

IT HAPPENED WHEN... John Blatchly



eacounty



IMPRESSIVE: Tomline's picture gallery

Photos: SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE

Huge port's pioneer developer

AFTER 25 years as editor of the Suffolk Institute's Proceedings, Dr David Allen contributed a masterly biography to the 2005 issue on Colonel George Tomline 1813-1889. His opening paragraph compels the casual reader's interest:

Bishop's grandson, maverick politician and landed proprietor of almost limitless wealth, builder of the Felixstowe Railway and pioneer developer of the town and port, the peppery and eccentric Colonel George Tomline was arguably the most colourful character of Victorian Suffolk. No respecter of either persons or institutions, he quarrelled so acrimoniously with...

The bishop concerned was George Pretyman of Lincoln, who had been private secretary to William Pitt the Younger, and owed much to his patron.

Pitt failed to obtain the see of Canterbury for him when George III had Charles Manners Sutton in mind. However, and this was preferable, a massive inheritance from a casual acquaintance transformed the Pretymans' lives in 1803.

Marmaduke Tomline of Riby Grove near Grimsby left

Bishop George almost his entire estate, conditional only on changing his name to Tomline. Elizabeth, the bishop's wife, desperately coveted a title to go with their new-found wealth, and a Scottish Tomline baronetcy was revived for them

dropped the title which did not count in England, and was plain 'Mr' when he sent his three sons to Eton; there George did well, but father neglected to send him to university.

After travel and Army service and a turbulent career in the Commons (starting Tory and ending Liberal) he bought the Orwell Park estate of the Vernons from the Harlands, adopted the county as his own, and greatly extended the house to include an observatory.

Tomline fell out with his neighbour at Broke Hall over the position of the drive entrance to that mansion, so that when he wished to construct the Felixstowe line that neighbour opposed the route which would cross the flight path of ducks entering the Broke Hall decoy.

Tomline then threatened to cut off the water supply to the house, as he did later in another dispute with the War Office at Landguard Fort.

His railway, complete with Orwell Halt, largely for his own use, led to the development of Felixstowe as a popular resort and his dock there as a port. He laid all the foundations for present day developments there.

Tomline never married. Amongst friends, he was a genial and generous host and always a gracious guest.

MAVERICK: Colonel George Tomline

– thus permitting her to be presented at Court as Lady Tomline – much to the disgust of the College of Arms.

William Edward Tomline of Riby Grove, son of the bishop and father of the colonel,



BEFORE: Orwell Park as he bought it



AFTER: Orwell Park after he had extended it