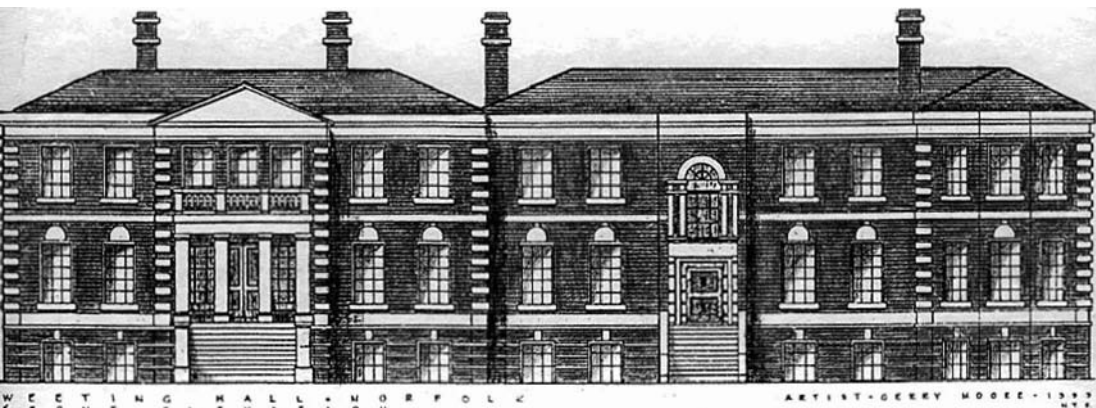


# WEETING WORTHIES



WEETING HALL - NORFOLK

ARTIST - GERRY MOORE - 1992

by

**Gerry Moore & Anthony Twist**

**LOCAL HISTORY SERIES  
WEETING HISTORY GROUP**

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## *Introduction*

**This publication began as a booklet in the Weeting Local History Series; it grew into a fully-fledged book as research uncovered the story of the people associated with the village. It has been said that the wealthy leave a heavy footprint on history and the lowly barely a shadow. This was certainly the case regarding the past inhabitants of Weeting.**

The story of Weeting goes back to a time out of mind, when man had discovered how to use tools made from flint and mined the area known as Grimes Graves. Archaeological explorations have shown that a sizable industry was established for the mining of flints, to satisfy not only a home market but for export to mainland Europe. No records exit from this period so our story starts from the time of the Norman invasion and that thorn in the side of King William, Hereward the Wake.

The great survey of the country carried out in 1086, known

as the Domesday Book, lists Wetinga (Weeting) as a small settlement of only six people. From this time records of people and their actions began to be made though land and property ownership, grants, wills etc. Patronage of the Christian church resulted in those institutions amassing great wealth, thus creating a need for bookkeeping and records. It is from these documents that much of our local history is written.

The arrival of Lord Mountrath in Weeting and the building of the Hall in the 18th century transformed the area and by 1777 most of the village was in his possession. This created what became known as the Weeting Hall estate. When Mountrath died the estate passed to his cousin Lord Bradford; he sold it to John Julius Angerstein and thus began the ninety-year occupation by his family.

All the owners of the Hall estate until its demolition in 1954 had interesting lives, some were worthy, several distinctly unworthy; all however are worthy of note. These people, all wealthy, were the stars of the show, but the supporting cast, the workers, have not been forgotten; all have a story to tell. Some families have lived in the village for generations, others are comparative newcomers. Some names may have been missed, for that we apologise.

As this volume is published as a popular history, references and notes have been omitted. All the research however is fully referenced and students wishing to extend their studies are invited to contact the Weeting History Group.

## *Hereward the Wake*

Every Englishman has heard of William of Normandy and the invasion of his country in 1066. Many will be aware of the resistance fighter called Hereward the Wake (c.1032–c.1072) who gave William so many problems in the east of the country.

The life of William, being the conqueror is well recorded; but what of Hereward, who was defeated by the Normans? There is no doubt that he existed and was a thorn in the side of William during his occupation of eastern England, particularly in the fens and the city of Ely. Records of his exploits are scarce and it was the Victorian writer, Charles Kingsley who was largely responsible for creating the Hereward myth, with his book *Hereward the Wake* published in 1866. The novel was inspired by his study of a twelfth century manuscript *Gesta Hewwardi Saxonis*, written by a monk called Richard. It recorded the exploits of an outlaw called Hereward and it was based on the

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recollections of elderly veterans of the Ely campaign and a lot of creative imagination.

According to Kingsley, Hereward was of noble birth, the son of Leofric, Lord of Bourne and Mercia his mother Lady Godiva. There is no evidence to support this lineage and he was probably just the son of a Lincolnshire squire, born in this country, educated in Normandy; and when his ancestral lands were given to the Norman invaders he returned in an attempt to reclaim them. When legal methods failed he turned to violence and caused so much trouble that he was declared an outlaw, fled into the fens, where he was joined by other discontents who formed a dissident army with Hereward as their leader.

When the occupation of England was complete, William gave instructions that throughout his new kingdom fortified buildings should be erected at key positions to control and contain the population. In the important area of East Anglia this task was given to William de Warenne. After the battle of Aldreth where William's army was defeated by Hereward and his followers, William decamped, went eastwards and set up court in Brandon so that he could defend the rivers Wissey and Little Ouse. He instructed William de Warenne to build a castle at Weeting to defend the entry from the fens into England. Kingsley suggests that Hereward came to Brandon to spy on William and discover his intentions. He heard that that a castle was being built at Weeting and made his way there. According to the historian, Sir Francis Palgrave, Hereward saw the castle under construction, *"New, and strong, and cruel in their strength – how the Englishman must have loathed the damp smell of the fresh mortar, and the sight of the heaps of rubble, and the chippings of the stone, and the blurring of the lime upon the green sward; and how hopeless he must have felt when the great gates opened, and the wains were drawn in, heavily laden with the salted beeves, and the sacks of*

## *Hereward the Wake*

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*corn and meal furnished by the Royal demesnes, the manors which belonged to Edward the Confessor, now the spoil of the stranger: and when he looked into the castle court, thronged by the soldiers in bright mail, and heard the carpenters working upon the ordnance – every blow and stroke, even of the hammer or mallet, speaking the language of defiance.”*

Was this fact or fiction – we are not certain. What we can be sure of is that William came to Brandon, a fortified building was erected at Weeting on the instructions of William de Warenne and that Hereward the Wake lived in the fens and fought the occupiers of his beloved land. In time he saw that resistance was futile, accepted the Normans as his masters, was given back his lands, spent his declining years as a squire and died in about 1072 at the grand old age (in those days) of 40.