lists the last of the village blacksmiths, Ernest Allen and (James) Curry Smith and it is their smithies that we know more about, first the earliest Ordnance Survey map shows where the smithies were located and then later from some rather surprising sources which clarified both ownership and occupation.

The Twentieth Century Domesday Book^{20, 21 & 22}

Ernest Allen's son, Kenneth, was born just as Lloyd George was introducing new measures to tax land in his 1909 Budget - enacted as the Finance (1909-1910) Act. The significant proposal in this act was a tax on increases in the value of land and property that had accrued from improvements made by central and local government. Before an assessment could be made, it was necessary to identify the owner(s) of every piece of land in the kingdom. For only then could it be surveyed in order to fix a basic valuation dated as of 30th April 1909, from which increases would be calculated.

Firstly, Valuation Books²⁰ were prepared with information provided by the Inland Revenue Department and landowners.^{23 & 24} Each piece of land, with or without buildings on it, was given an unique (assessment) number and the owner(s) and occupant(s) were identified. Altogether there were 40 columns available for facts and values for each piece of land.

Subsequently, this information was checked, amended and expanded by surveyors when they undertook their inspections of every piece of land. All this data is recorded in a second set of books, the Field Books together with on-site valuations.²¹ They were also armed with the relevant Ordnance Survey map and authority to inspect on demand.

The surveyors described each property, noting its condition, drawing sketches and plans to clarify any detail. Farmyard buildings were particularly noted. The date of inspection was recorded as well as any subsequent changes in ownership or tenancy. Valuations were made by the surveyor, following the inspection.

The entry for each assessment covers four pages and there were a 100 to each Field Book and seven Field Books for Blakeney.²¹ Additionally, each property or piece of land was outlined with a colour wash on the most recent and largest scale Ordnance Survey Map available. These maps serve as visual indices to all the assessments and without them the Valuation Books and Field Books are unfathomable.

The ensuing result was one of much confusion and open to many interpretations and abuses. Not surprisingly, it all came to an end when the Finance (1909-1910) Act was repealed in 1920. However, much of the resulting paper work and records have survived.

The Valuation Books have become known as Domesday Books and are to be found in County Record Offices, while the Field Books and accompanying maps (Record Plans)²² are deposited in The National Archives at Kew, London. Together, they are a major legacy providing a key source of information for local historians

and many others including geographers, economists and sociologists. For the very first time in British history it is possible to know exactly who owned what and who was living where.

This is the real Domesday. Once the 1911 census books are released in 2011 and we are freed from the 100 year rule regarding confidentiality, the impact and full potential of this resource will be truly awesome.

All is revealed on the Quay

The information that flows from this Act allows the smithies to be positively linked with specific blacksmiths and to follow more closely some of the changes that were occurring along the quay as the harbour ceased trading and the merchants sold up and left. For the inns, there are telling comments in the Field Books.

The quay-side had long been the arena of the merchants with their houses, barns, granaries, warehouses and offices dominating the front and the smithies strategically tucked in amongst them. It was the commercial hub of the village, where the rural hinterland interacted with maritime trade. For the blacksmiths, they were admirably placed, coal for their forges and foundry was on hand, ships and lighters were moored nearby and of course they were also well placed to deal with horses and carts on the flat. Likewise, virtually every inn and beerhouse in the village was near the quay, except for the Calthorpe Arms at the top of the High Street.

A list of the smithies, inns and Allen homes that were sited on the quay, or close by, has been extracted from the Valuation Book and is shown here in Table 4 while Figure 3 highlights the same properties captured on the accompanying map.

The smithies of Ernest Allen and Curry Smith can be pinpointed with certainty; Ernest owned the premises at the bottom of the High Street (Photograph 2) and rented another from Lord Calthorpe, while Curry Smith according to the Valuation Books rented a shop from C J Ash, although the Field Book subsequently identified it as a "small smiths".

The blacksmith premises in Westgate Street bounded the King's Arms on the north and west, and was an impressive sized brick and tile smithy with a large yard far surpassing any others in the village. It extended southwards reaching the property that had been Herbert Hercules Allen's home, but was now occupied by his widow, Charlotte, whilst next door to her was Walter Allen's home, with his capacious carpenter's workshop to the rear.

Walter is still remembered by the older people in the village if only for the barometer that was on a wall beside his house in Westgate Street (Photograph 3); as time passes and memories fade it is often forgotten he was Ernie

Ass. No. Value	Description of Premises	Occupier	Owner	Extent	Gross
35	Blacksmiths shop	Ernest Allen	Lord Calthorpe	30p 11y	£180
36	Cottage	Walter Allen	Walter Allen	16p 23y	£235
43	The Ship Inn	Ezra Bond	Morgans and Co	20p 27y	£801
47	Crown & Anchor	John Curle	Augustus Hill	5p 27y	£400
58	Granaries	Clifford Turner	C J Ash	1r 13p 21y	£350
63	King's Arms	William King	Morgan and Co	18p 6y	£401
78	The White Horse	Mrs Vurley	Bullard and Son		£500
81	Shop	Curry Smith	C J Ash	1p 27y	£ 15
121	The Anchor	Anthony Brown	Lacon and Co	5p 12y	£450
266	Cottage	Mrs H Allen	W Starling exors	3p	£ 61
267	Cottage	Mrs H Allen	W Starling exors		£ 56
603	Smithy	E H Allen	E H Allen	3p 21y	£ 22

Table 4. Summary of Valuation Book entries for the smithies, inns and Allen properties sited on the quay or nearby. The extent of each assessment was measured in acres (a), roods (r), perches (p) and yards (y).

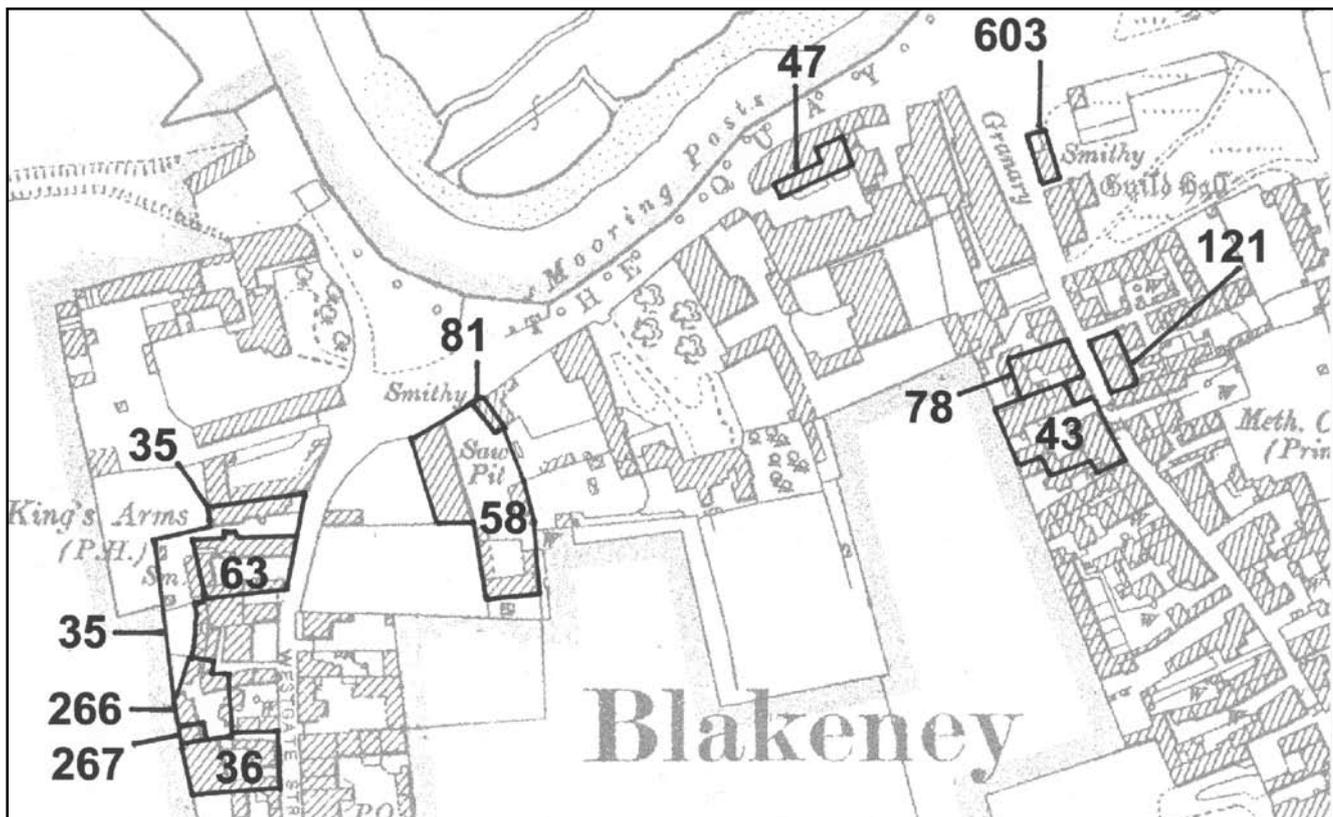


Figure 3. Map of quay side showing location of properties assessed in 1910. Navigate between Table 4 and this map by using the assessment numbers to locate relevant information. The 1907 OS 1:2500 was used by the surveyors, north is at the top of the page.

Allen’s cousin. His building of the UCL laboratory on Blakeney Point in 1913, is recalled on page 69.

Returning to the entry in the Valuation Book, the surveyor subsequently found on arrival for his inspection that Charlotte Allen was no longer there. 266 and 267 on the map were now the property of Augustus Hill and occupied by his tenants W Long and J Forsdick respectively.

James Curry Smith’s small shop is interesting because two sets of auction papers provide descriptions of it, first in 1906²⁵ when Charles Johnson Temple-Lynes sold his estate, then again in 1929²⁶ when the Ash estate was put up for auction. In 1906 it was part of Lot 6 which Page and Turner rented as yearly tenants. The auction details go on to describe “The Blacksmiths shop erected on this site belongs to Messrs. Page

and Turner and the Purchaser will have to pay in addition to his Purchase money, the sum of £12"; the additional money was for the shop as this was not included in the auction.²⁵

Details of the sale were duly noted in the Field Book, then in 1929 the smithy was part of Lot 8 and described as "On the East side of the yard are Capital Blacksmith's Shop, Newly erected Shoeing Traverse with a small piece of ground adjoining, as now in occupation of Mr Curry Smith (a yearly tenant) at a rental of £5.4.0 per annum". He was to have tenancy till the following May, 1930.²⁶

All is revealed – The Inns

The King's Arms, for so long the family home of the Allens, was described by the surveyor in the Field Book as old and dilapidated. Outside there was a covered yard and an old flint and tile empty cottage, cart shed and stabling and store sheds. Most of these formed the southern range of buildings that have now been demolished making way for the car park. The inn was owned by Morgan of Norwich, as was the Ship in the High Street.



Photograph 2. Ernest Allen's Smithy (603 on the map) at the bottom of the High Street with Clifford Turner's new office towering behind. Photograph from Perry Long's Collection



Photograph 3. Looking south along Westgate Street early 1900s. Walter Allen's barometer is just visible on the right, attached to the wall leading to his workshop at the rear of his house. Photograph from G Cubitt's Collection

The Field Book records that the Anchor was bought by Lacon and Co of Norwich in February 1903, together with an adjoining five roomed cottage, three rooms being upstairs and two on the ground floor. The three storied Crown and Anchor on the quay was owned by the Blakeney merchant, Augustus Hill; it formed part of a larger property subsequently auctioned in 1915 which was later demolished to make way for the Blakeney Hotel.²⁷

The oldest surviving public house in the village, The White Horse, was owned by Bullard & Son of Norwich. The full description in the Field Book declared it to be an old brick, flint and tiled two-storied building with stuccoed front and in very good repair. All downstairs and upstairs rooms were listed, in particular, the six bedrooms were noted as very small and it was further noted that outside there was a detached newly built, one storey brick, flint and tiled tea-room, fully licensed, and also a stable and cart shed with loft over. The surveyor concluded "Best place in the village, but very little trade". It says it all!

Since 1910 the White Horse has expanded considerably, acquiring property to the north and south, which has been subsequently either incorporated or demolished.

The assessments outlined above demonstrate that the wealth of detail found in the Field Books includes information on recent sales (together with prices), details of new owners and occupiers, the style of property with number and arrangement of rooms, comments on condition that were relevant to value, besides identifying details of trades and retail outlets previously listed simply as shops. It builds an intimate and detailed picture of Blakeney that is now beyond recall.

Adapting for Survival

Blakeney in the 1920s was a very different village to the one that Robert and Hannah Allen would have known when they arrived sixty years earlier. Gone was the bustle along the quay-side. Gone were the mariners and seamen frequenting and lodging in the inns, and gone were the endless lines of horse drawn wagons and carts attending the ships and lighters moored along the quay. Also absent were all the young men from the village who had lost their lives in the Great War and those who had emigrated to start afresh somewhere else. The numbers of people living in the village were not too different to the numbers recorded for 1800.

By the 1930s cars and buses were regularly bringing small numbers of visitors and holiday makers to enjoy the sporting and leisure facilities of the Haven, together with the comforts provided by the Blakeney and Manor Hotels.

The hospitality trade had taken a new direction, even if the new Hotels had to close for the winter months.

Likewise, the blacksmiths were adapting to changing times and Ernest Allen, last of the Allen family blacksmiths, was in a commercial directory as a "hot water engineer". Curry Smith however, now located in New Road, Blakeney, was listed in bold as "Smith, James Curry and Son blacksmiths, agricultural and general smiths, pump work, hot and cold water engineers and sheet metal workers; ornamental work forged".

The activities of these blacksmiths are well within memory of the older residents today and they are recalled with some regard as Curry Smith and Ernie Allen. Curry died Xmas Eve 1940 and was succeeded by his only surviving son, Herbert, who carried on at the new forge on the New Road until the 1950s. He was the last blacksmith in the village, Ernie Allen having retired earlier.

Both of these blacksmiths had reinvented themselves as plumbers. Consequently many houses built along New Road and Morston Road can attest to running hot and cold water, whether it be upstairs in bathrooms for the adventurous or downstairs for the more cautious who remained to be convinced about "such newfangled installations". In his own home, Ernie Allen demonstrated his ingenuity for he designed and installed a lift for his wife, the very first in Blakeney.²⁸

In late May 1948, at a Ministry of Health Inquiry held in Blakeney, the Walsingham RDC applied for consent to borrow £525 to maintain partial water supplies in the village pending the installation of the Council's own system.²⁹ It was anticipated that this would be achieved within five years. The private water installation referred to was the work and property of Ernie Allen supplying 42 premises, using some 4,000 gallons a day. The Public Analyst declared the quality to be very satisfactory.

Many may well recall the water tower standing in the British Legion drift and although no longer there, the pipes laid by Ernie Allen to the houses nearby are still functioning today with Anglian Water flowing through them. What an accolade!

Conclusions

Not a long Allen presence, essentially the generation that arrived and three more, four generations in all that experienced a period of significant change. Of the inns that had been open when they first arrived only two now survive. Beerhouses no longer exist and a new breed of hotels have appeared catering for a different clientele. For the blacksmiths it was



Photograph 4. The site of the Allen family foundry with a close-up of the commemorative plaque above the shop entrance.

even more telling. The nature of their trade had changed and they had to adapt in order to survive. At the end, Ernie Allen and Herbert Smith generally worked alone, employing extra help only when needed. Herbert certainly would not contemplate taking on apprentices.³⁰ When these two blacksmiths retired, that was the end of an era. All that remains to remind us of blacksmiths is a small plaque on the shop front of 'Stratton Long Marine' recognising the site of the Allen family foundry (Photograph 4).

If Kenneth Allen's maternal family are introduced into the equation, then the balance would be altered and extend back to the opening of the nineteenth century for his mother, Edith Digman, was the daughter of Alfred Digman master mariner. Her grandfather and great grandfather, both Henry Digmans, were seaman and fisherman respectively and the family appear to have been of eighteenth century Irish extraction. Edith had been a school mistress and with her knowledge Kenneth would have had an even greater awareness of Blakeney's past and the future it was facing. Nor would he have needed Domesday information, he was living it and unlike us, probably knew the answers.

It is a tribute to the enterprise and endeavour of the Allens that this account can conclude noting the legacy they have left the village. The King's Arms is still in existence, albeit as a Freehouse, and Kenneth Allen's researches on the history of the Glaven Ports, and Blakeney in particular, are safely deposited locally in the History Centre where it may be freely enjoyed by all.

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