

WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 79

October 2025-2

Newsletter Editor's report

Forthcoming Talks/Speakers

- **The Ferry - Sunday 14th December 2025 at 3:00 pm**

This talk is by our ever-popular ferry lady, **Dani Church**. This is bound to be a "sell-out" due to the speaker and the fact that it is our Christmas celebration event. Please book early, especially if you are planning to bring a guest. Please note the time of 3:00 pm and the usual liquid and solid refreshments that are traditional for this fixture.

These talks are free to members and £5 for guests of members and can be booked through Edward Wright at ewright123@btinternet.com in the Village Hall

This is the fourth newsletter of the year and we hope that you find this another fascinating edition.

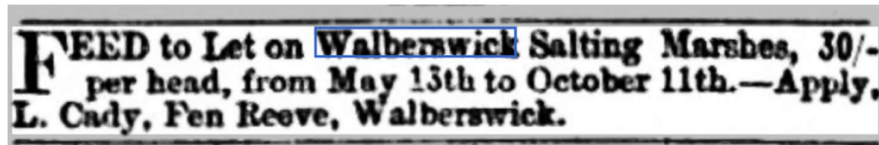
My thanks this time go to Keith Roberts. Keith has kindly offered to write a series of illustrated articles based on the Walberswick chapter of his book on Francis Newbery. We readily accepted Keith's offer believing that this would be an excellent project, revealing all kinds of previously unknown stories about a fascinating period of village history. The first article follows and concerns Lewis 'Luke' Cady, a member of the once large Cady family of Walberswick. I have followed this with a small piece about the famous Peasenhall murder. The link is that this also involved members of the Cady family. It was a different branch of the family but, like all old Walberswick families, related.

John English – Newsletter Editor

The Walberswick Fen Reeve - Keith Roberts

Walberswick has had its own fen reeve since the 19th century, the history of which can be found in the August 2009 issue of the newsletter that covered the history of the Common Lands Charity. In April 1878 the local parishioners got together and agreed that "the Parish Consider that the Pasturage of the Saltings and Common ought to be regulated in such a manner as to give every person belonging to the said Parish an equal right". So, as the minutes tell us, to do that they, "proposed that a *fen reeve* be appointed over the said lands". A group, that included one Lewis Cady, then appointed Henry Cleveland to be their fen reeve.

Fen reeve is not a common occupation, but the idea of reeves goes back to Anglo Saxon times, as more carefully defined community tasks became identified with individuals selected and sworn in by the local citizens and answerable to the 'court leet'. We get our word 'sheriff' from shire-reeve. Gradually such responsibilities became progressively more specific until by the sixteenth century there were, among others, hog reeves, dike reeves and fen reeves, along with ale tasters and inspectors of victuals. And one of the most notable of the Walberswick fen reeves was Lewis 'Luke' Cady, who at some time in the 1880s had taken over from Mr Cleveland.



East Anglian Daily Times - Thursday 30 April 1896

Lewis Cady was born in Walberswick in 1826, one of seven children. Related Cady family members had long lived on The Street (back then called Fish Street) and like them Lewis took to the sea and became a master mariner. But when approaching 50 he retired and, by succeeding Henry Cleveland, energetically took on his new post of fen reeve, looking after the commons, saltings and marshes. The post had been occupied at least since 1808, and each year Luke had to administer the more than fifty grazing lets, or 'feeds' (he got his own lets free). The money he raised was distributed every year by a curious custom whereby on each Old May Day each legal parishioner received two pints of beer and the children a bun each, the remainder being distributed to every villager, rich and poor alike. The charity commission was understandably perplexed, and this delightful arrangement became rather more regulated after Lewis's death, following the establishment of the Walberswick Common Lands Charity in 1901.

I don't know of any photographs of Lewis Cady, but luckily paintings can often tell us more than photographs, and we can certainly learn a lot about him through the two enormous portraits of him that were painted by Francis 'Fra' Newbery, the head of the Glasgow School of Art, during his summer visits to the village between the 1890s and 1914. Looking at the two wonderful portraits he produced of the man, it is easy to see why Fra Newbery was intrigued by Lewis ('Luke') Cady, who lived locally and whose son had the bungalow now called Mazoe, just along The Street in Walberswick. Whether he persuaded his neighbour to pose for him, or whether he worked from photographs back in his studio, the result was two, large, full-length and imposing portraits, one called Warden of the Marshes, the other The Fen Reeve, titles both romantic and evocative.

Lewis's impressive physique and imposing presence worked in his favour, and he remained as the fen reeve, as well as being a local coal merchant, until finally retiring around in the 1890s, having established by then quite a reputation. He supported Mr Gladstone and the local Liberal candidate, and it is his egalitarian spirit that made Lewis a local figure, often at odds with the church, for example fiercely defending his patch in a court dispute with the clergy about land rights. Later, the parish minutes in 1891 ask that, 'the fen reeve request the vicar

to fill up the hole that he had dug, and if he refuse to do so that the fen reeve is to get it filled up and charge the vicar with the cost'. He was introduced by the judge, when he appeared as a witness in another court case in Halesworth, as holding, 'The position of a kind of prime minister in that place.' Before the charity was set up, the parish may well have exceeded its authority, since in 1884 Lewis was empowered to let plots of land on the common, not for grazing but for houses to be built, and in 1887 he leased a piece of the common to the Southwold Railway Company for a yearly rent of £6.

It is not clear when Newbery first encountered Lewis Cady, but it must have been some time in the late 1890s, when the retired fen reeve would have been in his mid-sixties, still proud of his position in the village. Fra Newbery may even have been intrigued by the comparison of Lewis Cady with the dependable elderly pilgrim in Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale*?



F.H. Newbery *Warden of the Marshes* 1899
Oil on Canvas 144.5 x 86.5 cm Museo Nacional de Belles Artes, Santiago, Chile

In the *Warden of the Marshes* the great-coated reeve is seen from above, from atop the dunes, with the town marshes stretching away in the distance, grazed by sheep, possibly from

nearby Valley Farm. The wispy white beard morphing into his white scarf, the stout stick, the battered hat and the ancient layers of clothing all present us with a man who has weathered adversity and experienced life to the full. He was now living alone with his wife Maria. They had, like his parents, produced seven children, the three youngest of which had all died before their teens, and the others had long left home. On his death, his son James returned to be with his mother and attend to his affairs, and he is recorded as continuing to oversee the annual grazing lets. After his mother died in 1908, it was James who arranged the sale of Mazoe, their bungalow in The Street, the following year. At some point after this, the position of fen reeve was formally taken up by the ferryman, Bob Cross. Born in 1873, Bob had operated the old steam ferry from the age of 30. After its demise in 1942, he then manned the replacement rowing boat until he retired in 1956. But he remained the fen reeve, counting the cattle on the marshes from the vantage point of the dykes along the river.

The *Warden of the Marshes* was painted in 1899, a year before Cady died, and Newbery was clearly pleased with it. That same year it was not only shown in the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, but also in the Manchester Corporation autumn exhibition. In 1900 it was hung in the Royal Glasgow Institute and the following year it was shown in the Munich Glaspalaste. Finally, in 1910 it was sent as part of a group of over 550 works from English art groups and societies to the International Exhibition in Santiago, Chile. Newbery was included in the section submitted by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. The Exhibition was, in truth, predominantly an agricultural and trade show, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of independence for Argentina and Chile (Bolivia joined in as well). Many countries answered the invitation to submit artworks for the cultural event, and *Warden of the Marshes* first travelled to Montevideo and Buenos Aires before ending up in the huge exhibition in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago, newly built in the French style for the anniversary. Of the 550 English works hung, including by John Lavery, Walter Crane, Lucien Pissarro and Walter Sickert. Newbery's painting was one of only nine that were reproduced in the catalogue (where it was oddly called *El Contramaestre* (The Boatswain)). The work must have been well received as it was bought by their Fine Art Commission, and it remains there today, hanging in the same building.



The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile in 1910

Fra's second portrait of Lewis Cady, titled *The Fen Reeve*, is dated by George Rawson to c.1914/1915 but since Lewis died in 1900, and the composition and his apparent age are so close in both portraits, the true date must be considerably earlier. Photographs may well be the source for both compositions. The painting entered the collection of Stirling Council at some point, and for many years was shown in their Municipal Buildings. With their closure it has been relocated to the stairwell of Old Viewforth, the current council building, where they claim it can still be seen.

Curiously, E. A. Walton, the Glasgow Boy artist and friend of Fra Newbery, was also down in Walberswick at the same time (in later years he and his family stayed in the Old Rectory in Wenhaston) and they often painted the same subjects, for example the old windmill next to Rooftree where the Newbery family stayed. Walton also exhibited a painting in the Royal Scottish Academy entitled '*A Warden of the Marshes*', but sadly its whereabouts is unknown, so we can't tell if it was also of Mr Cady.



F.H. Newbery *The Fen Reeve* c.1900
Oil on canvas, 183 x 91 cm Stirling Municipal Buildings

Both Fra's paintings of Lewis Cady place the full-length figure on the left, but the second work is much larger and has a strikingly different mood; a low viewpoint shows the reeve standing on his Walberswick dunes, Prospero-like holding his staff, staring inland into the distance towards Southwold and silhouetted against the threatening sky with his marshes behind him. Both paintings reflect Fra Newbery's empathy with the dignity of rural manual workers, and their toughness in the face of adversity — the same sympathies that were found in the Glasgow Boy's earlier work and its antecedent in their French role-model, Bastien-Lepage. While Fra often painted fishermen, rural workers or women labourers in the traditions of rustic naturalism, he correspondingly never painted workers in industrial, institutional or factory settings.

Thus, Newbery's humble neighbour, Luke Cady the fen reeve, far from vanishing from history has ended up travelling the world.

Editor's note - For more information on Mazoe see:

<https://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/Newsletter-No-57-February-2020.pdf>

People with the same name do not have to be closely related, even if they live in the same, small, village. I suspect that the above Cady family and that mentioned below might not have considered themselves "family". When I was a child there were a number of families with the name English who did not consider themselves related (they were but did not know how). Certainly, the head of the family below was not born in Walberswick (though his wife was). Anyway, it's a good enough excuse to put these two articles together.

Did a Walberswick Woman commit or cover up a Murder?

Walberswick and the Peasenhall Murder – some thoughts by John English

At the start of the twentieth century what was life like in a small village in Suffolk? The seasons, the weather and social status would heavily influence how you lived, loved and believed. Like today, the workplace, the pub, the church and the shop would be where people met and talked. Unlike today the outside world intruded little, probably through newspapers and little else. Everyone knew each other and being talked about was to be avoided if possible. With no reliable contraception families were large, living conditions cramped and for the majority of working people finance was a day-to-day worry. Children produced outside of marriage were a problem economically and morally. Families would sometimes go to great lengths to hide such events. However, murder as a way out was surely rare? An accusation of just such a thing thrust the small village of Peasenhall into the national news and made legal history.

I have always been fascinated by the 1902 Peasenhall murder as have many others. It has been the subject of several books and television programmes. However, it's connection to Walberswick allows me to write about it in the WLHG newsletter. My source of information about the Peasenhall murder is the 1990 book by Martin Fido and Keith Skinner. There are more recent books but the facts do not change and are unlikely to. "Who did it" will forever be speculation, making it a good subject for books, TV and the internet. It has a certain

“Agatha Christie” quality to it as Peasehall was essentially a “closed” crime scene with all the possible perpetrators living locally (unless the murderer was a passing stranger). Sadly, there was no Marple or Poirot to provide the denouement. With the case being unsolved and the trials making legal history it will probably always fascinate.

It is a story of Suffolk village life in the early 1900’s and Peasehall would have been little different to Walberswick. It was a time of certainty when people knew who they were and where they fitted into society. It was also a time when the post was so reliable you could use it arrange an illicit meeting for the following day and know the letter would get there in time. That letter sent by the killer to the victim is surely the key to who did it but who wrote that letter we will over 120 years on never know?

Most readers will have driven through Peasehall. It has not changed much in lay-out since 1902 and Emmett’s Store is still there with the “murder house” the other side of the road. The pub has closed but essentially it appears much as it would have done in 1902. There were no street lights (something Walberswick has avoided well into the 21st Century). Doing anything without being observed (or heard) in such a small community was difficult but at midnight most people would be in bed. However, leaving a marital bed at midnight to make an assignation up the street seems quite a chancy thing to attempt. This, and all the other circumstantial evidence, was what two juries had to grapple with.

The victim, a young servant girl, had arranged (by post) to meet her lover at midnight in the back room of the house where she lived and worked. She was to leave a lighted candle in her upstairs bedroom window for a short, specified time to signal “game on”. This could be seen from the street below but probably not much further. The following morning, she was discovered with her throat cut and later found to be six-months pregnant. With virtually no evidence other than local gossip the police had a problem but it did not take long for a suspect to emerge. The dead girl had alleged “previous” with a non-conformist preacher, William Gardiner. Gardiner was tried twice for her murder but in those days a conviction required a unanimous verdict and after the second trial ended without one he was released.

So how is this linked with Walberswick? It could be said to be a tale of two families, the Cadys and the Etheridges. The accused was a father-of-six, William Gardiner. His wife was born Georgianna Cady in Walberswick. The 1871 census shows Georgianna living in Walberswick with her parents George and Sarah Cady. Sarah Ann Cady, her mother, was born in Walberswick in 1845, so Georgianna was clearly a Walberswick woman and a member of the once-large Cady family. While the 1881 census shows the Cadys in Yoxford they must have returned to Walberswick after this as during the trial the children were sent to live there with their grandparents in Alma Cottage.

Georgianna and William had married in haste in 1888 in an attempt to conceal an embarrassing pre-marital pregnancy. It was as if nobody could count in those days. By the time of the 1891 census, they were living in Peasehall. The 1901 census shows the couple in Peasehall with nine people living in the house (William and Georgianna, 6 children and Georgianna’s sister, Annie Cady). Any sort of privacy must have been difficult.

Why was Gardiner the obvious suspect? The victim was a member of the primitive Methodist chapel that Gardiner preached at and previously both had been caught up in local gossip about activities outside of choir practice. This was largely based on the evidence of two young boys who observed the couple entering a deserted building. The gossip in turn caused the church to investigate. Part of the investigating team was a member of the Etheridge family, also lived at times in Walberswick.

The Etheridges have left an enduring record of their life in Walberswick - the foundation stones bearing their names can be seen from the street on the Methodist chapel (now a dwelling).

The Walberswick scroll records the text on the stones (see right - courtesy of WPC). Noah Etheridge (there were two Noahs, but this must be Noah R) was to feature more than once in the story of Gardiner's rise and fall. The Etheridges and the Cadys were neighbours and both members of the Primitive Methodist church.



An Etheridge family member was involved in disciplinary hearings following the gossip and Noah testified in court following the murder. Noah and Gardiner's father-in-law, George Cady, were involved in a financial squabble at around the same time Gardiner was having to marry Georgianna.

Gardiner was the obvious suspect but did he do it? The logistical problems clearly troubled at least one juror and authorities on the case. Could Gardiner have got out of bed, dressed, left the house, murdered his lover and then returned to bed without anyone hearing? Even people in the house next door could hear people moving about. This was such a problem that one writer has suggested that Georgianna was the killer as she knew her husband was responsible for a soon to be exposed pregnancy. Fanciful, but what did she know? Given that the meeting was pre-arranged by letter it seems more likely that any involvement of Georgianna would have been that of providing an alibi and destroying evidence. Assuming there would be a degree of blood spatter who would deal with the killers clothing? Some of the case involved the shirt being worn and the shirt in the wash. This perhaps worried at least one juror.

While the trial saw the end of the Gardiners in local society it does not seem to have had any bad effect on the Etheridges. They finally found their way to Millfield Road so things must have gone well. Born in 1860, in the 1881 census Noah Robert was a young man living with his parents at Westleton along with a dairy maid called Emma King. Noah Robert Etheridge married Elizabeth Black in December 1886 and they had their first child together in 1889. Oddly in the 1891 census Noah Robert was with his parents (but not his wife) at Union Farm, Bulcamp. Also with them was a boy called Noah George Etheridge who had been born on 5th September 1887 in Thorington. By the time of the 1911 census the Etheridges were living together again at Westwood Lodge where Noah was a farmer. In 1916 Noah Robert and Elizabeth Etheridge lived at Red Cottage (now Lushan) in Millfield Road (Kelly). They were still there in 1921 plus married daughter Elsie Reynolds, 29, born Wangford and her daughter Joan Elizabeth, born Beccles. Noah Robert was buried in Walberswick aged 64.

The trial of William Gardiner exposed the politics of the day, something Walberswick would have shared with Peasenhall. Politics was certainly different to today – woman did not get the vote until 1928 and men without property were not much better off. However, you could choose where you went on a Sunday. In those days Walberswick had three places of worship.

There was a chapel on the green built by the Southwold Congregational Church (SCC). From 1884 the building was used, as intended, as a Congregational Chapel. In 1918 it became the Village School and currently it is the Heritage Hut. Up the street was the Primitive Methodist chapel, first where Fisher's garage once stood and then a much grander building over the road where it is now. Finally, there was St Andrews. As a long-term resident remembers, the "nobs" went to church and the villagers went to chapel. The nobs appear to have won in Walberswick as both chapels have gone. Peasenhall was similar and Gardiners presumed guilt or innocence depended partly on where you went on Sunday.

The verdict of *nolle prosequi* was not the same as innocent or guilty but in a small community he could never be innocent again. The 1911 census shows the family living in west London. Two more children had been born since the trial. Whether or not any of the family ever made it back to Walberswick is not clear. Holidays were for the well-off and there was soon to be the war to end all wars.

Guilty or not guilty Gardiner could consider himself lucky. He came close to having his neck stretched not once but twice. Nowadays DNA evidence would have at least determined whether or not he was the father of the unborn child. Forensic science would surely also have detected other evidence. Without these modern methods there was nothing other than gossip to convict him. Yet eleven out of twelve jurors would have seen him hang based on what they heard. He was certainly lucky not to hang but it would have been a very doubtful conviction if he had.