



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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**NEWSLETTER NO: 69**

**October 2022**

### **Newsletter Editor's report**

#### **TALKS/SPEAKERS**

It was a long time coming but when it did come it was a good one. What am I talking about? It was the first WLHG talk in the Village Hall since before lock down and billed as our **late, late Christmas do**. It was unusual to have a Christmas do in June but we could not wait. For various reasons this was a "ticket only" meeting. It was, of course, fully booked. Charlie Haylock entertained a full house with stories about coaching Ralph Fiennes in "The Dig", a film about the Sutton Hoo excavations. As a special surprise, and bonus, Ralph Fiennes was there too. Being a Christmas do there was also drinks and nibbles to follow. For me that night alone was worth the membership fee.

However, there was more to come to add to the come-back year. On Saturday 17th September Mark Bailey, Professor of Late Medieval History at the UEA, gave a talk on "Reconstructing the evolution of the Suffolk Coastline C1100-c1700 with some insights from the Walberswick Area". Now, that might sound like something for the specialists but Prof. Bailey turned out to be an excellent speaker and a big hit with the audience.

So, by September we had already made up for lost time. But there is more to come this year.

#### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

The late, late Christmas do in June does not mean we will not have our normal Christmas meeting. This will be an entertaining and seasonal affair so make a note of the date

- Saturday 10 December 2022 – Talk by Richard Hoggert "Ghost stories of M R James". As this is our Christmas do expect drinks and nibbles.

As usual, this will start at 7:00 pm. If you want to bring a guest then contact Edward Wright to reserve a place ([ewright123@btinternet.com](mailto:ewright123@btinternet.com)). It's free to members but £10 for guests.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

We believe that Membership has never been such good value. The Committee has agreed that we should raise the cost of membership by £2.50 making the annual fee £10.00 per person from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023. We hope our members will understand the need for this increase.

#### **LIFE MEMBERS**

Also at the last committee meeting we decided to make a number of life members. This is in recognition of those who have made an outstanding contribution to WLHG, have served on the committee and are currently still members. This applies to Philip and Pat Kett, Julia Reisz and Maureen Thompson. The committee would like to record their thanks and admiration to these pioneers of the history group.

## GENERAL

WLHG is one of the primary user groups for the Heritage Hut which means that we can use the HH free of charge for small meetings and exhibitions. We are also still planning the following but dates have still to be fixed:

- **The George Charles Haite exhibition** of charcoal sketches of Walberswick dated 1895. WLHG is fortunate to own 13 beautiful sketches of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Walberswick and copies of two more. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Charles\\_Haite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Charles_Haite) for general background. Date to be announced.
- **Exhibition of Jessie Browton's paintings** of Walberswick from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. WLHG holds high quality copies of the originals held by Southwold Museum. Date to be announced.
- **Open Morning** - The WLHG archive now has a permanent home in the HH. The archivist and members of the committee would love to show you the archives and try to answer any questions you may have. We may even inspire you to join the committee – especially if you are younger than most of us (not difficult).

## A Good Year for Genealogists

2022 saw the long-awaited availability of the 1921 census. For people like me it is probably the last census we will see as the 1931 records were destroyed in WWII and that of 1941 not done as the country was at war. Luckily the 1939 register is available to help minimise the loss of the two, though redacted to obscure the entries for those who may still be alive.

Having said that the 1921 census is available it is only available to customers of a certain genealogy company and at a quite a price, member or not. It is also subject to the problems of reading a document that was never meant to be used how we want to in 2022. There are lots of transcription errors and searching it can be difficult. Luckily for WLHG one of our members was able to work her way through all the problems and provide us with a look at Walberswick in 1921.

The opening words of Lady Chatterley's Lover are "*Ours is essentially a tragic age*" D.H. Lawrence was almost certainly referring to the Great War and maybe the flu pandemic that followed it. Lady Chatterley's husband survived the war but, like many survivors, the war left him scarred and disabled. Many others, sons, lovers and husbands never returned. This was the country that the 1921 census recorded though you may need to delve into the individual households to get an idea of this. Women would still have to wait some years to get the vote. It was also a country where the class system still prevailed. People would happily sing in church "*The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, and ordered their estate*" (All things bright and beautiful). This verse has mostly since been removed.

The 1921 census records just over a hundred Walberswick households. These are listed alphabetically as each house had a name rather than address. This causes some problems when the house names have been changed over the years. It was interesting in previous documents to get an idea of neighbours – not always clear but mostly information was collected house-to-house. Having said that, addresses have always been a problem in Walberswick.

The other issue that affected Walberswick was that of second homes. Infuriatingly lots of the big houses were unoccupied on census day or occupied by the servants only. It would be interesting to know who owned some of the houses. It is this that makes house deeds so valuable now (never allow your solicitor to destroy them). House deeds show a record of ownership whereas the census lists who was there on census day.

Guests on census day are also interesting. For the smaller houses you often see the daughters and grandchildren of the head of the household. The “sleepover” was possibly not a big thing in 1921 so one imagines widowed wives and orphaned children. This would be relatively normal for the times but following the Great War probably more so.

**John English** - Newsletter Editor – email [johnrenglish@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:johnrenglish@tiscali.co.uk)

## Teachers in Walberswick during the Great War and the nineteen-twenties – John English

The first thing I did when I saw the 1921 census was look for my Father (born 1918). Sure enough, he is there with his parents and younger brother, living at “The Studio”. This must have been a semi-detached property as there is a Studio A and Studio B recorded. In B is a widow Kirton, her 38 year-old daughter and a visitor. All are recorded as Londoners (some things do not change!). The Studio is certainly not the building we know today with that name. Infuriatingly the way the census is recorded is alphabetical and does not show the properties either side so that you cannot work it out. However, I am told by an older member of WLHG that this Studio was in Stocks Lane. I know my grandparents next moved to Merville Bungalow (where Creek cottage now stands) but this was not built in 1921. I then looked at Beach View which is where my family moved to after Merville Bungalow. Prior to them moving in it was rented out by my Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother (I mention both as this relates to a court case that hinged on the status of the wife, to be looked at in a future issue).

In 1921 Beach View was occupied by Harry and Helenor Took, 69 and 60 respectively. He was a retired joiner of Halesworth and his wife born in Southwold. Living with them is Jessie M Took, 33, single and born in Halesworth. Interestingly Jessie is shown as a trained, certificated Head Teacher working at Council School, Walberswick. How long she had been teaching in Walberswick is unknown. Possibly not that long as in 1911 she was an elementary teacher in Halesworth. Maybe it was a promotion that took her to Walberswick as here she is a Head Teacher. We certainly know that the Took family had not been in Beach View for long. In 1917 it was occupied by Nellie and Charles Cross. Sadly, we know this as in 1917 Nellie received a telegram at that address informing her that Charles had been killed on 6th April 1917, aged about 30, on H.M. Trawler "Strathrannock" whilst sweeping off St. Abb's Head. The record states “struck a mine and was blown completely to pieces. Not a survivor was found, not even a spar nothing except a lifebelt”. When she would have had to move out of Beach View I do not know but I guess not long afterwards.

As we shall see later the Head Teacher in 1917 was a Mrs Billingham. Maybe there was another tenant between the Cross family and the Tooks. Whatever, in 1939 Jessie is back in Halesworth, with her widowed mother, and working as an Elementary Head Teacher. She managed to reach the good age of 76 but apparently never married. Like the woman we are about to look at she had a good career at a time when women were expected to marry and give up work.

At about the same time as the census data became available I was sent, via Penny Buncombe, information about another teacher at Walberswick School who was there a few years earlier during the war years. The information includes a letter, a job reference and some biographical notes plus a photograph. This was a young woman by the name of Ruth Mary Frost. The information was provided by Mrs Marion Leeson and thanks go to her for providing documentary evidence alongside memories. Ruth was an aunt on Marion’s mother’s side.

It looks like Ruth was a teacher in Walberswick for about 2 years from around May 1915 to May 1917. Marion says:

*Ruth Mary Frost was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of six children, 3 girls and 3 boys, born in 1896 at West Stow Hall on the Culford Estate where her father was a farm foreman.*

*By 1916 her parents lived at P???? Farm, Henley. She died in August 1985.*

*All three girls gained some education by becoming uncertificated teachers.*

*Ruth's fiancé was killed in the 1914-18 war and he was Canadian.*

*Ruth also taught at Offton in Suffolk before moving to Coventry to be close to her parents who had moved to Grafton Regis in Bucks – presumably to work for Lord Grafton of Euston.*

*She never married but she bought her own house on mortgage, remarkable for a woman of her generation, and her parents' retirement cottage. She also travelled to places like Russia and Israel when few simple women did.*

Ruth, like Jessie who followed her, was clearly a remarkable woman as witnessed by her niece. Like Jessie she never married but in her case the “tragic age” may have been a factor. We have a letter she wrote possibly in 1915 that gives some information about her life and thoughts.



*Ruth 1916 approx*

*1 Albion Cottage  
Walberswick  
Southwold*

*Dear Glad,*

*It is a good while since I received your letter I know, but it is not much use writing when you have nothing to say.*

*I had a short but pleasant holiday. You were a Jolly long while making up your mind to write. I was busy all the week, mostly washing mother would tell you (by instalments).*

*Mother had a photo from Alge and there was one like it waiting for me when I got back. Did you have one?*

*Mrs English is back and her husband too but I have not seen her to speak to. Most likely he is off to front soon.*

*My old landlady is out. This is the first time I have written a letter here. I have always gone down to the school.*

*I travelled with Minnie Barker from Stowmarket to Claydon. Ethel P was in the same train but I did not*

*get a chance to speak to her. I fancy Minnie thinks very little of her. I am afraid the collar will chafe tomorrow.*

*Will yours after gadding about such a lot?*

*Have you a nice children's song suitable for my little tots? Is there one in my song book which you borrowed or what about the Golden Boat Song?*

*We have orders to keep our windows closed at night in case Zeppelins come over and drop gas.*

*I travelled with a gentleman who said his wife had been staying at Lowestoft and went home quite disappointed because she had not seen a Zeppelin. He told her she would not have wished to see a second.*

*Remember me to Aunt Dawson*

*Love from Ruth*

It would appear that Ruth lodged with a Mrs Green in Albion Cottages. The 1921 census shows a Mary Ann Green living in Albion Cottages, aged 74 and born in Walberswick. She had lived there a while as in 1901 she was there with her husband William and in 1911 as a widow.

The letter to "Glad", presumably after a holiday meeting (though I am still not sure), is interesting. The Zeppelin raids over Lowestoft were in 1915 and this probably dates this letter. The "*gentleman's wife*" would have continued to be disappointed probably as the raids stopped. The sight of them must have been spectacular but the descending bombs more worrying. Thankfully they did not drop gas as was feared. The matter-of-fact mention of Zeppelin raids, gas warfare and going "off to the front" shows life goes on in times of great adversity. The thought about going back to work after a break (*the collar will chafe tomorrow*) also shows how immediate concerns can outweigh major problems. I also ask myself which Mrs English and who was Minnie Barker and Ethel P? Like the census, this letter was never intended for our eyes and Ruth and Glad would have known what we do not and probably never will.

I am intrigued that there is no mention in the letter of her Canadian fiancé. Had they yet to meet as this was only 1915? Canadians could not return to Canada when they had leave and would take this in England. Halesworth and Walberswick are unlikely places for Canadian soldiers to go to so perhaps this was yet to come after leaving Walberswick?

By May 1917 we have more documentary evidence to show that Ruth is on the move. This a reference written by the Head Teacher. It is a sort of general reference rather than one addressed to a new employer.

*Walberswick Council School  
1<sup>st</sup> May 1917*

*I have much pleasure in testifying to the character and abilities of Miss Ruth M Frost, who has acted as a supplementary Assistant Teacher in this school for the past two years. During that time, I have found Miss Frost to be thoroughly conscientious and reliable in all that she undertakes to do. She is very quiet and patient in her manner of dealing with the children, and spares no pains for the good of the class. She has taken the needlework for all the girls – that and the occupations, (hand and eye work) also taken by her, have been specially good. I regret that she is now leaving us, and wish her success, wherever Providence may cast her lot.*

*(Signed) Mrs Billingham  
Head Teacher*

Where did Ruth go next and why? By May 1917 she is leaving after two years. The Head Teacher, Mrs Billingham, regrets that she is leaving and does not appear to know where she is going (*wish her success, wherever Providence may cast her lot*). Maybe she had ambition and being "a supplementary Assistant Teacher" was not enough. She certainly seems to have done well financially in the following years. It was a "tragic age" but one that changed society. At least she would be allowed to vote before the next war.

## **Charles Mallet – Edward Wright**

On the 14th of April 1903 Florence Mallett married James Blair and the whole of Walberswick celebrated. There were too many guests for everyone to find room in the church, so the churchwardens arranged outside seating. A canvas awning stretched from the door to the road, lined with the schoolchildren as the newly married couple left the church in a cloud of confetti. The reception, attended by 150 guests was held in a marquee at the Mallett's new home, Tower House on the corner of Palmers Lane and The Street.

For the village, it might have been a royal wedding or jubilee rather than the marriage of a local couple with no gentry or aristocratic connections. Flags were flown and houses were decorated; the villagers were given a tea party the following day and the children had their own party. A Mallett marriage was a big event for Walberswick and yet, a decade or so earlier, few in the village would have recognised the name of Charles Mallett, the bride's father. A self-made man, he arrived in the 1880s and soon established himself as a leader of village affairs. The Lords of the Manor, the Blois family were hereditary gentry with a Walberswick connection going back centuries; the Malletts earned an equal status in a few years.

Tower House stands guard over the Western approaches to the village, sturdy in red brick with white painted joinery. To enhance its proprietorial status there was once a medieval style tower on the Eastern side. It was completed just before the large Walberswick houses of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was bigger, and sat in larger grounds. A generator powered its lighting so even at night it would have made its presence felt as the light escaped past the curtains of its large windows.

Charles Mallett was an enthusiastic developer of land in the village and left a legacy of red brick houses. He was born in 1849 in Norwich where his father had a tailoring business and traded as a woollen draper. Charles moved to London and at the age of twenty-two he was working as a warehouseman for a wholesale cloth traders and drapers. He lived on the premises; just south of St Paul's Cathedral, along with a hundred other employees. He married Ellen Monument in 1878 and by 1881 they were living above their own draper's shop in Sloane Street. How they managed to finance this is a mystery; neither of them came from wealthy families. Ellen was born in Norfolk but moved to Woolwich as a young girl when her father took a job as a bailiff on a farm. Working in a cloth warehouse may have given Charles the idea of starting up on his own. Somehow, he managed to rise from warehouseman to shop owner in the space of a few years.

The Mallett's business was called Richard Sands and Co in Sloane Street, London. They gradually expanded it until it occupied three adjacent properties at the fashionable Belgravia end of the street which probably explains why it was called Belgrave House. In its early days the business concentrated on small items such as ladies' blouses, shirts, veils, handkerchiefs and gloves. Later, they supplied wedding dresses and outer wear including outfits for riding and tennis and when motoring became fashionable, they stocked dust-proof veils. Sands was popular with American visitors to London; an article in The American Register in April 1904 says:

*Our own sweet Duchess of Marlborough (the American Consuelo Vanderbilt) has for many seasons purchased her entire stock of veilings and handkerchiefs from this establishment. To walk through their salons at the present moment is a liberal education in dress.*

Charles and Ellen had three children, Gertrude, Florence and Charles Francis. When in London the family always lived above the shop, and they

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made in a variety of  
materials.  
PRICE from 59/6

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arranged the accommodation so that their staff could live there as well. In the 1901 census there were at least ten draper's assistants living there as well as domestic staff.

Charles and Ellen's connection with Walberswick began before Tower House was built; Charles' sister Sarah married local farmer Edward Wigg in 1873 and it was perhaps this relationship that introduced Charles and Ellen to the village. Sarah and Edward lived at Manor Farm on the corner of the modern Manor Close.

By the time Tower House was built, in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Charles and Ellen had made a fortune and he spent much of it on building houses in the village, including Dudley on the corner of Millfield Road. The estate was selling building plots in those days; the architect Frank Jennings and his associates were keen buyers, but Charles ran them a close second. Leveretts Lane is the heart of Jennings country, but Charles managed an incursion, buying the plot for Knoll Cottage as well as the one for the Dutch House on the Street.

Charles' biggest project was The Terrace, opposite The Anchor. Some of the houses were leased out before being sold, others were sold immediately. Notes in the archive refer to him paying £40 for the land in 1900 and some of the houses were occupied by the 1901 Census. This seems very fast work, especially since another note says that the original builder went bankrupt halfway through the job.

Charles extended the Tower House Garden down to Moorside and built the terrace at the bottom of Palmers Lane. This was designed for his staff but apparently, they disliked walking so far to work because the lane was very muddy in winter. Charles placated them by building a wooden walkway. Even Charles' car and chauffeur were provided with a suitable home: a separate building on Palmers Lane.



*The Tower House in 1931 by John Doman Turner  
(by kind permission of WPC)*

It was quite usual for Charles and Ellen to be in Sloane Street while the children were in Walberswick. In the 1891 census for example Charles' mother Sarah was in Walberswick, living in a house on the Street with Charles' sister, her three grandchildren, Amy Beane a servant from London, and Louisa Burley the eighteen-year-old cook from Leiston. This was the house now called the Old Corner House; then known as Sloane Cottage. Charles probably bought or leased it as a family home while Tower House was being built. Perhaps the name was a reminder of their business in London.

Charles' sister Emmeline married the Walberswick grocer and draper Francis Debney in 1896; and by 1916 they were living at Torridon, Number 3, The Terrace. The Debney's shop was on the Green, not far from Vine Cottage, another house owned by Charles. He is said to have bought it to house his chauffeur, perhaps while the motor house on Palmers Lane was being built.

Charles and Ellen's daughter Gertrude also married a Walberswick man, Basil Ling a miller and the couple moved to Warminster. As for Charles and Ellen's son, he was living at Ashmoor House in Campsea Ashe in 1912 and later moved to Sutton in South London. He did not make a career at Sands, ending up working in a millinery business in Margate.

On his death in 1924 Charles' estate was worth £112,000 (£7.2m in 2022). Most of it went to close family but all his employees and domestic staff were mentioned in the will, as well a long list of friends. One of the charities included in the will was Miss Powell's Crippled Boys Home in Walberswick.

If Charles was as generous in life as he was in death, then it is no wonder that he and his family gained such importance in the village in so short a time. As to his physical appearance, Dorothy Seward of Old Farm remembered him as “a small man, Simian in looks”.

As for Sands, he modestly described it as his ‘glove and fancy business”. It would remain under the control of his widow and on her death his son-in-law was to be given the opportunity to buy it. Everything about this Edwardian self-made patriarch suggests that he would have liked his only son to take on the business but instead it was Florence’s husband James who was given this chance. It was their wedding that had prompted the lavish wedding in 1903. Perhaps Charles felt a sadness as he signed his will in the Southwold office of his solicitor. The Mallett name would long be associated with Charles’ buildings in Walberswick but not with the London firm that made them possible.

His widow Ellen lived on at Tower House and would keep the chauffeur up to scratch by wiping her white kid gloved hand over the car’s bodywork to seek out any lingering dirt.

Charles, Ellen and Charles’ mother Sarah are all buried in Walberswick Churchyard, just a hundred yards from Tower House.

*Thanks to Philip Kett for the anecdotes about the walkway down Palmers Lane, the Tower House generator and Mrs Mallett’s kid gloves. The information about the motor house comes from Mary Clayton in the WLHG history newsletter, Aug 2001. Tower House is now divided up, with Greengates fronting The Street.*

**Editor’s note:** In 1921 on census day Tower House has five women staying there (all single) - a house keeper, a parlour maid, a house maid, a cook and a school-girl visitor from Barnet, London. Presumably the Mallets were in London.

**Editor’s note:** Mrs Powell’s home for crippled boys would certainly need a change of name if it still existed today. The home was primarily in Heath House while the family running the home lived in Bracken Cottage. The latter is at the top of the terrace at the bottom of Palmers Lane as mentioned above (erroneously called the railway cottages by some). It may have been built after the terrace but clearly the Mallets and the first owners and residents of Bracken, Miss E.H (Ella) Powell and Miss Elinor J Miller, who ran the ‘Walberswick Home for Cripple Boys” must have been well acquainted. The home has been covered in previous newsletters but we plan to bring you photographic records in a later issue.