



WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 72

October 2023

Newsletter Editor's report

Since the last edition WLHG has been very busy with meetings, talks and exhibitions.

WLHG both uses and supports the Heritage Hut (HH). In February WLHG hosted a brilliant talk on paper conservation and the Walberswick Scroll by expert conservator Nicola Walker. As measured by the high level of audience participation during and after the talk it was very well received. It just showed that you cannot judge a talk by its title. Who would have thought that "paper conservation" would prove so interesting?

Pat Lancaster then led the team through three exhibitions in quick succession. In early March we had the George Charles Haité exhibition of charcoal sketches of Walberswick dated 1895. In late March there was an exhibition of Jessie Browton's paintings of Walberswick from the 20th century. In April there was an open morning allowing viewing of the archive and discussion of matters Walberswick. The intimate and historical setting of the HH was perfect for these meetings.

For larger meetings and exhibitions WLHG uses the Village Hall. In April the AGM was followed by a glass of wine and Andrew Stannard entertained attendees with songs by the legendary "Singing Postman" including his biggest hit "*Hev Yew Gotta Loight, Boy*"? In May Marlies Veldhuijzen van Zanten gave a splendid talk on "White Barn and the Cleminsons". There were a number of people in the audience who had fond memories of "Father Clem". We are hoping that Marlies will write an article for us and share some of the pictures.

So, six entertaining and informative events in under four months. Not bad for a history group in a small village.

Forthcoming Talks/Speakers

Our next two talks are at unusual times **so please take note!**

- **Shorelines: voices of Southwold Fishermen: Friday 20th October 2023 at 7:00 pm** in the Village Hall: You may have read Robert Jellicoe's book "Shorelines, Voices of Southwold Fishermen" about Southwold's longshore fishermen. Come and see the author and listen to him and the voices of a bygone age (including some from Walberswick which was always bound to Southwold).
- **Southwold Railway – Past, Present and Future: Sunday 3rd December 2023 at **4:00 pm**** in the village Hall: John Ridgway, Newsletter Editor for Southwold Railway Trust, will talk to us about the Southwold to Halesworth railway. This is our Christmas event so expect wine and nibbles after the talk and the opportunity to socialise.

These talks are, as usual, free to members.

Both talks are members-only events - please email Edward Wright, our membership secretary, at ewright123@btinternet.com to reserve places. We then know who is expected and it helps with catering for our Christmas meeting.

Membership costs £10. If you know someone who would like to join then please email us in good time before the talk at ewright123@btinternet.com. It's good value, especially for both talks.

Details of our 2024 programme will be available soon, including a talk on Fra and Jessie Newbery (see a snippet below) – probably 2nd March. Following soon afterwards we have Margaret King on the “Herring Lassies” – probably 11th May. That's just the first half of the year.

On the weekend of the Haité exhibition mentioned earlier, Keith and Nicole Roberts were in the village doing some research for their new book on Fra and Jessie Newbery and their family of artists. Fra Newbery, who is Nicole's great grandfather, was the mentor of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and head of Glasgow School of Art (if you are not aware of the Mackintosh connection with Walberswick then search previous newsletters). Briefly, the Newbery family had a holiday home in Walberswick (Roofree, The Street) and Charles and Margaret Mackintosh were in the habit of holidaying in the adjoining cottage (Millside). That is until the summer of 1914 when Charles and Margaret decided not to return to Glasgow. But that really is another story.

Getting back to Haité, Keith noticed something odd about one of the Haité sketches - telegraph poles and lines in a drawing dated 1895. The telephone did not come to Walberswick until 1904 so Keith embarked on a quest to explain Haité's inclusion of poles and lines nine years earlier than would be expected. Fortunately, Keith's friend, John Cranston, is an expert in the history of the telephone and telegraph system, and after considerable research, the answer was found - and it was quite a surprise.

But before we start, here is another puzzle for you and hopefully one of our readers may be able to assist answering a question or three.

In the course of the Roberts' research they came across the following picture taken in Walberswick. It comes from a Newbery family album and shows a pageant held in 1911. The questions are:

- Whose garden is it in?
- Who are the people shown?
- What was the occasion being commemorated?

Nicole has identified her grandmother Elsie, and her sister Mary,



who are fifth and sixth from the right on the back row, but perhaps one of our members might recognise something e.g. the row of houses in the background or have a copy of the photo with some names marked on it? My guess was that the garden is that of Old Farm (next door to Rooftree and with a big garden) and the houses in the background are in Millfield Road (each house has a chimney stack at each end) but this was just a guess. The Newberys and the Swards were good friends and known to host get-togethers. However, our Millfield Road expert, Edward Wright, disagreed. Both he and Keith Roberts think the 1911 pageant was on the land that runs down behind the houses on the West side of the Green. The back of the House on the Green is quite distinctive. This would fit with Amy Leather who used to own Briar Cottage on the Green and is known to have produced plays. Google Earth helps with the perspective and building line but for me the jury is still out. We still have no idea what the pageant was celebrating.

The Walberswick Telegraph Pole Mystery

The Haité drawing below is the one that started the “mystery”. Dated 1895 you can clearly see telegraph poles and a line going up Ferry Road and towards the Green, but the telephone did not appear in Walberswick until 1904. The first thought was that there was an error in the date on the picture. If so, Haité made the same error multiple times. Also, he was meticulous in dating his sketches and so we quickly discounted any notion that there was an error on the sketch. But clearly he had recorded telegraph poles and lines before they should have been there. As far as we know, he was not clairvoyant.



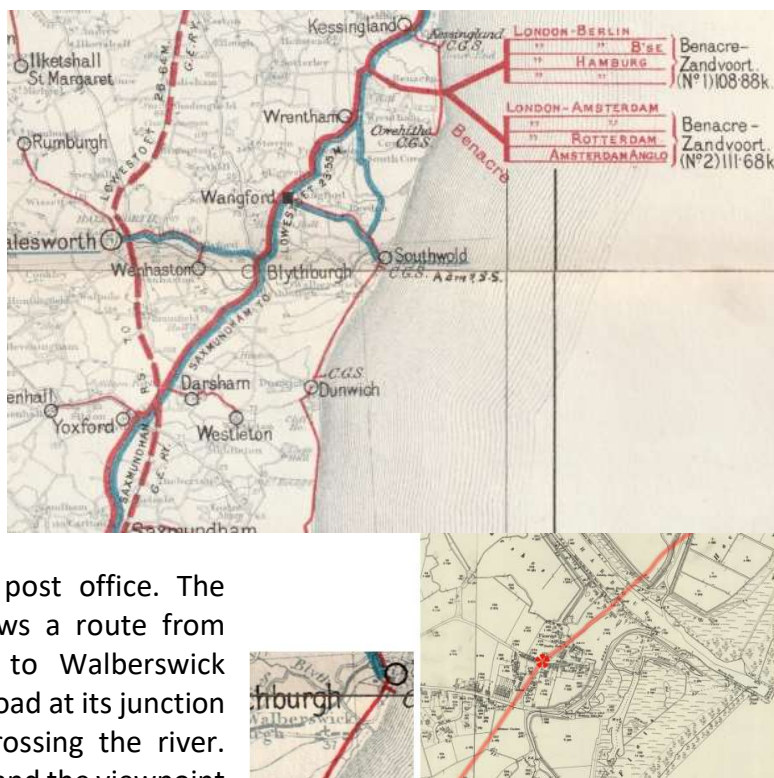
Confirmation that the telephone exchange WAS opened the summer of 1904 comes from an article titled "Salubrious Southwold" in the *Halesworth Times and East Suffolk Advertiser* of 6th September 1904. It lauded the "*many improvements and evidences of enterprise which mark the town's progress*", including the inauguration of a Constitutional Club which had "*connection with the Post Office Telephone Exchange*".

John Cranston explains that the 1904 telephone link was probably a phone booth or “silence cabinet” in the post office. It seems that the phone service in Walberswick remained limited to that “call office” for the first few years. There are no records in the directories of any businesses or private homes in the village with their own phones. The call office - phone number Southwold 2 - was still listed as the only number in the village in 1920. Therefore, the poles and lines in Haité’s 1895 drawing cannot have been associated with the telephone.

The map below is taken from the 1912 telegraph map of East Anglia and it enabled John to solve the mystery.

The map shows (though probably not very accurately) where the main telephone (blue) and telegraph (red) lines ran.

Importantly, it shows a thin red line which passed through Walberswick linking the coastguard stations of Dunwich and Southwold by telegraph. It was part of a network which ran around the coast, and dated, probably, from the mid-1890s. As shown, it did not connect up with Walberswick post office. The telegraph red line clearly follows a route from Dunwich across the marshes to Walberswick where, as shown, it joins Ferry Road at its junction with the Street before then crossing the river. Both the route of the telegraph, and the viewpoint (marked with a red asterisk above) of the drawing by Charles Haité, are superimposed on the 1903 map above. His drawing shows the poles in 1894, Bell Cottage is on the far right and the road tracks down to the ferry. It is of interest that at the spot where the wire crossed the estuary there stands today, on the Southwold side, an old telegraph pole (though of much later vintage) warning of the presence of an underwater telephone cable.



So, Haite was recording the telegraph line which passed through Walberswick without stopping!

Photographic evidence shows that there were also telegraph poles at the other end of the village before 1904. These can be seen in the picture of Walberswick station. A phone was established in 1899 but at the station only, and not available for public use.



A system of rings enabled one station to alert the next of train departures!

The first Walberswick people to be “on the phone” all shared what was known as a rural party line. This must have been installed around 1921 - a single pair of wires serving those who had agreed to stump up for a “shared service”. The 1922 book lists eight of them: Charles Alford, H Block (builder), C Home McCall CBE, a Mrs Owen, WH Stewart, JHE Tupper, Edgar Turner and Payne Williams.)

For most people needing to communicate urgently, telegrams would have been used. They were far cheaper than a call from the call office which had to be booked in advance with no guarantee of the transmission quality. However, the nearest telegraph office to Walberswick

was at Southwold. A 12-word telegram cost sixpence (c £2.40 today, according to the Bank of England's inflation calculator) and a reply would usually come within a few hours, whereas a three-minute phone call to, say Glasgow, from the Walberswick call office would be nearly ten times that price!

Many thanks to John Cranston for his painstaking research and for Keith Roberts for setting the puzzle and helping to solve it. Without their help this would have remained an annoying mystery.

The Post Office Moves

Since 1904 Walberswick Post Office has had many homes and the following series of pictures show some of the places it has been as it made its way around the Green and then up the street. The last fixed Post Office, within the Tuck Shop, is now long gone but that is another story.

Arthur Sharman, a former sub-postmaster, wrote a history of the post office for the WLHG newsletter in 2002. Arthur was well-placed to do this as Arthur's parents and then Arthur and his wife Mollie were all employed by the post Office at various times. The whole article can be found by clicking on

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/WLHG-NEWS-LETTERS-14-26.pdf>.

The scan contains multiple issues but the one you want is no.22.

The picture on the right is taken from the Walberswick Scroll courtesy of Walberswick Parish Council. It shows the site of the first post-office. This was in Norland Cottage and ran from about 1900 to 1923. By the time this was painted (1931), the PO had moved up the street. A previous newsletter contains some oral history concerning this PO. Eric Fergusson, grandson of the postmistress Jessie Fergusson, writes in the newsletter about Walberswick around WWI, and much about the PO.

In particular Eric describes his father's recollection of his father Ernest [Henry] *"making space for one of the first telephones in the*

Post Office. I cannot imagine how this could be fitted into the living room but dad did say it had a slightly sunken floor". Read the full text at:

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/King-and-Country-09122018.pdf>

It also gets a mention in chapter 17 of Edward Wright's latest book (Walberswick People and houses 1870 -1930). A visit to this PO left a lasting memory with one caller of *"The*



overpowering smell of unwashed bodies and unventilated rooms". To be fair this would be the case with many small homes at that time. The person with the sensitive nose was Dorothy Seward and you can read more of her Walberswick observations at:

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/NEWSLETTER-NO-63-DECEMBER-2020-LOCKDOWN-ISSUE.pdf>

Dorothy also recalls an episode from her childhood that suggests an answer for the picture question – “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”.

Subsequent PO homes according to Arthur were Mrs Reynolds Store (now Hedgely), Concord Cottage, The Parish Lantern (The Pottery Shop), The Old Corner House, Grasmere (Pennys), Mrs Meekins' lock-up (next to Rose Cottage and on the site of Lane End), Fair View and, finally, The Tuck Shop.

The picture on the right is also taken from the Walberswick Scroll courtesy of Walberswick Parish Council. It shows Mrs Reynolds shop on the Green and you can see the post box. This was painted in 1931. Mrs Reynolds had this shop and her husband, Jack, a grocery store up the road. In between they built a house for Jack's sister. Their only son, Peter, was killed in WWII.



The next picture is where Mollie and Arthur Sharman ran the PO in a “period of stability” (as mentioned by Arthur in his history). Mollie, and Arthur ran the post office from 1945 for 43 years until May 1988 when both retired. Initially it was in Mrs Meekins' lock-up before moving to their family home, Fair View,



opposite Fisher's Garage. The PO occupied what was the front room. As well as Mollie and Arthur there were three children so quite snug. The women in the street are Ada English and her sister Nellie Fenn who lived either side of the PO in Fern Cottage and Beach View. [Editor's note: the woman on the right is my grandmother and the woman on the left my great aunt]. My great grandfather once owned all three cottages]. Incidentally, Mrs Meekins' lock-up can be seen at the far right. It had many uses in its life-time apart from briefly housing the PO. It is probably most famous for being the home of world-famous Walberswick fudge made by Mrs Scott, mother of local-artist Richard Scott.

that Mea Allen resides at Eastwood Cottage. This is where Nat Le Roux now lives and he has written about her and her gardens in previous newsletters.

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/HISTORY-GROUP-NEWSLETTER-March-2019.pdf>

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/WLHG-NEWSLETTER-Sept-2019.pdf>

Getting back to telephones, there is no mention back in 1953 of anyone phoning anyone. The police would go through the village blowing whistles. In place of the telephone there was a lot of running about and bell ringing. The nerve-centre was Miss Sanders at Cartref, The Terrace. The Chapel (opposite Millfield Road) was designated as the “rest centre”. A Captain Davies had a boat on the Green which was to be manned in two shifts by six men.

By 1953 there were telegraph poles and lines all up the street but no mention of phones being used.