



WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 63

Christmas 2020

Newsletter Editor's report

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Still no dates for meeting in the Village Hall but we are working on other ways we may bring presentations to you.

Normally at this time of the year we would have our Christmas meeting with drinks, nibbles and good conversation. Instead we are providing another lockdown newsletter. Unusually this newsletter includes only one article. It is not a "festive" article but it does take us on a journey through over 75 years of Walberswick life in the 20th century. It harks back to a time that seemed simpler. However, we would be wise to remember that it encompasses two world wars, the depression and a pandemic amongst other challenges. Nevertheless it is a heart-warming read.

One reviewer commented "*It's a wonderfully evocative tale. I feel it's a stand-alone! It's beautifully told*".

Another said "*I found the whole account so interesting: as I mentioned, she describes a life in Walberswick which was just fading away when I was a child. Everybody seemed to have servants: we did, though my parents were as poor as church mice. We had a living-in maid, who was paid her keep and 12s.6d a week. She got married later from our house! I was one of her bridesmaids. She married Wessy Cross junior, son of the erstwhile ferryman; Wessy had an identical brother, Jimmy, who was killed in the war*".

The current article has been in the archive since 2011 when it was donated by Brita Haycraft at the same time as she did her "WALBERSWICK MEMORIES OF FIFTY YEARS AGO" which makes up the whole of newsletter No 40, Sept 2011 (you can read this on the internet <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/WLHG-NEWS-LETTERS-27-40.pdf>).

Those who know Walberswick history well will spot some obvious inaccuracies in this account relating to the ferry and the bridge. Along with unflattering descriptions of people now long dead we have left the article exactly as written.

There is a small mystery. The author wrote this in 1978 when she says she was in her 87th year. However, what we have in the archive comes to an end in 1946. Are we missing 30 or more years? Can anybody help with this? No matter, we do have Brita Haycraft's article to complete the century.

I could not edit a newsletter without including a photograph. The following, taken around the time the author first came to Walberswick, puts faces to a number of the names mentioned in the text.

John English - Newsletter Editor – email johnrenglish@tiscali.co.uk

Picture from Gillian Smith a descendant of the Cross family



Chas Cooper John Millican H Todd
C Buckingham J Stannard G Buckingham Wm Cross D Kerridge H Jackson
D Kerridge George English Weston Cross C English Bob Cross Ben Kerridge

MEMORIES OF WALBERSWICK –

Written in 1978 by Dorothy (Seward) Walton.

At Easter time of the year 1901 or 1902, my parents Albert and Marion Seward could have been seen setting out for an exploratory walk from the Grand Hotel Southwold along the quickest way to a village called Walberswick which was along a path bordered in the East by a raised dyke, and in the west by a narrow stream with grassland beyond.

Their two elder daughters, myself and Phyllis, were delighting in their first adventure to Suffolk, and as few normal children can bear to walk sedately they were skipping on top of the dyke along the single-track way, running down and up to the pathway where the parents walked. This was a special treat for them, away from the nurse and the nursery in Cambridge, with exclusive access to parents temporarily free from their numerous commitments and social obligations, and with the excitements of a first stay in a hotel. The goal of my parents, particularly of my mother, who had most money of the pair, was a cottage in the country for holidays. I don't know how they chose Suffolk but my father had a passion for old churches and had probably - with my mother from whom he hated to be separated - made many excursions into the adjoining county; he covered miles, as we all did, on a bicycle.

After the mile walk, breathing in the sea air and probably blown by the wind, we reached the river Blythe flowing, after its devious history, between Southwold and Walberswick, and stood waiting for the ferry, a splendid affair chugging to and fro on chain cables, with

manoeuvrable ramps at each end and two men in charge, one in the engine room and one to take fares and open and close the gates. I remember the two Cross brothers - or were they cousins? - Anglo-Saxon types so much part of east Suffolk. One was "Wessy", tall, handsome with friendly eyes, blue as speedwells; and the other small, Iberian in looks with dark skin, shifty dark eyes and a dour personality; both men wore earrings.

At that time, just as Suffolk itself, the seashore, woodlands, common lands and marshes were still mostly left to themselves, wild and unspoiled, so were the real Suffolk natives, set in distinctive origins, many still married among themselves and content to stay where they were born. There was and still is a strong Saxon strain, handsome stalwarts such as Wessy Cross and Charlie English, blonde-hair and blue-eyed women. There was also a swarthy strain, some such as the fisherman Mr. Gilbert and his wife, who struggled in poverty to raise their family in a tiny cottage on what was called "The Salts" between the ferry and the start of the village houses. They communicated little with anyone and kept to their own lives in silent dignity. Native Walberswick folk were not forthcoming and incomers were, though treated politely, not really "accepted" for years, if ever.

There were inhabitants of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Flemish (because of their marshland skills), and Norman blood in East Anglia. The Normans many of whom came over at the Conquest and were given land, have been powerful figures in the history of this part of Suffolk: the notorious Bigods, terrors of the countryside, were not as far as I know part of the story of 'Walberswick, but the Blois family have owned large chunks of it and still do, and the Malet family have been connected with it for generations, but have no descendants there at present. When we first went to Walberswick, a Mr. Malet (a small man Simian in looks) built the largest house there, now converted into flats, on the left entering the village. Charlie Malet, his son, whom we met at tennis tournaments, later left the neighbourhood. The Blois family landlords, some oppressive, some less so, still operate. Sir Ralph reigned in the early years of the century and there was a Sir Gervase some years ago. One of them was Rachman-ish but I can't remember which, and I don't know the reputation of the present descendant. There have often been feuds between the Blois family and the Walberswick residents over common land rights, by-way closures and. So on, and Suffolk is said to have been the most densely populated county in England at one time.

To go back to the ferry and, though we didn't know it, our momentous stepping from it into Walberswick. There were then and up to the 1914-18 war, roomy artists' studios built of wood beside the river opposite Blackshore and a collection of varied sized huts on "The Salts", one of which belonged to Mr. Block the carpenter, a jovial character who regularly performed at the annual village concerts in the 'Gannon Room'. We learned some carpentry from him along with the Newbury girls. Wasted in my case, but I loved the smell of clean-cut wood shavings.

Crossing a creek in the Salts was an arched wooden bridge, the 'Kissing Bridge', where years later we kissed, and which has been renewed and still stands, I'm glad to say. As we walked along towards the village centre, my mother noted the bit of meadowland and a cluster of trees west of the road like some in a painting by Corot and often painted them herself over the years: the Corot trees are still there.

The first sign of commerce we saw there was the Post Office, the first of a row of old cottages, now 1 Norland Cottages, all now smartened up and none (?) inhabited by villagers. Mrs. Ferguson, the Postmistress, was a wan-looking woman and entering the place, even for a child, was an ordeal, the smell of unwashed bodies and unventilated rooms being overpowering. The first shop we saw was a little further on and the old lady who sold

sweets there was somewhat grubby - I can remember her black fingernails scooping sugared almonds out of a glass jar, but one noticed that dispassionately. She sold that delicious sugar candy hanging on string in brown crystal lumps. Passing the Bell Inn (now grown to the Bell Hotel), we came to the village green opening out to the right, partly lined with houses, and some small cottages, one, facing the road, a dignified house dating back some two or three hundred years, inhabited then by 'Gentleman Jim' Thompson. He, it was said, had seen better days and put on airs, but was a seedy character and outraged mothers and nannies by scrutinising the sea-shore after they had taken the children home, and picking up any left belongings which he later offered for sale.

Opposite the green a varied collection of houses, one called the 'Crow's Nest', of three storeys, another as low-set as the Crow's Nest was high, where old Mrs. Milligan lived, keeping herself to herself. I remember no gossip about her but she looked like a witch and there was a rumour of her ghost appearing on the green. At the end of these houses, just before the ways turning left across the stream to the beach, crossing the 'Cow Bridge', or the narrow one-at-a-time wooden bridge, was Mr. Debney's double-fronted grocer's shop. Mr. Debney held a monopoly there for many years. He was white haired with a permanently red face, and not very tolerant of children, but it was enjoyable buying black treacle out of a tap, and the bulls' eyes weighed into blue paper pokes, and the shop had a fascinating multi-smell.

A sharp right turn, past the Gannon Room, where concerts, lectures and all entertainments were held, and we were in the main Fish Street with a row of Victorian villa-type houses, the 'Terrace' on the right and fields opposite, until we came to the Anchor Inn, kept by Fred Lines at that time. I remember it as dark and grubby inside though I cannot think what took me there. A picture of the original building hangs on the wall of its modern successor, the Anchor Hotel, which has gradually expanded and built an over flow of wood chalets at the back. Standing back from the street on our left as we walked on to our adventure was a splendid windmill (a Post Mill) standing on its own ground, and I can still hear in my memory the creak of the turning sails, and smell the ground grain. After it fell silent in disuse it survived until not many years ago, when it was set on fire and finished for good.

On the opposite side of the road were small cottages, still inhabited by villagers some of whose names are in the Domesday Book. The Cadys, fisherfolk; the Jacksons, the Bloomfields, the English's and others. Descendants of that truly Suffolk character, Mrs. Bloomfield, blue-eyed, comely, strong-minded, humorous and extremely capable, still live in her cottage and her son Basil has inherited her love of a garden. Although crippled with arthritis, he tends more than his own garden and limps across the road to his plot of vegetables in the field (now allotments). His mother, wearing a cloth cap on her abundant grey hair, seemed to live on her bicycle, took in summer visitors and was also in great demand as a midwife for the village. At any moment a flustered messenger might push open her wicket gate breathing heavily and beg her services: "It's Mrs. So-an-So; she's been took sudden and she's wholly bad." "Don't you fret," Mrs. B. would say, "Yew gaw right back and tell her that'll be arl right and to pull on the pains". She would give instructions to some one of her family to "put on them peas and potatoes soon as Robertses get back from beach", and off she would go, exuding competence. There was one thing, however, about which she refused for years to see the common sense, and that was to accept gratefully the laid-on water when it was brought at last, replacing the well, the pump and the cesspool. Perhaps it was the doctor who finally persuaded her after attending yet another of her visitors with dysentery.

To continue, after passing twin houses one of which, Roof- tree, we were to know well in years to come, we came to the house mentioned to my parents by the house agent, The Old Farm Cottage, and all of us loved it at once. Enormous hollyhocks stood in front of the lower latched casement windows, and many flowers bloomed between the old flint wall and the front garden. We were received by the Hamiltons, brother and sister, who were still farming the property in a small way. He was dark and she was red-haired, tall and elegant, a niece of the artist Wilson Steer in whose Walberswick paintings she is immortalised. I don't think it took my mother long to decide to buy it, lock stock and barrel, but minus livestock (she was the one with money then). The house was at least 200 years old, had a barn, a pigsty, about an acre of garden. The rooms were low-ceilinged with latched country doors, and we children were enchanted by the two narrow cupboards going back deep in to the wall of the old iron fire place in the front ground floor room. Were they for bread, salt and flour? There was a small room next the kitchen called the "cheese room" which was reached by a small flight of steps and a sloping roof. I can't remember if it was converted to a bedroom already or by my parents. There must have been a period of some alterations after the purchase but for some years all the water we used had to be pumped from the well, and pumping (in the stone-flagged scullery) was hard work. There was no inside loo until Walberswick got water laid on, just two outside earth closets which were emptied by a hired village lad who also did a stint of pumping, and probably cleaned the knives, a tiresome job before stainless steel. Lighting was by oil lamps and heating of course by coal and wood. Life was cosy and easy. It was a very happy holiday house and two 'maids' (refused against contemporary usage to call them servants) usually came down with us from Cambridge in summer, at Easter and occasionally Christmas. I realise now - in my 87th year - that these holidays would have been the perfect opportunity for us painfully ignorant daughters to learn to cook, but none of the teenagers we ganged up with did any chores, I think, except for caring for the grass of the tennis court which sprouted beetroot and other vegetables, still unaware they were not on a farm. There were several tennis courts in the village and these, after the days of beach-play, clambering about on the old jetty, playing hide-and-seek over the common, etc., were in constant use, and tournaments were arranged and held in our gardens.

It was not long before we got together with the Newbery family, who rented Rooftree for the summer, the house next door with a convenient hole in the intervening hedge. Francis ("Fra") Newbery was Principal of the Glasgow School of Art, his wife Jessie had been a student and we and their two blonde daughters Elsie and Mary became life-long friends. Fra Newbery rented one of the studios beside the river and his friend Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret had another for two or three years and rented the house next to the Newberys - Millfield - for a short while. I think it was the Newberys who suggested that the Edinburgh artist Edward Arthur Walton and his family come to Walberswick, and they rented one of the Terrace houses one summer, but later took the Vicarage at Wenhaston, 5 miles inland, every summer until the devastating year of 1914. We all bicycled, bathed, picnicked and took our enjoyment for granted. Devoted mothers saw that we were fed on vegetables grown in our own gardens and plentiful meat and fish. No-one of course possessed a car, but men came to the door in horse-drawn carts or with baskets on bicycles. Mr. Stannard, fat and jovial, came regularly with fresh fish, and I think Mr. Baggot, the Southwold butcher, delivered meat. A swarthy man came once a week from Yoxford driving a long cart selling fresh fruit and vegetables and the best peppermints I have ever tasted, enormous brown discs which filled the gob for a long while. Milk was fetched from Mr. Whig's farmhouse (now Mary's Restaurant) and I suppose we became

immune to the primitive treatment of it or perhaps it was boiled before we drank it. There were delicious cakes to be bought in Southwold, especially at Chapman's shop near the lighthouse which made Chelsea buns curled like ammonites, full of currants and dripping with melted sugar. Most cakes were home-made, however, and of a quality rare today.

There were parties, there were visiting guests who arrived excitingly by the incredible phenomenon the Southwold Railway (originally commissioned for China but never delivered) whose long-funnelled little engine sounded off a shriek when approaching Walberswick. Slowly its train of small coaches weaving its way along the single 9 mile track laid from Halesworth to Southwold stopped at Wenhaston, Blythburgh, Walberswick, following its course through the bracken. As the coaches rattled and lurched so did the oil lamps suspended from the ceilings, though the speed was so leisurely that rather crude picture postcards were thought up by someone showing passengers alighting from the train indulging in various ploys and returning to it while it was still in motion. I certainly remember one of our guests chasing it successfully. I cannot remember whether there were more than two trains daily, but it was the one arriving after dark which it was so enjoyable to meet. We walked the quickest way, down a sandy lane flanked by high hedges, and across the common, carrying lanterns burning candles made by the gypsies. These lanterns were fashioned out of old tins, decorated by fretting as fine as lace. These gypsies were dark and handsome, different from the tinkers of today, and were of the same breed as George Barrow's friends. They seemed to fade away as the years went by.

Painters and their camp stools and easels were a common sight and many appeared with the summer; a few lived there permanently, Seymour Lucas for one. Well-known artists and writers came and went. I name a few who come at once to memory: E.A. Walton (my future father-in-law), Fra Newbery, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, R.O. Dunlop, Wilson Steer, Greiffenhagen (just before our time), Arthur Rackham, Lewis Baumer (of Punch), John Farleigh, Bertram Priestman and many others. Selwyn Jepson, W.W. Jacobs (perhaps his salty short stories aren't known now), A.E. Coppard, Gilbert Murray and family. Their eldest, Rosaline who married Arnold Toynbee, was ill and spent one summer in a summerhouse beyond our ken, but her younger brother Denis and sister Agnes were perfect play companions. A gang of us performed the Pyramus and Thisbe part of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in the garden owned by a widow, Mrs. Leather, who had built the cottage now called Briar Cottage on the Green, and was reputed to have built eight others, never being satisfied.

She always wore dark glasses and was aesthetic and intense and sweetly formidable. She lent her garden for a performance of Pyramus and Thisbe enacted with great enthusiasm by our current gang of teenagers, produced by Cecile Walton, cast including 3 Seward girls, 2 Newbery girls, and two or three Gilbert Murray children. Mrs. Leather kept her butter in the bucket of the old well in her garden and was angry when one of our party released it to send it to the dark depth of its bottom

Many garden fetes were organised for various charities and pageants and plays out of doors, one at least for aid to the Belgians at the outbreak of the 1914–1918 war. Walberswick was of course considered a possible invasion area, so those with holiday houses there were banished, and the Old Farm Cottage was taken over for billeting soldiers, leaving it infested with fleas. People became obsessed by possible spies so that Charles Rennie Mackintosh who had been living and painting in Walberswick was arrested until his innocence was vouched for, because letters from Germany and Austria (where his work was appreciated for some time before it was in the U.K.) were found in his possession. The

German artist, Sauter, husband of Lilian Galsworthy, returned to Germany, and their son Rudolph interned until his uncle John Galsworthy got him released, and a German Professor who had been part of the Walberswick scene all summer suddenly vanished. We never knew if he was or was not a spy. The ferry was immobilised in the middle of the river, and thereafter slowly disintegrated, signposts were obliterated, and a Bailey bridge put up further upstream by the army (I think), over which cars could not pass. Barbed wire desecrated the beach and 'pill boxes' were hurriedly erected. All was alerted for invasion; as it had been years before for 'Boney', and I imagine Dad's Army would have been strong there too, for the Suffolk types were not ones to lie down.

After 1918 the scattered jig-saw had to be joined together again but many bits were missing. I married John Walton in that August. He was still working in the Friends' Ambulance Unit as an orderly on one of the ambulance trains the Society of Friends had presented to the army in France. He had less than two weeks' leave, and arrived the night before the wedding at Downing Lodge. Phyllis was still a V.A.D. in a Cambridge Red Cross hospital, Margery had, with independent enterprise, opted to study in London to be a Psychiatric Social Worker, and Carola was at Bedales. The Old Farm Cottage was still a haven for us all at various times and I only realised many years later that our mother, who had made such a big war effort as well as running a large house and constantly entertaining, was already not well, although she kept her troubles to herself as always. In the summer of 1921 John Walton went as a botanist with the first Oxford expedition and as I was still living at home, Huon (aged one) and I were with the family at Walberswick where - recovering from whooping cough - he thrived and regained lost weight. The Waltons were not to go back to Wenhaston Vicarage. E.A. Walton died in 1922. Nor did the Newberys retain Rooftree, their house, and in 1923 my mother sold the Old Farm cottage to Crittall of windows fame, my father having decided that the east coast no longer suited his liver. The cottage since then has passed through several owners, the low latch-fastened windows modernised and its antiquity not preserved. The garden, so beautifully kept and fruitful under the care of my mother and old Fincham who lived up on the 'back road', became neglected. But gardeners such as Fincham are rare now. Old Fincham gave me a cure for whooping cough (Suffolk was and still is rich in cures) which was to hang a bunch of snails in the chimney and as they dried out the cough would disappear. He was a man of few words and when his niece - a nurse - got married to the Provost of Queen's College, Cambridge, causing a flurry of gossip, was quite unmoved. She was pretty, calm and sensible and filled her new role admirably, probably to the disappointment or the snobbish ladies of Cambridge on the look-out for gaffes.

From 1923 the family continuity with Walberswick was not broken, but was tenuous. Phyllis married Michael Sampson (from Downing College also) in 1923 (?), Marion Seward died in 1924 and thereafter for family visits rooms or a house had to be rented. We acquired a car and took to camping holidays as rooms, the kind we could afford, were not satisfactory, and hotels of any kind were out for young children. Most of the camps (large tent and one small one each for Huon and Camilla, and a two-wheel trailer for luggage) were in Scotland for botanical reasons but for two summers out of the eight we went back to Walberswick, pitching tents on the common on the holidays. There were few commercial camp sites then and we were rich in space. I did a lot of the cooking out of doors at Walberswick, and we dug holes for a latrine decently enclosed with hessian, and another for a hay-box where we could leave a stew to cook while we went off somewhere. There were fancy dress dances in the Gannon Room, garden fetes, and large camp parties, especially after dark when we lit a camp fire and kept a kettle of coffee ready. I couldn't bake cakes, as our cooking facilities

consisted of a double-burner primus stove and the haybox, but there were and still are people around who make splendid cakes for selling. One of our teas was honoured by a London surgeon and his wife and pretty daughter (the Porter-Parkinsons) at which I remember offering round a large chocolate cake placed in our large frying pan and Mrs. Porter P. extending a white kid-gloved hand to take a piece. I only hope they weren't sitting on biscuit tins or camp stools, but I'm sure they didn't know what they were in for. John and Huon explored the derelict Southwold Railway station at Walberswick and triumphantly returned with enough wood to make a table and bench. Water we fetched from the Buildings, and there was of course sun-bathing whenever it was thought to be warm enough. I wasn't so choosy, and loved going to the beach before breakfast in most weathers and bathing solo in an early morning nearly deserted North Sea.

Then about two years after, in 1939, came the second war to shatter our lives once more and those of our children. Huon went into the army after less than a year at University in Glasgow and was not demobbed until 1946; Camilla started her medical career. Dorothy Sampson went into the 'Wrens', and Anthony was just old enough to be called up for the Navy

From the internet:

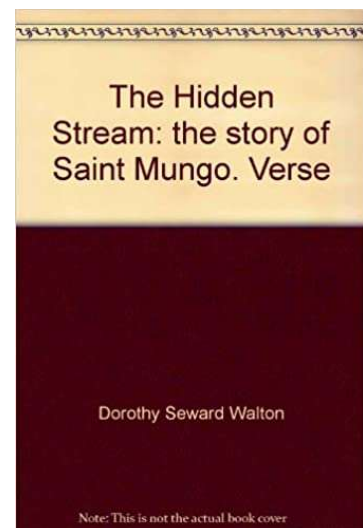
The text suggests Dorothy Seward married John Walton in August 1918. WWI still had 3 months to go. The card on the right shows she was at one time in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD - a voluntary unit providing nursing care for military personnel in the UK). John Walton was a Society of Friends ambulance driver (usually registered conscientious objectors).

Surname (see Seward) Walton
 Christian Names Dorothy
 Permanent Address: c/o Rev. Seward, The Wrens' Lodge, Downing College, Cambridge
 Date of Engagement 15.5.15 Rank 1st member of Pay nil
 Date of Termination Feb. 1916 Rank VAD Pay 4
 Particulars of Duties secretarial work St. Chad's VAD Hospital, Cambridge
 Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served 700 hrs approx.
 Previous Engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where
 Honours awarded

Was she also a published poet? This fits with the Glasgow connection.

From the Village:

The last paragraph mentions a Dorothy Sampson (later Meade). There is currently a "Sampson" connection with the village, Sally Sampson. Sally says that Dorothy Walton was her husband Anthony's aunt and Michael Sampson was his father. She has said she must write some reminiscences of her own so we may get some more missing information



A very happy Christmas to you all!