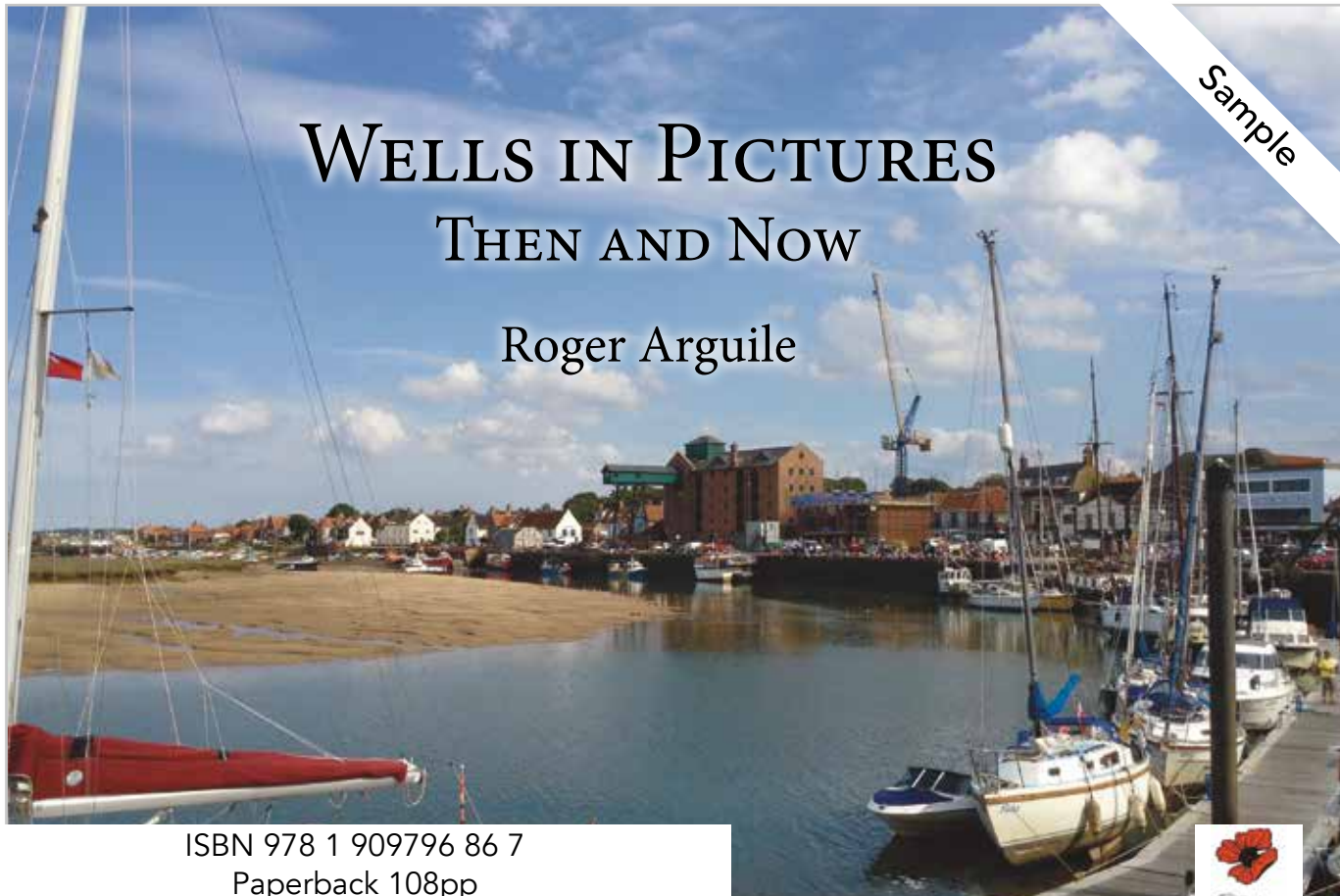


Sample

# WELLS IN PICTURES THEN AND NOW

Roger Arguile



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Poppyland Publishing is pleased to announce *Wells in Pictures: Then and Now* by Roger Arguile.

Wells-next-the-Sea has become a much admired holiday resort. Its character is, in good part, due to its having been for a long time a port, fishery and industrial base. Now known for its shellfish—crabs, lobsters and, of course, whelks, fishing has been a regular and important trade throughout its history. In the 19th century malting became a huge industrial and commercial enterprise until its collapse in 1929. Agricultural related industries continued until the 1990s when the coasting shipping ceased.

In the past fifty years many of the signs of its industrial past have disappeared, apart from the Granary built by F & G Smith in 1904 to store and facilitate the export of barley and malt. This building still dominates the quayside—today providing high-class accommodation with fine views over the estuary. It represents both the old and new. In this book the author has gathered together a collection of photographs from the past and present that puts the town into its historical perspective. Buildings survive because they are used for new purposes, sometimes retaining evidence of their former life, sometimes not. This book provides the reader with some of those clues if they wish to look.

### **About the author**

Roger Arguile has lived in Wells since 2007 though his connections go back much further. A well known local historian, his other books for Poppyland include, *Wells next the Sea: A Little History* and *Wells next the Sea: A Small Port in a Wide World*.



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Map of Wells-next-the-Sea (OpenStreetMap contributors [CC BY-SA 2.0]).

## Fishing



*Whelkers at the turn of the century by Tugboat Yard, East Quay.*



Although the fishing industry has left few buildings today, it seems sensible to explain how the present fishing fleet came into being.

Wells was a fishing port from, at least, the 14<sup>th</sup> century. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, its men were bringing back salted and dried cod from Iceland. The herring fishery, dominated by the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> century came and went. Oysters were dredged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But it was the whelk fishing which came to prominence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Initially casting over the side, one at a time, a system developed of attaching the pots to each other, in shanks of eighteen or more with an anchor at each end, a 'Dan' buoy on the surface so that they could be hauled up one by one.

As long as rope was made from a natural fibre it would easily rot in sea water so both pots and rope would be coated in tar. A pot of tar gently boiling in the whelk sheds was a normal sight.

Hauling by hand was hard and may have been the cause of the large numbers of septic hands treated by the hospital in the 1930s. It was for this reason that petrol driven engines, often taken from cars, were introduced. Eventually, hydraulic hauling would take the strain, though pots still had to be lifted onto a steel table to be emptied, rebaited and stacked ready to be dropped back into the sea. Undersized whelks would be dropped back over the side, together with the odd hermit crab, while the whelks' natural predator, the much hated starfish, would be left on the deck to dry out and die.

*Bringing bags of whelks ashore at the East End before World War I.*

## FISHING

Pots were once made of hazel and weighed down with iron bases called 'music' because they resembled musical staves. Later these were replaced by iron frames, supplied by local foundries and blacksmiths. The pots would be bound with tarred rope. Their manufacture and repair was a routine occupation for fishermen when on shore. (Modern pots are square, made of plastic and are weighed down with concrete.)



*left: Jack, Billy and Jimmy Cox mending whelk pots.*

*below left: 'Gully', Reg and Rolly Grimes at sea sieving whelks.*

*below right: Alan Cox dropping re-baited pots into the sea.*



## WELLS IN PICTURES



above: Whelks in boxes ready to be carted to the factory in Kings Lynn (Arguile).

right: Local sentiment expressed in the Eastern Daily Press to the European Commission's food hygiene directive in 2000. The caption read, 'So I say ter Francois here if yure so keen to shove yer snout into the Norfolk whelk industry, why not do it properly?' (Archant).

opposite left: 'Loady' Cox with a basket of whelks (Tuck).

opposite right: Stanley Frary boiling whelks (McNab-Grieve).

The whelks would be sieved and bagged at sea, then, brought ashore to be boiled in large boilers in the whelk sheds at the east end of the town. This procedure was judged to be unhygienic under European regulations and the whelks had to be taken to a facility in Kings Lynn. The newspaper cartoon (below) reflects the attitude of local fishermen to this change in process having been used to dealing with them for many years.

Bags were eventually replaced by plastic boxes, which were easier to handle, could be lifted, stacked five or six high by hydraulic lift, and driven away on a flatbed lorry.







WELLS IN PICTURES



*'William Edward' and 'Sally' with the Grimes and Jordan families unloading 1960 (Jordan).*

## FISHING

The boats themselves had scarcely changed in decades. Built of wood, they were powered by a single lug sail and oars. If the wind died, the crew could beach the boat, walk home and go back for it on the next tide. When engines began to be fitted, it meant rebuilding the stern post, however, this improvement gave greater range and reliability.

The next step was to use retired Liverpool class lifeboats, such as the *Ann Isabella* and the *Spero II*. Still built of wood, they were stronger and had more powerful engines. They lasted fifteen or more years before the next stage of development: larger boats made of different materials.



*The 'William Edward' built in 1950 in full sail.*



*Former lifeboat Spero II with whelks being unloaded onto East Quay.*

## WELLS IN PICTURES



*Cortina, one of the Faversham trawlers.*



*The Blucher, a GRP boat made from a mould of the William Edward.*

22     *John Nudds' boat, Isabelle Kathleen.*

Boats looking for a different catch were several trawlers from Kent, the *Romulus*, the *Remus*, *Cortina* and the *Faustus*, in search of sprats and rays. Though no bigger than the whelk boats, they were enclosed and operated in pairs—sailing side by side. With a trawl net strung between them, they brought in a huge numbers of the small fish. The catches were sent to Grimsby to be made into fish meal. Long before he came to Wells, this system had gained its inventor, and one of the skippers, Alf Leggett, the MBE\*. The four trawlers stayed in Wells after the sprats disappeared.

Wooden boats would soon become a minority. The *William Edward's* hull was used as a mould for a GRP (Glass Reinforced Plastic or fiberglass) boat, the *Blucher*. John Nudds was the first local fisherman to buy a GRP boat of new design, the *Isabelle Kathleen*. New designs were made possible by the use of this new material and, eventually, boats with twin hulls vessel would appear, including the much larger *Nell Diana*.

\* Member of the Order of the British Empire.

*New generation of fishing boat the Nell Diana which arrived in 2020 (Arguile).*



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