



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 45

March 2014

### *A note from the Chairman*

Test pitting is coming to Walberswick again this year: on Wednesday 30 April and Thursday 1 May, a completely new set of gardens will be dug in as we try to explore the limits of our village in the 16th century as well as seeing what can be found.

Test pitting in this form began in 2005, when Dr Carenza Lewis left *Time Team* to take charge of the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA), exploring the histories of villages through archaeology. HEFA is run by Cambridge University and Downing College, a college that deals with archaeology and anthropology, giving Year 10 school children an insight into higher education while benefiting village history and archaeology. Each child has to fill out a 16-page record of the two days' dig, which is done to strict guidelines - the children spend a third day at Cambridge to learn about what they have found in the previous two days.

Since 2005 to the end of the 2013 season HEFA students have dug 1499 test pits, dug out some 2000 tonnes of soil, sieving and recording as they go - and then put all the soil back to where it came from! (Results from 2013 on view at the AGM.)

*Philip Kett*

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

**Saturday 5 April**

*Alfred Corry: The Southwold lifeboat of 1900*

John Cragie

**Tuesday 22 April**

History Group AGM

**Saturday 11 October**

Talk on Suffolk Punches

The Suffolk Horse Society

All meetings commence at 19.30 in the village hall.

PAT WYTHE  
28 NOVEMBER 1925-30 DECEMBER 2013



Back in the late 1980s Pat Wythe and Don Thompson were talking, and Pat said: 'We could arrange to have a history group in Walberswick.' Don agreed and said: 'Let's set one up' - so they gathered several others around them including Philip Kett, Merl Rafferty and Angela McKay. Meetings then followed at 'Greenways' (by the Green).

Don was elected Chairman and Pat became Secretary [according to a newspaper article in the archives, Pat had a 'wealth of experience behind her in the secretarial, administrative and personnel world', so that position on the committee was made for her] and Angela McKay Membership Secretary.

By 7 January 1992 there were 50 members and 30 attended the first meeting in the village hall. Mike Marshall, the Coasts and Heaths Warden, was very helpful and made available a cabinet in which artefacts loaned or donated by members and residents of the village could be displayed in the Walberswick Heritage Centre during the spring and summer of 1991.

On 28 April 1992 an open meeting was held in the village hall and many long established village residents were invited to attend - Ellen and Bertie Stannard, Ruth and Leslie Goodwin, Florrie Denny and Elsa Hopewell. Over 100 people attended and enjoyed the first public exhibition of Miss Browton's paintings of Walberswick, two showings in the annex of the late Barrett Jenkin's video *Southwold*, including scenes of the Southwold Railway and a spectacular 'son et lumière' finale presented by John Allen

of the Blythburgh Society. The evening was a great success and the history group was soon to become the village organisation with the most members.

In those early years Pat was not only the Secretary; she was also the researcher for the group and was the typist for the newsletters, typing up the drafts that had been produced by other members of the committee.

Together with Don she was the driving force behind the history group until her illness in later years. Based on the sound foundations that they put in place in the 1990s, the history group is still a very thriving and successful organisation with some 140 members.

We thank them both for their vision.

*Maureen Thompson (and others)*

*A note from the Chairman:* Pat Wythe passed away since our last Newsletter so, on behalf of our members, I feel that I should mark the occasion with a few words.

Pat along with Don Thompson and other interested members of the village, decided to form a history group some 22 years ago; she became its secretary and chief researcher spending many hours at the Record Offices in Ipswich and Lowestoft, to get us off to a good start. Indeed, this remains the core of our research today.

She remained our secretary until illness overtook her and then had to relinquish the post, but she still retained an avid interest in the history group.

Over the past few months the village and the history group have lost several of its members, most of whom had been part of the village scene for many years.

*Philip Kett*

[*Note from the editor:* The article I mention above is from page 7 of the *Royston Crow*, dated 'Friday, December 27th, 1974' and, complete with a photograph by R H Clark, reports of Pat's 'moving on': 'Six and a half years after joining the staff of Neve Engineering Laboratories at Melbourn Pat Wythe decided it was time to move on. "It is an all time record for me," she told me, especially after intending to stay only a fortnight, as a temporary secretary. Pat Wythe left her job as Personnel Manager on December 12th.

'She has not yet made up her mind what she is going to do. One thing is certain, she intends to have a month's holiday and catch up on all the jobs she has neglected at home, a cottage in Harston, where she will continue to live.

'With a wealth of experience behind her in the secretarial, administrative and personnel world she does not envisage difficulty in obtaining another post. Pat Wythe is at present thinking in terms of working for a large concern in personnel to gain even more experience in that field.']

\*\*\*\*\*

## *THE FIRST WORLD WAR*

This year sees the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and there are many exhibitions showing up and down the country and events of all sorts taking place to mark this historic event. There is also a major collection of material, including diaries, letters, maps and photographs, on the website of the National Archives at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/>. Our area was not immune from its effects, of course, and there follow two articles of local relevance, one from the beginning of the war, the other from nearer the end.

### *FRONT LINE, FRONT HOME*

'This being the greatest war the World has ever known, it may of some interest in years to come, if we survive, to have a few notes of local events in this little Frontier Coast Town of Southwold lying at this moment within 80 miles of the front in Belgium and not more than 250 miles from the great War Harbours of Germany.'

Thus, Mr Ernest Read Cooper, solicitor and Town Clerk of Southwold, prefaces, in a bold sloping hand, the journal he wrote up after the war from the diary he had kept whenever he could snatch time from his manifold activities. At the outbreak of war he had been Town Clerk for the past 19 years, and was also Clerk to the Magistrates, Manager of the Harbour, Secretary of the Ferry Company, Secretary of the Lifeboats, Captain of the Fire Brigade, and Secretary of the Waterworks. In May 1916 he lists some of his additional wartime appointments: Commandant of the Volunteers, Clerk to the Tribunal, Secretary of the Canadians' Fund, Sub-Commander of Pilotage, Deputy Lloyds' Agent, 'besides smaller jobs'. [Phew! *Ed.*]

Cooper was, indeed, something of a Pooh Bah in this picturesque old Suffolk resort, but there is more dry humour than pomposity in his delightful portrayal of life on the Home Front. There is not lack of the growling that helps keep civilians happy in wartime - the price of food and its increasing scarcity, the behaviour of troops billeted on the town, the weather, some of which he even blames on artillery barrages on the Western Front. But it is evident that Southwold regarded itself as a special case, more vulnerable to the Germans than almost anywhere in England. It was on the direct path of Zeppelins crossing the North Sea to bomb London and other targets in south-east England. Far more, it was at the mercy of German naval raiders and invading troops. The fear of invasions persisted up to the last months of the war, when new pill boxes were being proposed to strengthen the coastal defences.

But even though the German menace was felt to be close, the journal, written as it is by a public servant very much at the centre of things, revealingly hints as [sic] the impassable gulf that existed between the Home Front and the trenches. Cooper's

devoted championing of the Volunteers - recruiting meetings, inspections drills - has a faintly comic air about it now, shaded of a later Dad's Army. The real war was elsewhere. On still nights in Southwold they could sometimes hear the dull boom of the guns in Flanders. It came from another, undreamed-of world.

The journal starts on 28 July 1914.

'My wife and I went on board our yacht *Louie* this day having let our house for a month and altho' there was war in the air on the continent it was not supposed that we should be drawn in, but on the second night on board, about 1.30 am on the 30 Inst, we were awakened by Noel hammering on deck and shouting, he said the Postmaster had called him up and sent him down with two important telegrams. I was sleepy and wanted to discuss the matter but he was very cross at being turned out and shoved the telegrams thro' the skylight and scooted. They turned out to be telegrams from the Board of Trade that no lights were to be extinguished nor buoys removed without the concurrence of the Admiralty, one was addressed to me as Town Clerk and the other as Manager of the Harbour. Sissie said at once, that means War with Germany, and when we went up to the Town in the morning we found that all the Coastguard had been taken away during the night, during the day the Reservists were called and on the Sunday the Naval Reserve men left.

'All sorts of rumours were flying about and visitors were getting alarmed. I had letters from people who had taken rooms asking me if was safe to come. The Territorials were mobilised and left for Leiston and the Boy Scouts in all their glory were on the warpath.

'I had to go to London on the 4th Aug. and after securing my room at the Jnr Conservative Club I walked down to Trafalgar Square. London streets were full of Americans ordered out of Germany and fleeing from the Continent generally, taxis and motor cars were flying round with English and French colours flying and large troops of young men were marching round singing and cheering. Traffic was diverted to Westminster via the Embankment so I got on top of a bus and when there changed on to one eastbound and came slowly up Whitehall thro' the crowd. All London was waiting Germany's reply to our Ultimatum, the excitement was intense and after I had got back and into bed I could hear the cheering and singing in front of the Palace.

'My case was adjourned next day for a week and although it was announced the Government had taken over the railways I got home all right that night travelling down with men of the Rifle Brigade who were all in the highest of spirits. I found Southwold visitors almost in a state of panic, the newspaper shops were besieged, spymania set in badly and the old women in trousers soon began to worry the authorities.

'We lived on board the yacht all the month. several yachts were in the Harbour at the time of the Declaration, some got away at once, other men laid theirs up and went off for a time, Lewis could not look after us properly as he was "all of a flutter"

and each morning when he knocked on the cabin door he told us all the latest news. Very soon came the news of HMS *Amphion* and the mines and her smashed boat was washed ashore here - then some mine sweepers appeared and began sweeping a channel for the coasters, one of their first acts was to catch the warp of Bob Harris' trawl boat and sink it nearly drowning him ...

'We had sent Judith and the nurse to lodge at Wenhaston while the house was let and used to run up the river in the motor boat to see them, Nurse amused me by saying, "Since the War's been on I always sleep with my window fastened." Things seemed so safe outside that we never let go of our moorings and directly our house was vacant we moved in and laid the yacht up. The Rev Pawley Smith was there in his boat and had his gardener as steward, one day he asked Fred if there was any news and gardener solemnly replied, "Well sir they do say up in the town as them Jarmans have took Barlin."

'A week or two later I was appointed Joint Hon. Secretary of the local branch of the East Suffolk War Relief Fund and we raised over £600 in Southwold & District, in connection with this I organised a recruiting meeting in the Market Place which resulted in over sixty recruits joining including two of my own clerks, Peck and Moore (I am glad to add both of these returned safely in 1919 after over four years service abroad) ... The new recruits left on 7 Sept and they mustered in the Market Place and we had the band and crowds to the station to see them off. A few days after as one of the National Reserve I accompanied those who had been called up down to the station and each time I saw the old Col. Sergeant Mackenzie looking out of his window watching and I wondered if he thought of the days when he was at the Crimea with the Scots Guards. (He died 2 Feb. 1915, aged 86, I arranged for the Funeral and the 25th Londons furnished the Firing Party, his old Regt sent a wreath.) ...

'31 Oct. A troop of Lincolnshire Yeomanry came in and I let them into the Waterworks Enclosure on the Common where they made a most horrible mess, damaged the fence, gave my men a lot of trouble and then refused to pay the modest sum of 10/- asked for water and accommodation of forty-four horses for two nights ...

'We hardly realised what War really meant until the 15 Oct. when the Ostend smack *Anna Williams 028* arrived in the Harbour with Belgian Refugees and saw members of other smacks making for Lowestoft. I boarded her with a pilot at the Harbour Mouth and found her crowded with men women and children from seventy years to an infant, who had fled just as they were with pitiful little bundles and boxes, leaving everything else to the Germans who were reported just outside Ostend. These people were well looked after by the Southwold folks but were ordered to London and left next day in a special motor bus for Halesworth where they joined the Lowestoft refugees about 1,000 in number. There was great excitement about these poor people and we thought it might be our fate later ...'

[to be continued ...]

## ZEPPELIN FALLS IN FLAMES IN EAST ANGLIA

'On Saturday night, June 16, 1917, the quiet, picturesque village of T\_\_ retired as usual and woke early on the following Sunday morning to find itself famous. The reason is given in Lord French's Official Report:

"Sunday, 5-30 p.m. Last night's air raid was carried out by two enemy airships ... The second raider made an attack on a coastal town of East Anglia at about 2-30 a.m. She was heavily shelled by the guns of the anti-aircraft defences and was driven off. It is probable she was damaged by gunfire. Shortly afterwards, the raider, after dropping a number of bombs in open places, was engaged and brought down in flames by a pilot of the Royal Flying Corps. The airship was destroyed."

'Such is the official record of an event which disturbed the serenity of this quiet spot and brought a crowd of sightseers from near and far to the estimated number of nearly 30,000 on Sunday alone. Many had been awakened by the gunfire and had watched the course of the Airship as she turned and twisted, now upwards; now down; in her vain endeavour to evade the furious shelling and escape to sea. Others awoke to consciousness with a vague impression that their neighbours had gone mad, why else should respectable human beings be cheering themselves hoarse at this time in the morning? The great Airship had again turned seawards in a final frantic effort to escape when "spits" of fire from the machine gun of a pursuing aeroplane seemed mysteriously to transfer themselves to the "gasbag," and in less time than it takes to tell the tale she burst into flames from end to end. Then,—a gasp! then,—the most spontaneous burst of cheering one has heard for many a day, and the monster slowly sank to earth leaving only a long trail of smoke to mark the course to final destruction of the "pride of the Fatherland." A general stampede from all directions followed, and although everyone appeared very definitely to have "somewhere to go" how few were "all dressed up"! There was many a quiet chuckle as friend greeted friend on that auspicious June morning, about 4 a.m.

'Probably the first on the spot was Petty Officer B\_\_ (home of leave) who promptly took charge of the Commander of the Raiding Squadron who was alive and practically unhurt. Others quickly arrived and helped to remove three of the crew who were still alive. Some of the crew had attempted to jump clear of the final smash, their mangled bodies being found in a field near by; the remained were buried in the wreckage. And, what a wreckage! She seemed to have broken in two; the tail portion being piled in a mass of inextricable confusion, while the "nose" stuck jauntily in the air like the end of a huge cucumber. Amongst the crowd could be seen the R.A.F. Pilot who had administered the *coup de grace* and who had alighted in a field near by. The Military arrived and took possession, and from henceforth the public view was only to be had at a respectable distance. Then came the R.N.A.S. men who proceeded to clear

up, and by the following Tuesday 14 bodies had been recovered. On Wednesday the inquest was held at the farm house, in the open air. The names of four of the men had been ascertained, the other bodies were numbered. The medical evidence showed that five of the men, whose bodies were found in the fields, had died from injuries; the remaining nine had died from burns received in the blazing Zeppelin. The jury, whose foreman was the Vicar of the parish, returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.

'The same afternoon the funeral of the victims took place in the village cemetery. The ceremony was of the simplest character. The bodies were borne on gun carriages and army waggons, the 14 bodies being buried on one grave. The Rector of the Parish, a Brigade Chaplain and a Roman Catholic Clergyman, officiated in view of a large concourse of sightseers from all parts.

'L48 was one of the very latest type of Zeppelin Airship, and had many features not noticeable in the earlier types. Some of these it is not permissible to mention, but attention may be called to the blunt nose of the L48 as compared with the illustration with the illustration of p. 6, which is of an earlier type. These Airships are of vast dimensions from 500 to 600 feet and 40 to 50 feet in diameter. They have a very strong framework ... [text missing from the photocopied material]

"... attacking and destroying an enemy Airship: - Captain R. H. M. S. Saundby, R.F.C., and Sec. Lieut. L. P. Watkins, R.F.C."

'A later announcement tells us that "the King has approved the award of the Military Cross and Military Medal respectively to Sec. Lieut. F. D. Holder, E. Kent Regt. and R. F. C., and No. 506 Sergt. S. Ashby R. F. C., in recognition of conspicuous gallantry and determination in connection with the destruction of an enemy airship". While all four of the gallant airmen thus honoured took their part in the "warm reception" accorded to L48, by East Anglia, it fell to the lot of Sergt. Ashby, on his first night flight as gunner, with Lieut. Holder as pilot, to administer the coup de grace.'

[Photograph captions read: L 48 at 3.21 a.m. on June 17th, 1917; The Smoking Wreck at 3.45 a.m.; Sightseers at a respectable distance; Peace ... and war; Where many bodies were found; The Coroner and Jury; An open-air inquest; The funeral; Coffin of Commander of L 48 with R.F.C. wreath; A "Zeppelin" airship {this shows the earlier nose type referred to in the article}; Wreckage of L 48 ready for removal; Miles of aluminium; A gondola in the foreground; A gondola and engine parts; Once the pride of the Fatherland; R.N.A.S men at work; The nose; Loading up the 'nose'; The tail; Departure from East Anglia; A collecting box for Ipswich and E. Suffolk Hospital yielded £30; Farmer S\_\_\_ and some of the officers who superintended the 'harvesting' of his unique 'crop'; A few 'souvenirs' made from 'scraps' of the wrecked Zeppelin.]

\*\*\*\*\*



## *MEMOIRS AND MEMORIES*

Several memoirs have turned up in the newsletter office (i.e. my email inbox) and I thought these would be very interesting reading for members.

### *PENNIE WELLINGS*

Walberswick in the late forties and fifties was a thriving village and the following is a vignette of that time. Bear in mind that these are the recollections of a child; memory is an imperfect tool at best and, in a child, it is not only imperfect but is also selective.

My mother and I returned to Suffolk in the early spring of 1947 and lived, until she remarried, in a small black and white cottage next door to the Bell Pub which in those days was thatched. We then moved to one end of Valley Farm before eventually living in the entire house.

There was a primary school in Leveretts Lane run by the redoubtable Mrs Piper aided by Mrs Dooley. The playground was in front of the school and the central flagpole formed a division for boys and girls at playtime. The school was thriving as the village had many families with small children. One year they arranged an entertainment that 'toured' from the Gannon Room - as the village hall was then called - to Blythburgh Village Hall. All the children took part in some manner and I sang a song with Mrs Dooley's son about a 'Little Dutch Boy and a Little Dutch Girl'. The only other memory I have was to do with exercise books. The little ones did their sums in the conventional squared exercise books but, as you got older, you were allowed to do sums in a lined book. I longed to be old enough to do that but, unfortunately, I was moved to a small weekly boarding school in Aldeburgh before I reached my goal.

Mr Reynolds' grocery shop stood looking at the green, where Sea Shell Cottage\* now stands. His wife ran the haberdashery shop at the other end of the green. Her shop frontage is virtually unchanged, although it is now a private house called Hedgerows.

Barclays Bank came twice a week to a room in a small house in between these two shops. Also there was a tea shop run by Mrs Parker. Further up the street past the Anchor was Charlie Fisher's garage and almost opposite that was the post office run by Mr and Mrs Sharman.

Mr Reynolds' shop provided everything one would expect from a village grocery: bags of broken biscuits and offcuts from the bacon and ham slicer were available. The latter were invaluable for crab fishing from the Kissing Bridge. The original bridge no longer exists, having been replaced by a more up-to-date one. I suspect that the crabs are probably relations of the ones I used to catch and put in a bucket. More hygienic these days, too - in those days the late evenings echoed to the splash of many buckets emptying - all the Elsans (outside loos) were emptied straight into the creek ...!

The ferry was rowed by Old Bob and Ernie - the wreck of the old chain-operated ferry still lay on the river bank. My grandparents lived in Southwold so I was a regular passenger. I usually took my bicycle as there were geese kept down by the ferry and they were noisy and fierce so a bicycle was a necessary baffle. Ernie did not like strangers riding in the ferry and would refuse to talk to them. He let me help to

row - my hands over his - and although he talked to me, he would totally ignore the occasional holidaymakers.

Before the floods in 1953 the marshes behind the river were full of mushrooms and my cousin and I would get up early and pick as many as we could, bicycle over to Southwold and sell them to the vegetable shop there.

The barn cinema also operated and it was based behind the garage of Valley Farm and showed films on a regular basis. There were also Saturday matinees that I went to, these being mostly romances involving beautiful damsels falling from their horses only to be rescued by handsome and dashing young men. A pair of ruffled satin curtains hung in front of the screen and I remember being allowed to mix the lighting effects, creating wonderful rainbows of colour.

We also had a Nativity play there once, perhaps it was a school-organised one. I was an angel but had nettle rash all over my face so was talcum powdered heavily to disguise my predicament!

In the spring and throughout the summer there was a riding school run by Major Bugg and his wife ... and their small terrier. The horses were stabled beside the Anchor and used the fields towards the sea beyond the Village Hall. Major Bugg was everything I imagined a Major should be - he always wore a cap and leather gaiters. His wife, I imagine, did the paperwork for the riding school and they lived in a caravan up a lane just off the main street. I had weekly lessons mainly on a horse - probably pony - called Punch. I was not allowed to go hacking as it was considered too expensive at 7s and 6d an hour.

In and around 1952 I went to a boarding school in Hampshire but was back in the village in quarantine for something in early 1953 when the first floods happened. No seawalls then so a far more intrusive body of water flooded into Valley Farm, washed away the garage doors - which had been closed to protect the contents - also washed away out chickens and their house in our garden. I was just 13 and thought the whole thing an adventure. The allotments were ruined and lost pigs and chickens. I remember we got aid from the United States in the form of food parcels.

During the Christmas holidays and just before the event itself I did a relief post round - only the bottom half of the village. I found it great fun, although the others in my family did not appreciate it too much as they had to wait to unwrap their presents until I got back on Christmas Day ... in those days there were postal deliveries on both Sundays and on Christmas Day itself.

I also helped out during the summer holidays at the tea rooms run by Mrs Parker. She had, I think, been on the stage at some time and boasted a much-lipsticked Cupid's bow mouth in which was placed, permanent it seemed, a cigarette. She mixed all her cakes by hand with the cigarette still firmly clamped in the Cupid's bow, the ash growing longer and longer until it fell into the mixture and was incorporated into the baking. The customers, however, did not appear to notice this unusual additive to their cakes, indeed many customers would comment on how much they had enjoyed the home baking.

[Pennie says: \* 'Not sure about the name! It is Sea something Cottage but can't remember the middle bit.' Is this Seascape, perhaps? Ed.]

## MIRIAM DILLON and the EMPIRE WINDRUSH

Launched in Hamburg in 1930, the German cruise liner *Monte Rosa* became part of Hitler's 'Strength Through Joy' programme and in WW2 took part in the invasion of Norway, before acting as a recreational ship for the battleship *Tirpitz* and becoming involved in the evacuation of Latvia. After the war, the British took the 14,650-ton vessel as a prize ship, converted her into a troopship, renaming her *MV Empire Windrush*. In 1948 the *Windrush* made history when she brought the first batch of emigrants from Jamaica to their new life in the UK - after which she was re-roled as a military transport. Her last voyage, in 1954, was intended to bring British troops and their families, 1,500 in all, from Japan to Portsmouth but disaster struck some 30 miles northwest of Algeria, on 28 March, when an explosion and fire in the engine room caused a mains power failure. The back-up generators were then found to be defective, leading to the failure of all communications, the fire pumps and lifeboat-lowering mechanisms. The ship had no sprinkler system so the fire spread quickly to all parts of the ship, killing one engineering officer and three ratings in the engine room. However, other than a number of minor injuries, including burns, the remaining crew and the passengers escaped unscathed, with every witness speaking of the calm efficiency of the crew, the troops and their families as they abandoned the ship, many still in pyjamas. Women and children left the boat first and there were many individual acts of chivalry and courage, the officer in charge of the servicemen and the ship's master, Captain Wilson, being the last to leave, in a well-rehearsed operation that spanned two hours. Further, on hearing the distress signals from the *Windrush*, a fleet of ships in the area raced to the rescue.

The Dillon family, then comprising Major Brian, Miriam, 7-year-old Roger and 5-year-old Tipi, had boarded the *Empire Windrush* in Hong Kong, bound for the UK and a new posting. Given the uncertain condition of the ship, its captain was thought to have been reluctant to take on the military families, but he could not have anticipated the disaster that would face them all. Roger was the first of the Dillons to become aware of the impending danger, when he returned from the communal toilets early that fateful morning to report that there was 'something wrong with the ship's engines' and some evidence of smoke. After ensuring that his family dressed quickly, with whatever came to hand, Brian left to help take care of the troops, while the rest of the family made for the deck and were soon aboard a lifeboat, being lowered into the water. Those who know Miriam will not be surprised to hear that, on discovering that there were only four men on her boat who knew how to row, and none with any seamanship skills, she seized the tiller and took command. Although the boat was already full, one lady, anxious for those still aboard the ship, or struggling to survive in the water, demanded that they stay with the ship. However, Miriam counselled that they should

leave the area at once, for fear that their boat be sucked down with the *Windrush*, while making space for other rescue craft then arriving at the scene - and this argument prevailed. Meanwhile, Roger and Tipi, well used to being at sea, played contentedly about the lifeboat until they were picked up by the *Hemsefjell*, the captain of which commented to Miriam later how impressed he was with the lack of panic and great discipline he had witnessed among those his crew had plucked from the sea. Within a few hours, the Dillon family were safely ashore and together in Algiers, Major Brian, who had quite properly remained with the troops, being there already, waiting for them on the quay.

Ashore, the French residents of Algiers treated the survivors with great compassion, providing all the necessities of life, including quite acceptable accommodation in a tented camp vacated for the purpose by the French military. As with so many others, the Dillons had lost all their belongings that had been onboard - the second time for Miriam after leaving almost everything behind as she escaped from Greece when Germany invaded. This time, however, help was immediately at hand, with funds provided and an early trip into town to buy clothes and other essentials.

Meanwhile, out at sea, the doomed ship continued to burn, its aft funnel crashing to the deck while a boarding party was beaten back by the heat. Attempts to tow her to Gibraltar failed and just after midnight on Monday 30 March, some two days after the explosion, the *Empire Windrush* slipped, stern first, beneath the waves to her watery grave.

It is of interest to note the many comments published at the time, praising British officialdom and administration for the rapidity with which they dealt with this most unexpected disaster, mustering all the necessary support, together with sea, air and land transport, to bring some comfort to the survivors and return them home without unnecessary delay. So it was that the Dillon family were soon to board HMS *Triumph*, bound for Gibraltar, but for them, even this trip was not without its drama. Somewhere in the Mediterranean, little Roger Dillon was found to be missing - triggering a major search of the ship. He was finally located, having somehow locked himself in - and unable to escape from - a lavatory in the seamen's quarters. Again, for a second time that week, rescue was swift, with a Royal Marine, in fine tradition, quickly scaling the three-quarter door and pulling Roger to safety. Today, Roger Dillon freely admits that it could have been this courageous and exemplary act that persuaded him to join the 'Royals' - and rise to the top of his profession. More fortunately than most, the Dillons had friends in Gibraltar, who cared for them in the few days before a chartered aircraft flew them back to England, their long journey ending back in their house in Porchester - little the worse for their ordeal.

An inquiry into the cause of the accident centred initially on the possibility of sabotage.

*EMMA LAST*  
*MATRON OF BLYTHBURGH AND DISTRICT HOSPITAL*  
*1947-1977*

We set off from our house in Sidegate Lane, Ipswich, in deep snow, suffering a puncture en route.

Of course I remember how utterly ghastly it was. I remember it as I first saw it in 1947; it was a condemned workhouse slum of national ill repute so, of course, no money had been allocated to its upkeep. When appointed we were shown plans of the proposed new Bulcamp which were later abandoned.

Never shall I forget our tour prior to interview, the stench from a river of urine from an overflowing commode in the far corner reaching the door, the few staff with ill-fitting uniforms, thin brick floors, wooden staircases, chamber pots, the darkest possible paint everywhere and a network of overcrowded totally apathetic patients.

Never shall I forget my husband's ashen face. I do believe though that the board of guardians had some idea of the wind of change because although other couples had braved the elements to attend, Ted and I were appointed because, as we always said, we had no knowledge of the poor law or workhouse experience. We commenced on 1 April 1947 and for the next 30 years that building completely dominated our whole lives.

We were the new assistant master and matron. The master and matron left after three months as they were sick of the scandal and were applying elsewhere. But not before leaving me to cope over a long weekend with a grossly overcrowded, unclean hospital with three children under 4 with high fevers from measles. We had the temerity to apply for their post as our then chairman Mr Humphrey Scrimgeour told us 'to put it in'. After our short experience we felt that we could hardly do any worse.

Having been appointed we had a hard look at our prospects, Ted was always very practical and had an excellent knowledge of and great interest in electricity; he and Mr L. Summerfield installed the very first central heating system themselves, the boiler came from the former Halesworth United Dairy and the radiators (large iron ones) came from Little Plumstead Hospital. They spent every minute of their spare time including weekends on the installation of the heating system and how well I remember that Sunday morning when we had central heating for the first time! Ted and I had no clerical help, one driver and one general porter.

I had a visit once a week from a GP. His relief came to see the new arrivals for a quarter of an hour each Friday. There were no trained nurses and five inept and untrained others who were heartily 'sick of her and her new fangled ideas' and did not hesitate to either write or say so, the public assistance officer and his bulging briefcase at the monthly meetings bearing more than ample witness, but I stuck to my

guns and at the end of the first year only three of the original 'nursing' staff remained.

The committee was very trusting because I had no power either to dismiss or engage. Ted's few staff members were far more readily motivated and the network of broken down sheds, punishment cells, glass topped segregation yards were quickly demolished and a new roof provided for the whole building.

In the now St Felix ward with its sagging ceiling, broken windows and loose brick flooring, all the foul linen from the entire hospital was kept, plus broken furniture. This linen was then conveyed via the main kitchen by the Part 3 residents pulling a flat trolley, one man pulling and another walking by his side, as was the coal to the cellars.

While the residents were living among all this squalor, the auditors would argue over a lost pair of bootlaces or one tray cloth too many. We were on call 24 hours a day. When violent and uncontrolled patients were written up for Paraldehyde 5-10cc Ted had to come to the wards to help hold patients in order that I could inject intravenously so that the other patients could be safe and get some sleep. If I did not personally administer Phenobarbitone to some 20 or so epileptic Part 3s in the evenings then injuries would often occur requiring plastering or stitching, which I would have to undertake. Fortunately, my former work held me in good stead.

I battled on with uncaring staff. I never dared to do the night round at a regular hour after my first incident of finding a well-stoked fire, an armchair with blankets and pillows surrounded by a screen and 20 Players on the mantelshelf! Never, never have I forgotten hearing 'Nurse, please may I have my injection', this from a man dying of cancer, and the reply from behind the screen, 'Shut up you old bugger and go to sleep.' I could give you the position of that man's bed to this day and his name ... and the name of that so-called 'nurse'.

My evenings were spent (after bathing Pat and giving her a story) doing clerical work as we had no help in the early years. He would type while I dictated and in between times I gave medication and visited the wards.

I always had to attend the Chapel services in case a patient had an epileptic fit during the service. I never minded going to Chapel, however, and used to clean the glass decanters for the wine also the brass, while my daughter and I would always decorate the Chapel for Easter, going primroseing to fill large containers that we placed on the wide window sills.

In my later years I often wondered what I expected from my young husband and child so that I could give my all to the patients I cared so desperately about. I asked the committee if the name could be changed from Red House Bulcamp to Blythburgh and District Hospital as I felt that otherwise I could never attract good applicants for the nursing posts.

The hospital was almost self-sufficient in food - we our grew fruit and vegetables and even kept some pigs. Of course, there were no such things as freezers or fridges in those early days, so all the work at any sort of preservation was carried out by Part 3 residents.

There were endless inventories as every single item had to be accounted for and, quite rightly, I never minded this. So much needed doing that it was often difficult to know where to begin.

Ten-feet high brick walls topped with glass divided the exercise yards, separating men from women. There was a network of old sheds, punishment cells, and padded cells. Loose brick floors, chipped paint exposing brick walls, broken windows, buckets to catch the drips through the leaking roof when it was raining, open fireplaces, yet no fires when the wind blew in wrong direction ... therefore no heating at all, lamp-smoked ceilings, bare boards, no chairs, minute lockers, no fire escapes, overflowing commodes, urine flowing through wards, trestle beds in the attics with straw mattresses, smoked-filled day rooms, I noted one pack of cards and a filthy set of dominoes. Food trolleys to take to the wards were open and unheated.

The women's dormitory was opposite matron's flat, so each morning I was greeted by rows of tousled beds and chamber pots being carried downstairs to be emptied in a minute lavatory situated under the stairs. Men slept on wooden trestle beds in the attics on straw mattresses, interlinked in some way, there were dormer windows and no curtaining, bare scrubbed boards for flooring.

There were evicted families, mothers with babies, everyone seemed to have scabies or high grade mental defectives; there was epilepsy, anti-social behaviour; we housed the aged, the widowed, the generally unable to cope, widows who had given up homes to live with their children and come to us because it hadn't worked out.

Men's day room (2) loose brick floors, Windsor chairs lining the walls, protected by the individual occupant, so there never any opportunity to sit elsewhere but this was obviously very important to the individual; the open fireplaces were protected by high guards, a central table that was highly polished, although the smoke from shag tobacco smoked in the many clay pipes made visibility very difficult.

Clothing: weekly bundles comprising of dress/shirt, socks/stockings, black apron, vest, knickers/long Johns, petticoats for women: each person had three sets of clothing, clearly marked 'Red House Bulcamp' in block print indelible ink.

[*Note from the Editor:* I have tried to leave the original author 'voice' intact as much as possible, but there have been minor changes to Pennie's entry, I have condensed and edited slightly the middle section and cut the end of Miriam's because of space constraints and Emma's memoir is virtually intact and to be continued next time.]

\*\*\*\*\*

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

The following is a list of items Pat Lancaster, the History Group Archivist, has received and archived since the last meeting. All these items have been generously donated by members of the History Group and/or village residents. [The 'file name' (e.g. 'Art & artists') refers to the file you should ask for, should you wish to look at something.]

'Floods 2013': *The Journal*, Southwold - Pictures of the floods, 5 December 2013; memory stick containing photographs taken by Pat and Tony Lancaster on 6 December 2013 after 5 December surge and other photographs taken by Piers Ford-Crush, Alvin Hunt and Nigel Walpole.

'Heritage hut': Printout of information regarding the Heritage Hut.

'History Group': Parish News for February 1996 containing articles on the WI; visitor management working group; tribute to Heather Block; Heritage Centre; Cancer Research; rolling stones gather cash - hag stones article from Mary King; Minsmere Reserve report for October 1995.

'Miscellaneous': *Greatest Treasures* - the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, UEA, 14 September 2013 - 23 February 2014.

'People': Order of Service for Peter George Hodben Avis.

'Suffolk Record Office': Autumn 2013 booklet.

Unnamed ('NA'): A large box file containing all information of the Walberswick United Football Club 1987 - 1995; picture of the chain ferry.

\*\*\*\*\*

If you enjoyed the 'Christmas' social last year, when we were regaled by local folk group Shipshape, you may be interested in another folk project that has been going on around the country - it is also connected with the First World War commemorations, hence my mentioning it in this newsletter. "Forever England" is a project that aims to unearth the folk songs and stories of World War I from four small communities in Wiltshire, Devon, Cornwall and Oxfordshire' (*Songlines*, Issue 98, March 2014, page 12). Entitled Forever England: Song and the First World War, the production will be in concert halls throughout the country in the autumn, in a larger performance that includes the Geordie folk act, the Unthanks. I am hoping it will come to Norwich later this year - I'll keep you posted!

*Helen Baxter, Editor*