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THE BOOK OF HEMPNALL

A TREASURE TROVE OF HISTORY

Maureen Cubitt

The village of Hempnall is a large scattered village in the north-east corner of the Hundred of Depwade in south Norfolk, about ten miles south of Norwich, at the source of the River Tas. A large number of artefacts have been discovered representing human activity from almost every period of history from the Neolithic age to the present. It was once a centre of commerce, holding a weekly market and annual fairs.

In the past, the village was principally an agrarian community. Situated within the wood-pasture area of south Norfolk, the land favoured mixed farming. There were many woodland related trades and most old houses are timber-framed, many given a brick skin in the eighteenth century.

There was never a residential lord of the manor or influential landowner to dominate the village. Politicians and preachers visited the place, knowing that free-thinking, enterprising people would listen. John Wesley visited in 1759 and preached under a great oak tree. Spinning and weaving were once important but by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the villagers had diversified so that there was a multiplicity of trades and small shops. Ten inns, taverns or beer houses are recorded.

This is a story about people within an historical landscape. It is about a community that throughout the years has worked together to make things happen for the common good. It is also about murders, thefts, riots, assaults and very interesting eccentric people. Hempnall, with its remarkable variety of sources, invites and inspires exploration.

Maureen Cubitt spent her childhood in Hempnall and attended the village school for a while. Her maiden name was Stammers; a family which first settled in the village in 1841. She was a teacher in Norwich until retiring in 2000. She is a graduate of the University of East Anglia. For over thirty years, she has searched for archaeological evidence and drawn together information from early documents and newspapers.



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