

Iron in the Blood – being a true history of Suffolk’s notorious ‘Garrett Gang’.

A packed room at the Fromus Centre was treated to an informative, absorbing and highly entertaining talk about the famous Garrett family, by Fraser Hale, Director at The Long Shop Museum, Leiston.



Many of the attendees were probably already familiar with the headline achievements of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (as the first qualified Medical Practitioner in England and one-time Mayoress of Aldeburgh); her sister Millicent Fawcett (née Garrett), a prominent member of the Suffragist movement, and the earlier pioneering achievements of the brothers Richard and Newson Garrett (the entrepreneurial founder of Snape Maltings).



However, Fraser’s far-ranging talk also touched upon many other fascinating facts about the Garrett family and the evolution of the famous Long Shop itself. These included, among numerous fine examples:

- the early passage of Harmon Garrett to Massachusetts circa 1639, where he established himself as a gunsmith in Charleston, leaving his wife and children behind in Wickham Market until his return to Suffolk in 1652, just 4 years before his death.
- the involvement of Garrett and Son’s Leiston works with the Great

Exhibition of 1851, where the business came away with more orders for their growing range of products than the owners believed they could fulfil in a timely fashion. The Garrett stand at the Crystal Palace was also one of the largest at the exhibition. Remarkably, the then owner, Richard Garrett (1807-1866) also paid for all of his employees to attend over a number of days, transporting them by ship from Slaughden Quay to Horseferry in London.



- a meeting at the Great Exhibition between Richard Garrett and Samuel Colt (inventor of the famous Colt revolvers) sowed the seeds in the former’s mind for more efficient production of threshing machines, leading to the birth of the Long Shop, Leiston, as the first production line in Britain and the World, predating American Henry Ford’s version by half a century.

- At its peak during World War One, the Leiston Works employed around 2,000 people, with women representing the majority of the labour force. At this time, production was largely focused on the manufacture of munitions, producing some 7,000 12-pounder shell cases a week.

- In order to secure her qualifications as a doctor and, in light of the ‘Establishment’s’ attitude towards women, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was obliged to learn French to the required technical standard, before studying medicine in France.

- Louisa Garrett Anderson, the lesser-known daughter of Elizabeth, followed her mother into the medical



profession and, following the outbreak of World War One, formed the Women’s Hospital Corps (WHC) with Dr. Flora Murray. Knowing that the British Authorities would decline any offer of help to tend to the needs of re-patriated soldiers, the WHC approached the French Red Cross and were permitted to convert Claridges Hotel in Paris into a hospital. Subsequently, they were given access to a 120-year-old workhouse in Islington, London, which became the famous Endell Street Hospital.

One of the questions asked of Fraser following his outstanding presentation concerned records of ancestors who may have worked at Leiston Works. Fraser explained that the Long Shop archives include a number of apprenticeship indentures; however, beyond that there was much reliance upon mainstream genealogical datasets, extant third party research and local knowledge. It was also suggested that Alde Valley Suffolk Family History Group was on hand to help with specific enquiries.



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