



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 68

February 2022

### Newsletter Editor's report

#### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

As you know, we reluctantly postponed our Christmas talk and celebration. In retrospect, with the surge in the Omicron variant and the proximity to Christmas, this turned out to be the right decision. Fortunately Charlie Haylock, our speaker, has proposed a replacement date and we certainly hope with the return of warmer weather we will be able to get together for the talk and to socialise afterwards. As you were informed by our membership secretary the committee decided to waive the 2022 subscriptions for existing members; this is to say thank you for your support throughout the recent difficult times.

While searching for a new date for Charlie Haylock to come to Walberswick we learnt that the 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 is "Suffolk Day". None of us had heard of this before but on the strength of this we have reserved the following Saturday, the 25<sup>th</sup> June, for the talk. This will be well worth the membership fee alone with the promise of a real Christmas meeting at the end of the year.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June - The late, late Christmas do or the Suffolk Day do:** Charlie Haylock will talk to us about "Charlie and The Dig". To quote "*Charlie Haylock is an historian of spoken English, a dialect specialist, an authority on his native Suffolk and a bestselling author. He has a regular spot on BBC Radio Suffolk*". For those, like me, who enjoyed "The Dig" and Ralph Fiennes Suffolk accent then you will want to see and hear the man who helped Ralph perfect it. This will start at 7:00 pm in the Village Hall. The talk will be followed by drinks and nibbles. This is free to members and £5:00 for guests. So for an extra £2:50 why not join for £7:50 and get a whole year and a half's benefits? Charlie's talk will be well worth the membership fee alone and with the promise of a real Christmas meeting at the end of the year it's a "no brainer".

Other events that will hopefully take place in 2022 will be:

- **AGM and the introduction of the new Constitution:** You will be advised of the date at least 2 weeks before AGM takes place.
- **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 original held by Southwold Museum. Date to be announced.
- **Showing of the Walberswick Scroll and a dip into the WLHG archives:** The next outing for the scroll will be the first weekend in May to coincide with a celebration of the life of Richard Scott who for many years showed and cared for it. Details will be circulated in good time.

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## Daphne Brega (Née Cross) and the Suffolk Land Girls Documentary - Holly Brega

In the previous issue we briefly mentioned Holly Brega who is creating a documentary film about the Land Girls who were part of the Women's Land Army (WLA) in Suffolk. Holly, who is descended from the once-large Cross family, offered to write something especially for WLHG. We are pleased to be able to share this with you now.

For members who are descended from old Walberswick families many of the names mentioned will be instantly recognisable. This story interweaves the lives of members of the Cross family, the Fairs, the Gilberts and the Kerridges – all well-known names to anyone who knew Walberswick before the millennium. It is also, of course, about the relative newcomers, the Brega family. The name Brega may not be as familiar as those other names but there was a Brega living at Fenside, Walberswick as recently as 1954 and some older residents still remember the family. Some may even remember that family running The Bell after WW2. This article shows ways that these families relate to each other. It is likely that all the old families were related, if you dig enough into the female lines. The names may disappear but the people do not. People leave the village but they or their children keep coming back. As we shall see, some leave but decide to make Walberswick their final resting place.

This is an example of “oral history” using information passed down to Holly from members of Holly's family. It captures events that may not seem important to an historian but were important to the family and add colour to factual accounts. There is a danger though as all our memories can subtly change with time. As ever we have been fortunate to have Kay Ungless on the team. With Kay's expert research we have been able to help Holly fill in some of the acknowledged gaps in her family history and provide some additional information around the people mentioned. Kay has constructed a family tree for the people mentioned which we include at the end of the article. This should help readers work out the connections which can be difficult, especially with some names being the same.

It is a fascinating story of Walberswick in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. It does not duplicate the WLA story but hopefully the two together will form a rewarding journey. So many of us have lives shaped by WWII, even if we were not alive at the time. Daphne Brega was certainly impacted by that war and this article is built around her and her love of horses.

If, after reading this, you feel that your family history would interest readers then let us know. We can also help you with some family research if needed. We love to see old photographs as well.

Holly says:

With a background in film-making and being brought up with horses, it was only natural that I would want to share the story of my equine-loving grandmother, Daphne Brega (Née Cross), from Walberswick, on screen in my new documentary 'The Land Girls and Horses of Suffolk'.

In summer 2021, I decided to go freelance with my videography and reach out to experts in the county to help develop my documentary film.

The volunteers who were signed up to the Women's Land Army (WLA) became known as the 'Land Girls' and they played a huge part in



Holly Brega

keeping the nation fed during both World War One and Two. There are some great stories from ladies who were stationed at farms throughout the county including Depden, Gazeley and Walberswick. Many from West Suffolk would have trained at Chadacre or Shimpling Park Farm on a four-week intensive course in all manners of agriculture, but even as tractors were becoming more popular, there were still those who worked with horses, and my focus is particularly with the Suffolk Punch.

My film also looks at how the Suffolk Punch has impacted the county, from football clubs to breweries, taking their branding from the chesnut giant, such as Ipswich Town FC and Mauldons, the oldest brewery in the county.

Contributors in the film include Nigel Oakley, who runs Rede Hall Farm and he has been integral with helping me understand more about the Suffolk Punch breed, the practises in action and how he's working with others to enhance the horsemanship needed to continue the succession of the breed.

An additional character in the film is Women's Land Army (WLA) expert Nicky Reynolds, from Ipswich, who has dedicated over 25 years to discovering and raising awareness of the WLA and she has set up a project called 'Soil Sisters' with the new archive centre, The Hold.

I've also spoken to my great-auntie Tommy (Christine) Gilbert (Née Cross), who grew up in Walberswick and shared stories about what it was like to live in the village during the war and the work her older sister Daphne did as a Land Girl.

## **Pre WW2:**

The history of my family in Walberswick goes back quite a way. There were certainly Cross's in the 1700's. James Cross (1808-1865) married an Elizabeth Courtnell in 1831 and this couple is probably the source of this once-large Walberswick family. They had at least seven children including Benjamin (born 1837) and William (born 1850). Benjamin and wife Rachel had at least 10 children, one of those being Weston Albert Cross (born 1866). William and his wife Ann Maria Cullingford were only slightly less fecund and their children included William Nelson and Charles Benjamin. Further information on the family around WWI can be found in *J. English (2018) For King and Country - World War I in Walberswick* [<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/King-and-Country-09122018.pdf>]. Many of the men made a living as fishermen. At least one was a "mudman". Basically mudmen walked the river walls and made necessary repairs as required. Some say that it is a shame the same job does not exist today. However, without doubt, the occupation that the Cross family will always be associated with is that of ferryman. Benjamin, a former fisherman is recorded as a ferryman in 1892. His son, Weston Albert followed his father. The ferry in its current form is still run by a descendant of the Cross family and there is a whole book on the subject written by Danny Church, the current Cross descendant, which can explain it all (THE STORY OF THE SOUTHWOLD - WALBERSWICK FERRY Church, Dani with Gander, Ann).

Weston Albert Cross married a Susannah Rhoda Sagin (from Southwold) and they had a son called Harold Cross, known as Sonny, my great grandfather. There was also a brother called Weston Ernest, who my great aunty Tommy affectionately refers to as Uncle Wessie. Sadly, a third son, James Charles was killed in WWII and is commemorated on the gates to St. Andrew's Church. Lance Cpl James Cross 4th Bn Suffolk Regt was called up to war in 1939 and landed in Singapore, 17 days later was taken prisoner and sent to work on the Thai-Burma Railway in Thailand and once that was finished he was sent to Japan to work, but it is believed he was on a ship which was torpedoed by the US navy and he went down with those in the hold. He left behind a wife, Dorothy Margaret Cross and an unknown daughter (*Suffolk Memories – Compiled by David Shirreff and Arthur Sharman 1998*).

Also in the village, Horace George Fairs and his wife Elizabeth had a daughter called Violet. Violet and Sonny then married. The Fairs family helped Sonny Cross and Violet (Née Fairs) set up Manor Farm Dairy in Walberswick, a farm shop which sold milk and eggs, sweets and crisps.

Sonny and Violet had a daughter, Daphne Joan (DOB 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1924, baptised on 1st March 1925), my grandmother, then Sonny and Violet had a second daughter, Christine (aka Tommy, 1931). Tommy and Daphne had one other sibling who died as a baby, at 10 days old. Because the baby wasn't named or christened, she wasn't allowed to be buried in the Walberswick churchyard but she was buried in the hedgerow after dark by Uncle Wessie. Tommy's story is also included in the second volume of Walberswick memories of WW2 collected by Arthur Sharman (*Further Suffolk Memories – Compiled by Arthur Sharman and Patricia Wythe 2001*).

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Violet sadly died in 1936 when Tommy was about five. In those days it was not unusual for family members to take over looking after motherless children. In this case family member Elizabeth Baker, known to Tommy as 'Aunty Pippis', came to look after Tommy and Daphne after the passing of their mother. In May 1939 just before WW2 began Sonny Cross re-married to an Ivy Kerridge (Kerridge also being another old Walberswick name). In the 1939 register we discover that Aunty Pippis (Elizabeth Baker) is recorded as living with Sonny, Daphne and his new wife Ivy and was the widow of Herbert Baker. Herbert was gassed during WW1 and survived, but not long enough to see the start of the next war. Research revealed an Elizabeth Rhoda Cross, born 1897, daughter of Weston and Susannah Cross, and Sonny's sister, who married a Herbert Baker in 1925. The marriage was without issue. Auntie Pippis was therefore a real Auntie but why "Pippis" we do not know. It was not unusual for people to be called something other than their given name (Sonny and Tommy are two good examples).



*Sonny and Ivy Cross*

Daphne went to a private school in Southwold, recalled by the family as Miss Whitty's School. Southwold archives record a Miss Sage Witty as School Mistress of Addiscombe School. This is too much of a coincidence and therefore the two schools must be one and the same. The school was housed in a building anyone who has walked down Southwold High Street will be familiar with. At the time Daphne would have been there the school was based in the Church Hall of the Congregational Church. The latter building opened in 1837. It was formally Southwold Congregational Church, formed in 1672 when 'dissenters' were ejected from the Parish Church. In 1972 the congregation voted to join the newly-formed United Reformed Church. We are told that in 1958/9 Miss Sage Witty, School Mistress, Addiscombe School, retired and the school closed. Miss Witty continued to conduct private music tuition at her home. Why Daphne was sent over to Southwold for her education and not educated with the other village children is unknown. Walberswick had its own Congregational Chapel at one time, a much humbler affair. The building, overlooking the green is currently known as the Heritage Hut. One of the men granted permission to construct the chapel in 1884 was a "B Cross". This could be Benjamin Cross, Daphne's great-grandfather.

Sonny and his two girls then lived at the old butchers shop house on the green in Walberswick [this would be Dunwich View the current home of the WLHG Chairman]. After the butcher had died and he had left the house to his housekeeper, Sonny rented it from her. Coincidentally this house appeared in the previous newsletter when it was a B&B - Emily List's guest house. This was in 1929. Could Emily List have been Sonny Cross' landlady?

## During WW2:

1939 - Chamberlain declared war. Sonny's daughter Tommy remembers hearing it on the wireless when she was about 8. Tommy went to the primary school in Walberswick, her primary school teacher - Mrs Piper used to tell the kids to take a pillow and go under desks for a nap as many of them had been up all night due to air raids. Tommy never napped though!

Sonny didn't go to war as he had an injured arm from a motorbike accident as a young man so he then became a coastguard with Mr Piper. He did the milk rounds and had a taxi service during the war. Tommy remembers her step-mother Ivy Cross (Née Kerridge), Daphne and herself at home (the old Butchers shop on the green) when they were hit by a bomb. Sonny was on coastguard duty and saw it happen from the beach and didn't know if they were alive and came running back to check on them. Daphne always refused to sleep downstairs in the safety of the cellar and so was in her bedroom when hit. All were luckily okay!

Sonny and others had a dug out with a telescope scanning from Walberswick to Dunwich for invaders. During the war there were troops based in the village, but there were also dead bodies that floated in and would get entangled in the scaffolding so Sonny and others would have to get them out of the water, cart them up the beach and then take them away not sure where they were going to. Bertie Stannard, who lived on The Green, was one of the men who made the concrete blocks that are still on the back of the beach.

After night work Sonny would sleep during the day but a Cameroonian Piped Band were based in Walberswick and so Sonny didn't get much sleep as they played the bag pipes on the green all day long! That didn't bother Tommy, she loved them! Just down the road in Southwold were based the Black Watch Scotsmen who used to fight with the Cameroonians!

So, Daphne joined the Land Army when she was about 17 and helped on Horace Fair's farm at Westwood Lodge, with Joyce Hambling and Dulcie Goodwin. Daphne and another Land Girl worked at Top Farm (Eastwood Lodge) in Walberswick. They worked with cows and on tractors. The girls would get on their bikes and get the cows into the yard, they washed udders and milked. There was a bull - the bull didn't like the cowman, Mr Rose, and cornered him a few times. The girls would go to the marsh to get cows and bull and they rode either side of the bull for extra support!

During the war as a Land Girl, Daphne worked hard, but was also invited to the parties the Americans held. Daphne spoke about marrying an American called Gill but it never happened!

## Post WW2:

Churchill announced Victory in Europe Day 1945 - signed on 7th May - declared on 8th May, however rationing continued in Walberswick (as everywhere). There was a victory parade for the Land Girls in the Women's Land Army in London that Daphne went to. She also received a letter of thanks from the Queen. She would have had to return her uniform but was allowed to keep three items but unfortunately we don't have any records to see if she kept any.

After the war Daphne set up a riding school at Eastwood Farm, Walberswick where she did gymkhanas and point to point.



*Daphne Brega in Land Girls uniform and letter from Elizabeth R*

Then we get to the Brega family and my grandfather, Victor Emmanuel Brega, son of William E Brega who came over from Italy with 3 others, (non-relations). Victor Brega and his parents William E Brega and Ivy A L Brega (nee Pigney) lived in a house called Merrivale opposite the church in Yoxford. Just before the outbreak of war there is a record of a family of Brega's in Yoxford in the 1939 register. They are living in Little Street, Yoxford. William E Brega is a Head Waiter on the Blue Star Line, so is in the hospitality trade (possibly this may relate to their move to The Bell). Ivy A L Brega, his wife, has her mother living with them. Victor Brega had two siblings, Pam and Michael. Pam was younger and married a Kerridge and had eight children. Victor and his parents are the only Bregas visible on the 1939 register but there is also a redacted entry. William E Brega died sometime after 1939, possibly of lung cancer, and is buried in Yoxford churchyard. At some point the family moved to Walberswick to take over The Bell. The dates are not clear. Family tradition has it that Victor Brega had to come back from the war in Cairo on compassionate leave when his father died. As a woman, his mother was not allowed to run the pub on her own. This would place their tenure as starting during the war. Certainly William's job on the Blue Star Line would have been in doubt during the war. However, we have a piece of artwork of the Bell which has the dates the Brega's were running the pub as May 1947 - April 1954. Mrs Browton's diaries record some information on landlords of The Bell and include a Mrs Brega (note, not Mr Brega) but without dates. Mrs Brega appears in this list between Way and Stansell (McKeen?, Galer 1922, Way 1937, Mrs. Brega, Stansell). This list is clearly not accurate as many will recall the pub was run by the Hay family before the Stansell era. Whatever the actual dates it must have been a very stressful time for Mrs Brega with the death of her husband and her tenure including a catastrophic fire removing the thatched roof of the Bell in 1949. She would have also see the flood of 1953, though thankfully the pub stands on a relatively elevated area.

One fact that suggests that Victor had been in the village before 1947 is that by early January 1948 he had married a local girl. Victor Brega and Daphne Cross got married on 7th January 1948 at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Southwold, where Tommy was a bridesmaid at their wedding. The happy couple and family can be seen in the picture below.



*Victor Brega and Daphne Cross Wedding*

Then on the 2nd February 1950 my father, William Harold Brega (Bill), was born at Halesworth Hospital. Bill grew up in the house then called Fenside, down The Lea, off Leverett's Lane. The house now looks very different (see below) as it has been newly clad. The family was still listed as living at Fenside, Walberswick in 1954 by British Phone Books. However, soon afterwards they moved on.

Sonny packed up the Manor Farm Shop and played together with Bill during his childhood. Sonny and my dad were very close. Sonny then brought Heath House in Walberswick (Palmers Lane) which backs



*Daphne Brega - possibly Heath House*



*A recent picture of the house where Victor, Daphne and Bill lived (now newly clad)*

onto the heathland which very nearly got burnt down from heath fires as it is one of the first houses to touch the heathland.

Tommy remembers in 1953 the local PC Chipperfield got hurt in the floods and couldn't work, so John Gilbert, Tommy's husband to be, came to replace him and Vic took him in at the Bell Hotel. John Gilbert then he went to stay at Eastwood Lodge with Horace Fairs.

Vic, Daphne and Bill left Walberswick sometime after 1954 to rent part of the Old Rectory in Hargrave, then around 1957 he had a bungalow built in Thurston. Then he went to Rushbrook Lane in Bury and that last one is where he met Pat Purdy, my gran who is with us today. Throughout Daphne still kept horses.



*Tommy Cross and John Gilbert's wedding*

Tommy left home at 18 and went to Hertfordshire. Daphne kept newspaper clippings of her sister's wedding at St Andrews Church in Walberswick. It was a marriage that read "Mr John Arthur Gilbert, son of Mrs and the late Mr J Gilbert of 8 Edgar Street, Ipswich. Married to Miss Christine Elizabeth Susanne Cross, second daughter of Mr and Mrs H A Cross of Heath House, Walberswick. Daphne was bridesmaid and Victor Brega was best man. Miss Joan Piper on the organ."

Sadly, Daphne died in 1960 due to cancer. She has a plaque in Ipswich Crematorium and Bill, my dad, used to visit every year. The ashes of Daphne's husband Victor and

before he sadly passed away also due to cancer in 2020. The ashes of Daphne's husband Victor and her son Bill were spread at Walberswick.

### **A Land Girls wedding:**

Another newspaper clipping that Daphne kept was from The Halesworth Times on 2nd October 1946. It states the marriage of one of her best friends from the WLA:

*"Marriage St Andrews Church, Walberswick, on Sept 28th, between Mr Percy S Wilson the only son of Mr and Mrs F. J. Wilson, of 2 Old Station Road, Halesworth and Miss Joyce F. Hambling, eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs G Hambling, of Meadow View, Walberswick. Miss Joan Piper on the organ. Three*

*bridesmaids; Miss Daphne Cross, Miss Dulcie Goodwin and Miss Molly Reeve. Reception at the Anchor Hotel in Walberswick."*

### **Final thoughts:**

In my documentary film I don't delve into my family connection too deeply because I want it to be accessible for a wide range of audiences, but the film is important because the part which these amazing women in the Land Army and horses played in the war, needs never to be forgotten. I want to inspire the next generation to develop an interest in these subjects which go hand in hand but are not often taught at school or widely seen on television, so I feel it is my duty as a story teller to share.

There will be screenings with Suffolk Archives in February and March to tie in with an extended Women's History Month. The first screening will be at The Hold in Ipswich on the 5<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm. The screening will be free with the option to buy a ticket for tea and a homemade cake from the ww2 WLA Recipe Book.

To keep up to date with where and when you can view it, visit [www.suffolkarchives.co.uk](http://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk) and [www.hollybrega.com/land-girls-documentary](http://www.hollybrega.com/land-girls-documentary) or search in google 'Holly Brega Land Girls Documentary' or even follow @WalkingHolly on social media!

I would like to thank Tommy for sharing her memories with us to help connect family members and the legacy of people we have lost live on.

Here is the link for people to book free tickets to see the Land Girls documentary: <https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/whats-on/>

Thank you all for your support.



**Extended Family Chart for  
Holly Brega**

