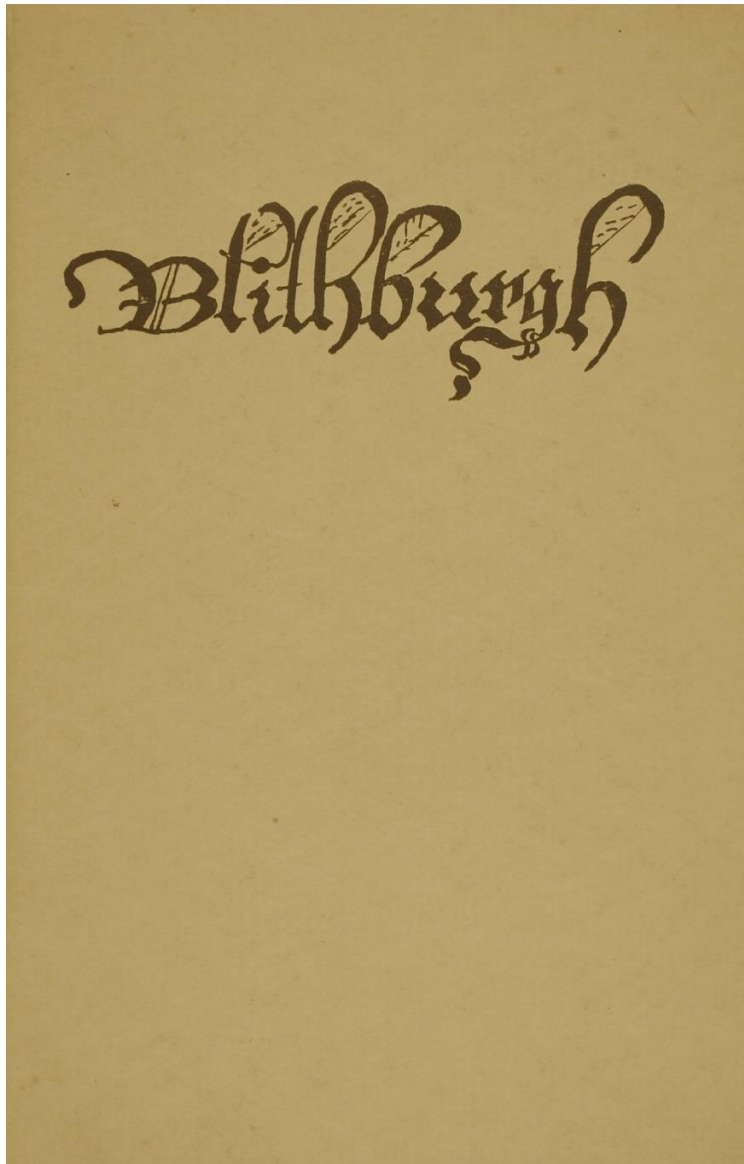


AN INDEX
to

M. Janet Becker, *Blythburgh. An Essay on the Village and the Church.* (Halesworth, 1935)



Alan Mackley
Blythburgh
2020

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Janet Becker (1904-1953) was the daughter of Harry Becker, painter of the farming community and resident in the Blythburgh area from 1915 to his death in 1928, and his artist wife Georgina who taught drawing at St Felix school, Southwold, from 1916 to 1923.

Janet appears to have attended St Felix school for a while and was also taught in London, thanks to a generous godmother. A note-book she started at the age of 19 records her then as a London University student. It was in London, during a visit to Southwark Cathedral, that the sight of a recently-cleaned monument inspired a life-long interest in the subject. Through a friend's introduction she was able to train under Professor Ernest Tristram of the Royal College of Art, a pioneer in the conservation of medieval wall paintings. Janet developed a career as cleaner and renovator of church monuments which took her widely across England and Scotland. She claimed to have washed the faces of many kings, aristocrats and gentlemen.

After her father's death Janet lived with her mother at The Old Vicarage, Wangford. Janet became a respected Suffolk historian. Her wide historical and conservation interests are demonstrated by membership of the St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocesan Advisory Committee on the Care of Churches, and she was a Council member of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. She also belonged to the Suffolk Preservation Society.

Janet Becker's first historical study was published in 1930: *Rochester Bridge: 1387-1856. A history of its early years compiled from the wardens' accounts.* *Blythburgh* (83 pp.) was to follow in 1935. She edited *Story of Southwold* in 1948. She also published a volume of verse: *Flowers by Post and Other Verse* (1944) and two novels. *Ploughshare into Pylon* (1939) describes battles of the 1920s and 30s between rural preservationists and encroaching road improvers, the motor car, speculative builders and the electricity pylons of the title. *David without Jonathan* was published in 1951, having first appeared in the United States in 1950 under the title *The Thirsty Oak*.

Janet Becker described her Blythburgh work as an essay, not a history. It is true that as a history, the book is limited in scope, concentrating on the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, during the lordships of the Hopton and Brooke families. And some of the author's conclusions must be reassessed in the light of later research. Nevertheless, in reflecting the study of many original documents and a wide range of other sources, *Blythburgh* remains a valuable work and should be read by anyone with an interest in the village.

A collection of Janet Becker's papers is held by the Suffolk Record Office (Lowestoft) under the reference 823.

Janet Becker was buried with her parents at Blythburgh and there is a memorial to her in the church.

Alan Mackley, Blythburgh, 2020

Blythburgh

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Addendum

A copy of *Blythburgh*, once owned by Ernest Read Cooper (1865-1948), and in the possession of the indexer, contains a number of press cuttings. The following, by Cooper from *The East Anglian Daily Times*, is of interest.

EAST ANGLIAN MISCELLANY

No. 10,720 BLYTHBURGH DISBURSEMENTS

The following notes from 'Blithburgh Old Book' are from Gardner's MSS. In a copy of his History formerly in my possession.

1547. The freestone of Blithburgh Cross was sold to Will. Crowe for 8 pence.

1549. Pd to Stephen Popull and Wm. Knights for making the Bryge, 7. 6. 8.

To Thomas Appleby for Timber for the Bryge, 7. 0. 0.

to Carpenters for seting up the Bryge, 1. 14. 0.

1576. Pd for the Town Bushel and the Weights to ye Clerk of ye Market, 8d.

for making clean the pinnacle of the steeple, 9d.

to Harman when he took the clock and chymes, 2d.

1568. pd to Crysmus for making the Pillory, 4. 4.

pd to Carver for mending the Sherehouse, 4d.

1584. Pd to Myles Colman for setten up of the Gallows, 2. 0.

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