



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 40

SEPTEMBER 2011

Our Chairman, Philip Kett, has drawn my attention to the fact that the History Group will shortly celebrate its 20th Anniversary: it was on 7 January 1992 that it held its first meeting. Perhaps we should have a celebration next year. I have been looking at the first issue of the Newsletter to see what the main concerns were at that time.

First, from the start it was felt important that the Heritage Centre display photos and artifacts relating to Walberswick; and now once again we are hoping that the Centre will become available for a similar purpose.

Historical research was very much on the agenda, and over the years a great deal of valuable research has been undertaken and archived.

At the meeting David Shirreff spoke about the HMS Guernsey (Basing) and said he was going to research and write about the ship: now his plan has come to fruition.

Richard Scott talked of his interest in Walberswick painters—and we treasure the book that resulted.

Also planned was a scheme to list all houses in the village with as much information as possible: this culminated in the Millennium Project, which photographed every house in Walberswick—a very valuable record.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the energy and enthusiasm shown by the founders of the History Group, and we continue to be very much in their debt.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**(All meetings at 7.30pm in the Village Hall)**

**Saturday 8th October**

**Huby Fairhead: *Decoy Sites of World War II and Local Airfields***

**Saturday 3rd December**

**XMAS CELEBRATION**

**Hilary Huckstep will show slides of cartoons by Reg Carter,  
best known for the Southwold Railway postcards  
(and saucy seaside postcards too!)**

## WALBERSWICK MEMORIES OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

Walberswick was first mentioned to us in 1959. A new friend in London, 70-year-old Francesca Wilson, generously said we must go and stay in her cottage in Walberswick. Where was this place? Neither of us had ever been to Suffolk. We didn't have a car. It was in 1961 that we finally rolled into the village, down the street to the Green, and saw the sea beyond the dunes. It was a mild late October day and we rushed down to the beach, where our children met other children down there wading in the low tide, looking for shells, crabs and star fish. It seemed perfect.

Francesca's Creek Cottage lay past the Green at the corner of the little Private lane and the gravelly path leading to the beach along a concrete wall, just as it does now. The Creek flowed away through the reeds towards Dunwich. Creek Cottage was white and covered in roses, with apple trees and gooseberry bushes. Indoors, each room had an open fireplace. It was enchantingly cosy.

### Changes

In many ways, Walberswick looks much the same as it did fifty years ago. In those days the upper end of the Green had swings, a slide and a see-saw, as popular then as now – though the see-saw has now gone. At the lower end stood the Jubilee Seat under its thatched roof, and the Village Hall, a charming wooden building with a board saying The Gannon Room, where markets and events took place.. There were two pubs, the Bell and the Anchor, and a ferryman who rowed you, bikes and dog, across the sometimes restless river Blyth to the Southwold side. There was no street lighting or bus service.

However long ago that was, the village did have more amenities in the 60s. On the Green was a general store, its twin bay windows full of goods and, as you stepped in, a long wooden counter with moustaschioed Mr Hackett facing you. Across the Green was a petrol pump and a little hardware store run by the welcoming Mr and Mrs Rogers, where you could buy crablines and have bicycle tyres' punctures fixed.

The Tea Rooms served delicious teas. And in the top corner, Briar Cottage ran a boarding house. Beyond, a single-storey pebble-dashed house contained the Village School, a well-equipped little school with some gym equipment, I remember, for just two levels, 5-7 year-olds and the 8-11s. Quite a few villagers will remember going to school there.

Just up the one and only street, significantly called The Street, opposite Fisher's Garage, was also a proper little post office. The Tuck Shop was then in tiny premises in The Street (recently the "Old Curiosity Shop"), ruled over by Ginger and Phyllis Winyard. There was an electric milk van that did its round, and the newspaper was always in your letter box by early morning.

As you entered the village, the large greenhouses of the Dickon Nurseries sold tomatoes, the delicious split ones at half price, and cucumbers and other vegetables. Two miles out of the village, at the Blythburgh turn-off, the kindly farmer's wife at the corner house would pull up any vegetables you wished, fresh out of the earth - and weigh them and sell for a shilling or two. Walberswick certainly provided all that you needed within easy reach on foot or by bike. Or by ferry!

### The Search for a Holiday Home

Walberswick seemed the ideal place for a family holiday. We came back for Easter the next year, and then again in summer 1964, with my parents from Sweden, staying at Briar Cottage. It was run by Mr and Mrs Rideout Evans, an ex-colonial couple, quite stern, but serving the best English food we had ever tasted. They never did puddings or desserts, only

savouries of great variety. It was a delight to sit down in the dining-room with its broad bow window.

Briar Cottage must be pre-1800 with its two narrow and steep staircases. These were usually occupied by the Rideouts' massive bulldogs glaring at you as you attempted to squeeze past. When my mother asked if the dogs could possibly move, Mrs Rideout retorted " You do realise that they live here all the time, whereas you are just a visitor!" After my father died in 1965, my mother decided to buy a cottage in England to spend summers with us. I remember going to Rottingdean and Seaford and Hastings to find some suitable cottage. It had to be by the sea, where you could bathe, or it wouldn't seem like summer to Swedish people. However, the south coast resorts seemed too "towny" and I kept feeling that nowhere could compete with Walberswick: it reminded me of the sandy Swedish south coast place that I knew so well from my childhood, called Ystad – now of worldwide repute due to a certain detective by the name of Wallander! You can check in the next programme that the beach looks not unfamiliar.

### **Moving In**

And so it happened that Francesca's sister-in-law Dorothy sold Crow Cottage in the little lane to my mother, two doors away from Creek Cottage. We were all jubilant and spent much of the 1966 summer in the renamed Longfield Cottage, 'crow' sounding a rather sinister name. This wooden bungalow was built when Blucher English and his wife married in 1936. His mother owned the land behind the older houses on the east side of the Green, and she lived in Harbour View, dating from 1911, giving a plot each to her descendants. Gradually cottages were built on them, though Creek Cottage is supposed to have been moved there from where Hidden Hut stood.

Blucher English had moved to Lima Cottage, but became very helpful to my mother and put up curtain rails for her. I still have his notes of the measurements of the rooms and was puzzled that the "back rooms" were the kitchen and bathroom and nearby bedroom. My neighbour in Samphire Cottage, Richard Scott, explained that initially the main entrance to our cottages was from the bottom of our gardens towards the sea. Apparently there was no Longshore then: it was moved there later from its site next to Valley Farm, where it had been a cinema run by the Jeans family. There was no actual 'lane' either, as our rear plots backed right up against the rear fences of the houses on the Green. From Samphire Cottage on, you had to open a little back gate to get to Longfield, and the same to access Harbour View. This means that today each vehicle passing down over our private lane is technically trespassing.

### **Neighbours**

As well as Francesca in Creek Cottage, Richard Scott's mother Mrs Blinkhorn lived in Samphire Cottage, and Ruth and Leslie Goodwin, nephew of Blucher English, lived in Harbour View. Then deep in greenery was Hidden Hut and, up the slope, the splendid thatched Hidden House where Ernst and Lucy Freud lived. Hidden House had once been a barn that stood in Leveretts Lane next to Toby Cottage. Ernst Freud then converted it as Hidden House in its present position. It turned out to be a wise position, since it just escaped the 1953 floods, unlike Harbour View, Longfield (then Crow Cottage), Samphire Cottage and Creek Cottage.

### **The Flood**

Richard Scott says his parents spent the night upstairs, as the Goodwins must have done in Harbour View, but Longfield and Creek cottages didn't have an upstairs. Fortunately Francesca was in London when the flooding occurred that November and Dorothy Wilson

hadn't yet moved into Longfield. But her daughter Brigid told me her mother had just placed some new mattresses on the kitchen table the day before. So when the sea flowed into the cottage, the table just floated up to the ceiling, sparing the mattresses!

To this day you can see the flood level in Longfield where special boarding 4ft high has been nailed to the wall ever since. The water receded but it took the garden three years to recover. However, in all the years we've been there, this wooden cottage has never seemed or smelt damp and the garden has been gorgeous. And an attic you can stand in has since been added. In the 50s Dorothy Wilson had asked Ernst Freud to design an extension to her cottage, which he built at an angle to receive maximum sunshine. It's still there, perfect, the only bit of Bauhaus in Walberswick maybe. Amazing to think that Freud himself might have stood in my cottage! But Siegmund died in 1939 before ever getting to see Walberswick, alas.

My mother always came over in early June in time for the Aldeburgh Festival and made friends in the village through bridge and tennis. She marvelled at Douglas Bloomfield's expertise with her garden. She would return to Stockholm in late August, ready to be back the following June. But after only five summers there she sadly died, and the cottage passed to us. We started spending much more time there.

### **Holidays**

Every half term we'd be up there, always rushing to see who was staying in Creek Cottage. Francesca invited old and young, and involved them all in quizzes and games. Visitors could also borrow Francesca's two rowing boats and row down towards the windmill. Our children adored Francesca and her cottage. She was very hospitable to everyone, be they Cambridge professors, Spanish refugees, Hungarian countess Catherine Karoly, or abandoned mothers. Before the war, Francesca had helped Nicholas Pevsner move to Britain. Decades later, she offered shelter to Peter Buxton, an eccentric former architect escaping from London. At first Peter had lived in the upright wooden container box discarded after transporting my mother's furniture from Sweden. This tall structure is still standing by East Point, which Francesca also owned.

East Point was once a pottery run by Michael Jeans, as Francesca would point out, admiring the lovely pale blue jugs and cups with white tracings. At high tide in winter, East Point could sometimes only be reached via the road from the beach. One of Francesca's many lodgers there, a painter specialising in different coloured points called Frank Beanland, had to row across the flooded car park or, as once happened, ride a horse through the waters.

Until the 70s Major Bugg still had his stable at the end of the narrow lane opposite Fisher's Garage. Among his many helpers was our 11-year old daughter Katinka, spending a whole summer mucking out and learning to ride bareback. Behind the stables was a vast hinterland where Mr Cleminson lived in a house with a fine tennis court, one of some 20 tennis courts once found in private gardens throughout the village. For many years we used to play at Eastwood, and when we attempted to retrieve tennis balls from its divine garden, we'd hear Mea Allen call out from her upstairs window: "Leave that ball. I'll pick it up for you."

### **Walberswick Characters**

As we settled in Longfield, I came across an elderly man working away in his tool sheds behind Pear Tree Cottage (now Bell Cottage). He was kind Mr Page, a boat builder who was also willing to mend or shape anything you needed in wood. His idyllic bygone workplace seemed straight out of a children's picture book. Mr Page owned Pear Tree Cottage - probably 18<sup>th</sup> century with its white-washed staircase winding in the middle up to an attic.

In the early 70s, I also had the luck to find an expert seamstress, Mrs Denny, who lived in 1 Adams Lane. She could also have been in a children's picture book with her pinafore, white hair and sprightly look, pins in her mouth as she tried out some cloth. She was even able to mend ripped tents in a day, asking modestly if five shillings would do for the job. My cottage has many cushion covers and curtains, and long 70s skirts, all her handiwork. She was good at reminiscing and said she used to hand an extra sandwich to our gardener, Vic Fairs, when he was a scrawny little schoolboy on his way to the village school.

Mrs Denny was also interviewed by the BBC about Rennie Mackintosh's stay in Walberswick in 1915. He lodged at Mrs Denny's aunt's boarding-house at Millside in the main street, where she would help out after school: she remembered Mackintosh staying there, and his slouch hat, and people being suspicious about his evening walks on the beach shining a torch.

It was one of my Walberswick joys to call on Mrs Denny. She lived right into her late 90s and she told me she'd spent a day at the old age centre in Southwold. "Just to please them," she'd comment, "but what's the point, sitting there playing cards? The old boy opposite would fall asleep. And the other one could hardly see, and another was almost deaf. So I feel I'm much better off at home." Florence Denny, Florrie to her family, was born Florence King in 1902 and lived to within a few months of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her grave is in the churchyard.

Vic Fairs was the village milkman at first, then turned to gardening, and became our gardener for nearly twenty years, the best one I've ever known. He and his brother Dennis were fine golf players and played cricket for the village team. Joan Fairs, Victor's widow, still lives in Adams Lane.

In 1975 John and I were introduced to Jean Webster, later Turnbull, who invited us to join her tennis parties at Mill Croft. For years we had the exquisite pleasure of playing on her lawn court, searching for tennis balls to the scent of roses. There will be others in the village who remember Jean's elegant style and cucumber sandwich teas. Two decades on, similar tennis joy is offered by Julia Joseph, the best ever lady player in Walberswick, on her superb court at Sunningdale with Dunwich in the distance.

My overall impression of Walberswick has always been one of kindly, helpful, and also very interesting residents. It's been a privilege to know the village and its historic setting.

**Brita Haycraft**

**April 2011**

*(With thanks to Richard Scott and Florence Denny)*

## **ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES**

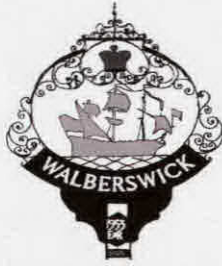
**“My Memories of Walberswick” by Brita Haycraft**

### **Funerals:**

Order of Service for the following:

Brendan (Ben) Sutton  
Arthur William Sharman

Four pictures of the excavations at **Alexandra Cottages**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 39

FEBRUARY 2011

The launching of *The Walberswick Frigate* was a great success, and the book has been very well received. It is a great tribute to the efforts of the late David Shirreff and all the others who helped bring the project to fruition—not least the Shirreff family themselves. Copies of the book were sold at the Christmas Celebration; it can still be obtained from the Tuck Shop and from Dione Shirreff for £12.50 a copy.

Some very interesting lectures have been planned for this year, and they are listed below. From now on our lectures will be open to guests for an admission fee of £3, with the opportunity to join the History Group at the usual subscription of £5 per annum. We hope to gain some new members this way.

I am now very keen to solicit some new ideas from members for contributions to the Newsletter. Are there any members who would like to research and write about topics of historical interest to the village? Let me hear from you!

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**(All meetings at 7.30pm in the Village Hall)**

**Saturday 9th April**

**Alan Mackley: *Building an C18th Country House***

**Tuesday 26th April**

**AGM with Archive Pictures**

**Saturday 8th October**

**Huby Fairhead: *Decoy Sites of World War II and Local Airfields***

**Saturday 3rd December**

**XMAS CELEBRATION**

**Hilary Huckstep will show slides of cartoons by Reg Carter,  
best known for the Southwold Railway postcards  
(and saucy seaside postcards too!)**

## BERTIE STANNARD

*Following on from Richard Scott's series that brought to life a number of Walberswick characters from days gone by, we continue with an account of a village resident who was with us until quite recently. He was Walberswick's oldest resident for a number of years.*

The Boer War had not long ended when this remarkable man was born in Blythburgh on 30 July, 1903. His parents already had four sons and were to have a further three boys and two girls, so this was a poor family of twelve living in a three-bedroom cottage. Times were far from easy. Billy George, his father, was a hard-working man; his mother, Dorothy Cross, was born in Walberswick and in her younger days had cranked the original ferry across the river by hand, long before it was steam-powered. He inherited their genes for hard work.

### Early Life

By the age of six, Tubby (as he was nicknamed even then) was spending time in the fields earning coppers scaring the crows: this helped buy the boots he wore to go to Blythburgh School, which Tubby called the Jimmy Nutt Academy. Jimmy Nutt was obviously impressed with the boy's intelligence and agreed that if he could pass the necessary exam he could leave school at the age of twelve. The exam was held in Reydon so Tubby's father took him over to Reydon on the back of his bike. His father was too busy to wait for him so Tubby had to walk back home to Blythburgh. The family still have the certificate he received from the East Suffolk County Education Committee, confirming he had passed by reaching the Fifth Standard in May 1916. And so began his working life.

### Starting Work

Opportunities were limited in Blythburgh in 1916, so he found ways of earning money as best he could: herding cows, chopping logs on Blythburgh Fen or driving a horse and cart loaded with milk churns down to Walberswick and over to Halesworth. He was still only fourteen or fifteen. When he caught rabbits he went to Lowestoft to trade the skins, this time with an older man driving the horse and cart. There were regular stops on the way home as Mr Piper liked his tittle and the old horse knew very well which pubs to stop at. Tubby always waited outside and this habit remained with him throughout his long life: he only ever went into a pub to refurbish it, never to drink in it.

### Apprenticeship as a Builder

At the age of sixteen he came to work in Walberswick for Heather Block's grandfather and started his apprenticeship as a bricklayer. His standard of work was exceptional and it was clear very quickly that he possessed a considerable talent for using his hands. He helped build the original Poplar cottage in 1921, and one of his last jobs was building the present Village Hall. In between he worked in or on most Walberswick properties. He was always a hard and conscientious worker and took great pride in the quality of his craft as a builder for over fifty years. Tubby was a perfectionist: he was quite capable of building a complete house on his own from the ground up!

### Marriage

In time he met Bubby, (another nickname) the baby of the Johnson family, and she became his friend, wife, and companion for the next 81 years. They had just one son, Michael. From 1931, when he married, he lived in Lorne Cottages. At the onset of World War II he dug an underground shelter in the garden, deep enough to stand up in, and big enough





**Bertie (Tubby) Stannard**  
**1903 - 2007**

to sleep nine people during the air raids. He also helped build wartime sea defences for Walberswick; many of the concrete anti-tank blocks and look-out pill boxes still remain.

In September 1940 he left home, on the same day that Michael started school, to go and do essential building work for the RAF. He built hangars for bomber aircraft, runways and Nissen huts, staying in places as various as Huntingdon, Malvern and South Wales, before coming to London during the blitz. He spent the rest of the war re-housing people who had been bombed, and built many pre-fabs – some still standing today, although they were only designed to last 10 years.

Later, when he was offered a senior management position with Wimpey, he declined because he did not want to leave the village he loved, and because he did not wish to disrupt his son Michael's education. He had no wish to be high-powered, have lots of material possessions or earn high wages. He was simply content with family and village life, and enjoyed picnics with friends at the beach hut throughout the summers, though he didn't really like the water very much and rarely took a dip. He moved with Bubby and Michael into Mafeking Cottage in 1951, after spending three years working weekends and every evening refurbishing and rebuilding the original cottage.

### **Retirement**

Shortly after his sixty-fifth birthday he decided to retire, as he reckoned he had worked for nearly sixty years and had done enough. He then began almost forty years of retirement. Heather Block decided he should have a new hobby to keep him busy in his retirement and introduced him to tapestry work. It is hard to imagine a man with such big hands and failing eyesight producing the most exquisite Queen Anne stool and fire screen, but he did - and he made the frames as well.

After Bubby passed away he lived alone. Libby Muttitt helped to take care of him, and would come in to cook his mid-day meal. Thanks to her he was fortunate enough to be able to stay in his own home until almost the end of his life. He always stayed positive and maintained his standards, always laying a table cloth before eating, washing up after every meal, and never without a shirt and tie. His routines were legendary. If you asked him if he would like a cup of tea, he wouldn't say yes or no, but ask what the time was. If you replied "half past three" he would say without hesitation: "I don't have my tea until four". He was always organised and had a system for everything: this served him well during his latter years when his hearing and eyesight were failing. When Libby Muttitt was his carer and went in every day to cook his mid-day meal, he would take food out of the freezer ready for her to cook. One time he woke up in the middle of the night and realized he had forgotten to do this – so he got up, retrieved the food, and put it in the airing cupboard to thaw.

His long-term memory was exceptional: he could clearly remember his schooldays, going back over 90 years, and it was fascinating to hear him talk about those times. He also had detailed knowledge of all the properties he had worked on the village, both pre-war and post-war, and was a mine of information about building practices of earlier times.. When Brian Morton worked on restoration of the Church tower some years ago, Tubby was able to recall the work he had done there many years before and give Brian invaluable information.

He liked to take himself out for a regular walk each afternoon and was fond of sitting on one of the seats down by the river, where he was a familiar sight in his beloved Nike baseball cap. Here he enjoyed talking to interested people who were fascinated by him and

his abundance of local knowledge.

In 1994 he collapsed in his house, and was found by Maureen Thompson, who revived him. At that time he was wired up for a pacemaker at the James Paget hospital, where the staff could not believe he was 91 years old. He laughed when the doctors told him the pacemaker would last 10 years—but he outlived that one and had a new one fitted 3 years before he died.

He received a certificate from the Queen on his Diamond Wedding day and a very special card from Her Majesty on his hundredth birthday. This was a day of great celebration that he much enjoyed, as Walberswick Parish Council sponsored a party on the Green right opposite Mafeking, complete with marquee. Many old friends came to celebrate with him.

Tubby was able to live in his own home almost to the end, but he finally died at the James Paget in 2007, at the venerable age of 104.

**Justin Stannard**

*This article is adapted from the address Justin delivered at his grandfather's funeral, and I am grateful for the opportunity to use it. I would very much like to hear from anyone who has more memories of Tubby for me to include in future issues of the Newsletter.*

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

#### **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

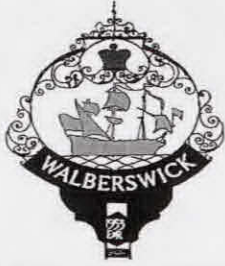
**These are now due - in fact overdue. Maureen Thompson would be grateful if you would contact her as soon as possible and let her have what you owe. Subscriptions are £5 per year.**

**Her phone number is 01502 723755**

## NEW ITEMS IN THE ARCHIVES

Item	Donated By
Suffolk CC Monument Report (pillboxes) 2009 Article on wherries (Blyth) Cutting of report of Walberswick Parish Council 1937 (photocopy) Posters for Village Fete 1988 and 1993 Village directory 1993	Philip Kett
Cutting from 'The Journal' 26 November 2010 (Joseph Kennedy)	Mary King
Photocopy of 'Walberswick' by Rev Oakes, 1889	Alan Walpole
Green beaker made at East Point Pottery	Grahame Godsmark
Additional copies of Methodist Chapel leases, etc.	Mike and Clair Fisher
<i>The Walberswick Frigate</i> by David Shirreff (2010)	Dione Shirreff

In addition the Hon Sec purchased the 1783 map of Suffolk.



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 38

SEPTEMBER 2010

The Newsletter is appearing a month later than last year, and will appear in September from now on; August has proved in the past to be a difficult month because of the holidays. The winter issue will continue to appear in February as always.

In this issue we have another of Richard Scott's inimitable character sketches of former Walberswick characters—this time of Margaret Orbell, who used to rule the Camp Site with a rod of iron, as many campers will remember. She was the daughter of Ted Thompson, the builder responsible for many of the houses down The Lea.

Progress has been made on The Basing/Guernsey Book, an account of the building of this vessel in Walberswick, which was begun by the late David Shirreff. The idea is to produce a book of about 270 pages, to be called the "*Walberswick Frigate*" with pictures in black and white. Penny Allport is managing the project in conjunction with the Shirreff family, with the Chairman acting as facilitator. It is hoped to have the book published by Christmas, in time to sell copies at the Christmas Party on the 4th of December

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

An anonymous donation of £500 to the History Group has been received via Tony Kohn. The Chairman has sent a letter of thanks for this extremely generous gift, which is greatly appreciated. The money will be devoted to future projects.

**Philip Kett**

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

(All meetings at 7.30pm in the Village Hall)

**Saturday 9th October 2010**

(Open Meeting)

***"A Voyage Around the East Anglian Coast"***

A Slide Show

**Presented by Robert Simper of Ramsholt**

**Saturday 4th December 2010**

**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

***"Lowestoft Fishing 1800 to 1970"***

A Slide Show

**Presented by John Holmes of Lowestoft**

## MARGARET ORBELL

This year seems a particularly appropriate time for Margaret Orbell to be brought into focus, as we are enabled to grasp the opportunity to celebrate the centenary of her birth, on January 2, 1910.

This short piece is a blend of the writer's own recollections of Margaret and those of many others, especially of those who knew her better, or for longer. She spent her early life in the village, but after her marriage in the late 1930s she spent some 25 years in and around Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire. Margaret was inclined to be rather secretive about this 'other life', and it is clear that a study of these years would require deeper research than time allows, and would probably add little to the spirit of this piece.

To those of us whose memories of Walberswick span the closing decades of the last century Margaret will be principally remembered as 'Queen of the Campsite'. Her father Ted Thompson, a local builder whose name would be forever linked with 'Thompson Town' (aka The Lea), had held for many years the lease on a one-time grazing field behind the dunes. During the 1950s he had started to allow visiting campers to pitch tents there (William Bowyer was a pioneer user of the facility c.1959). By the time Margaret took it over camping had become popular and at the height of the summers a forest of tents could be seen, the colony she presided over becoming for many an enchanting introduction to the life of the village.

### Early Years

Margaret's early years in Walberswick spanned World War 1, her home at this time being *Seascope* at the top of the Green. She once mentioned to the writer that her mother Phoebe had named her after Margaret Macdonald, wife of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The connection arose through Phoebe's role as a holiday nanny to the children of Francis Newbery, the Glasgow-based artist who had introduced the Mackintoshes to Walberswick. It seems likely that Newbery had arranged accommodation for them with the Thompsons at *Seascope*, when they made their first visit to the village c.1905.

In her early adult life Margaret worked at the *Wave Crest* tea-room which stood just to the east of The Savoy on what is now Ferry Road car park. This colourful building on stilts belonged to Robert Spall (Vida Connick's Uncle Bob) and was managed by 'Bel' Norman. With its elegant balcony replete with potted plants, it was a popular meeting place in this part of the village until the early 1950s. Its fate was sealed on the night of January 31, 1953, when it floated away on the great flood. Irene Horwood, who still lives in Southwold, was marooned in one of the cottages at Blackshore when the flood struck, and remembers seeing the *Wave Crest* majestically upstream and looking like a Mississippi river-boat, to its clattering demise against the Bailey Bridge).

It is clear from contemporary photographs that in the late 1920s and early 1930s Margaret was an exceptionally good-looking young woman with fine, delicate features. Her luxuriant auburn hair and bright blue eyes were splendidly painted c.1927 by Allan Davidson in a portrait (present whereabouts unknown) which hung in her cottage until shortly before her death. At some point in the 1930s she met and became engaged to Frederick Walter Orbell, a solicitor's clerk from Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. They were married at St Andrew's church, Walberswick, on March 27, 1937, and for a spell ran the Harbour Inn before moving



**Margaret Orbell in her little hut on the Campsite**

to Frederick's home territory.

### **A Return to Walberswick**

The death of Frederick Orbell at the early age of 51 in April 1962 precipitated Margaret's return to Walberswick. Phoebe Thompson had died while still quite young (a victim of cancer) and Ted had moved to *Heathward*, at the top of The Lea, where he spent the rest of his life. Here, Margaret lived in the cottage while Ted adopted a reclusive lifestyle in a brick-built outhouse which had been turned into a cosy nest.

It was during these later years that Margaret became such a known and cherished local character. As years went by, and particularly after her father's death, her lifestyle became quite chaotic and her cottage was an odd mix of style and clutter. Interior walls were at some stage painted with bright primary colours, demonstrating an awareness of a particular period of contemporary design, but without the minimalism; she was a great collector of unusual artefacts which were often acquired at the Adnams sales of the time. Vida Connick remembers – not without some embarrassment – accompanying Margaret to some of these events and being persuaded to do the bidding on her behalf. They sometimes found themselves struggling home over the Common with quite unmanageable items – on one occasion a very large mirror – balanced on their bicycles.

### **A Return to Catering**

Vida and Margaret were the first waitresses at Mary Allen's noted tea-rooms when they opened at what had been *Manor Farm*. Here, Margaret's eccentricity was generally deemed to be an asset, and Mary recalls with amusement Margaret's inclination, even in old age, to be quite daring in such matters as skirt length and the plunging neckline, which afforded glimpses of a favourite indulgence – lacy black underwear. Her sense of colour, seen already in her home, extended to her wardrobe, and she was able to wear strong cornflower blues, cerise and turquoise with assurance and flair. Despite this extrovert streak, her manner could be oddly coy, and she always exuded an air of quiet refinement.

An awareness of colour and beauty in her surroundings was ever-present for Margaret, and whenever one paused to speak to her she would comment with real and spontaneous joy on the colours of trees, pattern of skies or whatever happened to be in view. Patsy Murray, who had a nearby hut, recalls an extreme example when they went to Great Yarmouth to visit a mutual friend. The car broke down on a busy roundabout on the outskirts, and Margaret spent some time sitting on a low wall until help arrived. 'What a *beautiful* place to break down' she said, without a hint of irony.

### **The Camp-site**

By the time that Margaret took over control of the camp-site it had shrunk considerably since the 1950s, the sea and dunes having crept in by many metres. The character of this special corner of Walberswick was much as it is now, but the huts along its northern side were smaller and less robust, but more colourful. The tents, generally, were much smaller and more primitive, and in high summer very much more numerous than at the present time.

The site had no published map of individual plots, so a relaxed and slightly chaotic atmosphere prevailed; despite this, though, Margaret had a clear plan in her head of where every-



thing should be, and where individual visitors should be placed. Patsy Murray often overheard Margaret upbraiding miscreants with a terse 'We don't *do* that here!' Fees were very modest and most campers paid up promptly and treated their hostess with respect, but inevitably there were interlopers who felt that Walberswick was free for all and saw no reason to part with money. Margaret had a system for reminding these reluctant payers of their responsibilities, which was to visit the offenders while they slept and deftly pull out their tent-pegs with the handle of her stick; this usually did the trick. The same system was used with 'illegal' overflow campers who had pitched in the dunes. Margaret had no authority over these off-site visitors, but they usually paid up without demur. Perhaps they felt that parting with the fee somehow conferred upon them the right to remain there.

The popularity of the camp-site at holiday times generated some 'health and safety' anxieties, and Walberswick Parish Council assumed responsibility for imposing a limit on the number of tents at any given time. The writer, serving on the Council at this period, was allocated the task of monitoring the situation, making sure that there were no more than 26 tents. On the first visit there were 52, so Margaret had to be 'spoken to'. After listening to what had to be said she surveyed the horizon with no change to her serene expression and said 'I always think it's so *unlucky* to count, don't you?' Further attempts to negotiate bore no fruit, so the score remained Orbell 1, Scott 0.

Margaret's hut was a sight to behold, as you can see in the photo on page 3. Run-down and picturesque with its faded and peeling paintwork, it was a sort of home-from-home, packed with a chaotic clutter of assorted paraphernalia and treasures of every kind, to the extent that she could scarcely get inside it. Mostly, she sat in its open doorway, chatting happily for much of the day with passers-by. Her personal appearance in these later years became markedly more casual, but she still wore strong colours with panache. She had grown a great deal of fair facial hair, which she showed no inclination to remove, and she had taken to wearing an auburn wig, which was apt, as days wore on, to re-arrange itself strangely on her head. A rather vivid cerise lipstick was applied in a manner which did not entirely follow the contours of her mouth, completing an eccentrically theatrical image.

### **The Final Years**

After fading gracefully from the camp-site Margaret continued to live at *Heathward* for some time, and was visited there by a small circle of close friends. Despite living alone for so long she had enjoyed loyal and lasting friendships, and even maintained liaisons of a romantic nature well into old age. Eventually the struggle became too great and she went to a care home in Marlborough Road, Southwold, which she detested. Later she moved to St Mary's House, Bungay, where she died on May 8, 2006.

### **Richard Scott September 2010**

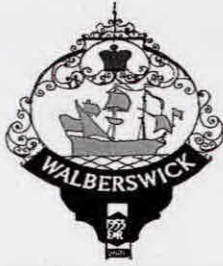
*Many people have contributed memories of Margaret; I would particularly like to thank Mary Allen, Caroline Campbell, Vida Connick, Philip Kett, Patsy Murray and Lesley Scott for 'going the extra mile' with their generosity in sharing recollections and time.*

## NEW ITEMS IN THE ARCHIVES

The following have donated items to the Archives, for which many thanks.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Donated by</b>
Brass propellor mounting from Jimmy Deekins' <i>Melody</i> 1943-1995	Philp Kett
Funeral service order for Annie Kiff-Wood - 8 June 2010	
Memorial Gathering order for Antonia Hunt - 13 September 2009	
The Defence of Walberswick 1939-45	Robert Liddiard
Part I: The Coastal Crust , UEA.	David Simms
Cable reel – War Emergency Grade	Christine Mitchell
Old Vicarage Guest House and Lawn Tennis Club: Brochure, wine list, etc, and photos; c1940s	Shirley-Ann Humphreys
Folder of miscellaneous cuttings including handwritten Parish Council Minutes by A E Coppard, a History of telecommunications in Suffolk, etc.	Maureen Thompson
29 postcards of lost Church in Dunwich, views of Blythe, etc.	The late Tony Whittenbury
Deeds of transactions for buying land and building the old Methodist Chapel (copies).	Clare and Michael Fisher
Tape of conversation aboard the Alfred Corrie with Dinks Cooper	Richard Leon
Article from EADT of 1963 about tourist littering, and a poem about Walberswick dated 1895	Alvin Hunt

**Kay and Bill Ungless, Archivists**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 37

FEBRUARY 2010

It has been a real pleasure for me to read the main article in this issue, an account of the eccentric Jimmy Meekins, who was a prominent village character when I was a child. He used to give my brother and me rides on the pillion of his motor bike - always a great thrill, as our parents didn't even have a car. Gruff he may have been, but we children did not find him at all alarming.

Richard does not mention this in his piece, but I remember Jimmy in later years telling me that he had been a very good swimmer in his early years, which was fairly rare at a time when many of the fishermen did not swim. I wonder if anyone else recalls hearing this?

The shop run by Daisy Meekins, Jimmy's mother, was a favourite haunt: my parents used to send me to it to get their cigarettes (as parents did in those days!) and I used to buy liquorice bootlaces and "gob-stoppers" (aniseed balls). I believe the shop was set up for Daisy by her father, to provide a living when she was widowed. Jimmy's younger brother, Harry, was the goalkeeper for the Walberswick football team.

**Reminder: annual subscriptions (£5.)** are now overdue. Please pay Maureen Thompson as soon as possible.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**(All meetings in the Village Hall)**

**Saturday, 3rd April 2010 at 7.30pm:**

A Case Study for 50-60 minutes on  
***Walberswick World War II Coastal Defences***

To be given by Dr Robert Liddiard  
The talk will feature video "Flythroughs"  
which give a real sense of being present in the scene

**Tuesday, 20th April 2010 at 7.30pm**

**Annual General Meeting**

Items from the Southwold Exhibition will be displayed on the rear wall.

It is also hoped to show a DVD featuring

**Mea Allan's Garden**

**Created by her at Westwood Cottage**

## JIMMY MEEKINS

Blunt; awkward; irascible; cantankerous: all these adjectives are apt to creep into recollections of Jimmy Meekins, known as "Diesel Jimmy". He was, though, totally honest and completely without pretence or artifice; once he had decided that you were 'all right' he would be a loyal and generous friend. In his later years, bearded and unkempt, he had the appearance of an ancient mariner battered, it seemed, by years of exposure to the elements; the reality was different, though, as despite his obvious attachment to the river, and particularly to his crumbling and picturesque fishing boat *Melody*, his earlier life had been much more varied.

### Early Life

Jimmy's mother, originally Daisy English, had grown up in Walberswick and, according to the village grocer Jack Reynolds when speaking of her c.1952, was considered to be the 'Belle of the Village'. Her marriage to Arthur Meekins took her northward to Eccleshall where Jim was born in the closing months of 1914. When Arthur died prematurely c.1919 she returned to Walberswick with Jimmy and his younger brother Harry. Life was an uphill struggle for the fatherless family, but Jimmy remembered attending the village school when it was based in the old chapel on The Green, now in use as the Heritage Centre.

As soon as Jimmy was old enough to leave school and go out to work he did so, initially for Block's, the local builders; but he soon became an assistant vehicle mechanic, an occupation nearer to his heart. He had a clear aptitude for this kind of work, quickly moving over to commercial vehicle maintenance and developing along the way a lifelong interest in diesel engines. Locally he was known at this stage of his life for his boisterous disposition and exceptional physical strength.

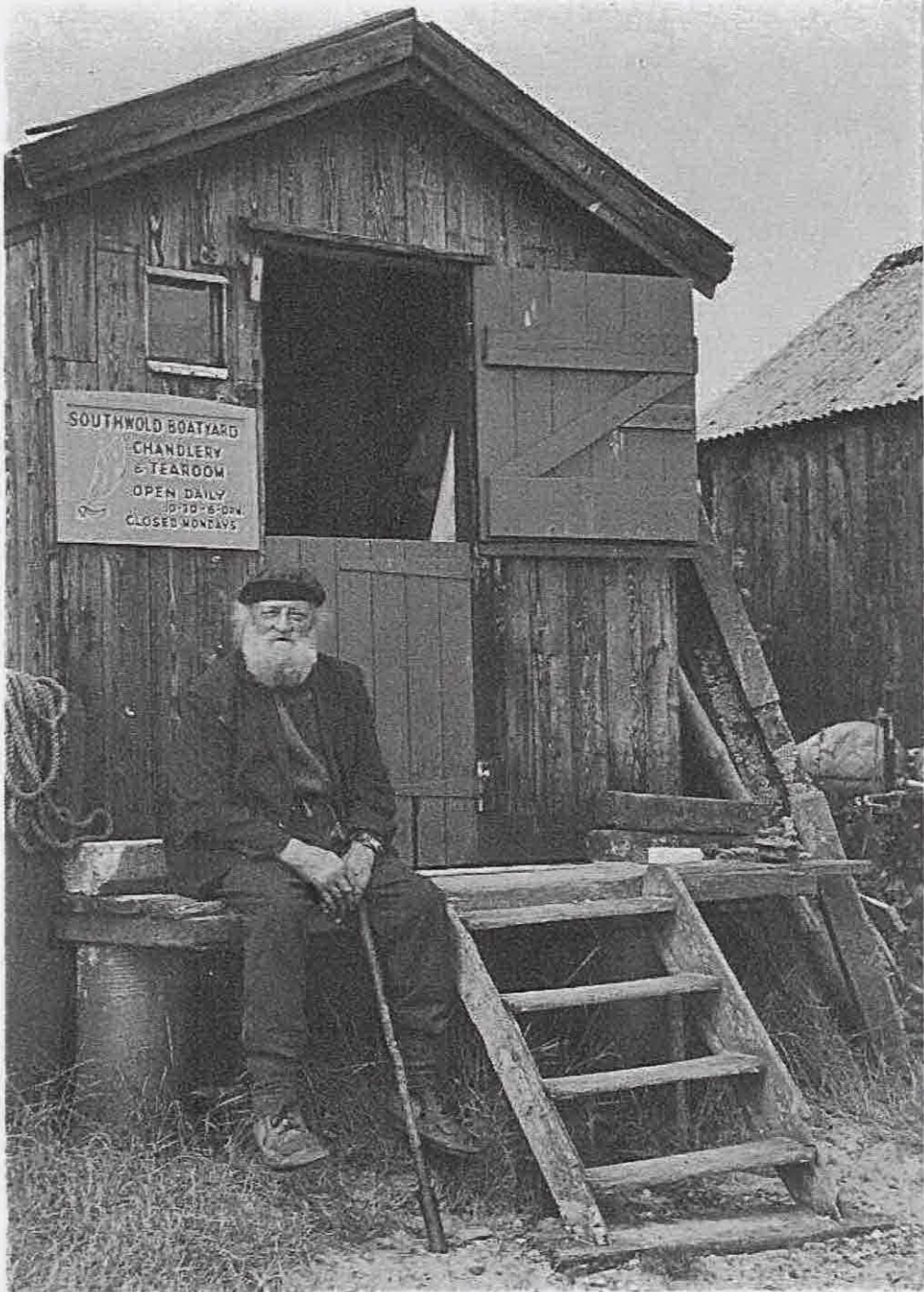
In the 1930s Jimmy went to sea as a maintenance engineer on trawlers, working seasonally from Lowestoft. When not at sea he worked as a lorry driver, often ferrying loads of fish overnight to Billingsgate in time for the morning auctions.

### Wartime

During World War II Jimmy was employed by Marshalls of Cambridge, working mainly on commercial vehicle maintenance - some of the vehicles being military trucks, for which Marshalls had a maintenance contract. Here he was valued for his expertise with diesel engines, as well as with the excellent but tricky-to-adjust Bendix brakes fitted to many 1930s cars and commercial vehicles. If the writer had been a better listener, he too would now also be a Bendix expert, as Jimmy would often describe in detail the procedures involved, while drinking Adnams Mild (for which in earlier life he had a legendary capacity) at the Bell bar.

### Holiday Visitors

After the war Jimmy moved back to Rose Cottage, Walberswick, with his mother. The double-fronted property, obliquely opposite Fisher's Garage, had a history as an 'apartment house' - that is, with rooms available to let for holiday visitors or more permanent lodgers. By the 1950s Daisy Meekins, remembered by Vida Connick as an exceptionally sweet person, was running it as 'Rose Cottage Guest House' during the summer months. Catering for the visitors from the small and fairly primitive kitchen was a considerable challenge but 'front of house' must have been very satisfactory as we noticed the same families returning year after year. The kitchen also served as a living room for Daisy and Jimmy at



**“The Ancient Mariner”**

**Jimmy Meekins in typical pose by his hut**

these times. An additional modest source of income was provided by the small shop-on-stilts next to the house, which survived until quite recently and was usually let to commercial tenants but was at some periods run by Daisy herself, principally as a sweet shop. Many readers will remember it more recently as Ann Wells' herb and craft shop.

### **The Motorcycle**

During these early post-war days Jimmy was employed as a fitter by Garretts of Leiston. Jimmy's personal transport for the daily commute in the 1950s was a large Royal Enfield V-twin motor-cycle. This rather cumbersome model was produced in the mid-1930s for sidecar use. Jimmy found that the third wheel made it possible to ride to work on icy roads, although for him the sidecar was used as a giant toolbox. At night the outfit was usually parked on the small concrete apron in front of the shop, and passers-by generally gave it a wide berth. Pre-war British motorcycles were far from oil-tight, and Enfields were considered to be among the oiliest. Hazel Church recalls that as a girl she once brushed against the machine while wearing a smart new coat, with results that did not please her mother. In the mid-1950s the writer's mother Marjorie Scott (later Blinkhorn) made a back-door visit to Rose Cottage and witnessed with suppressed amusement the cramped conditions prevailing in the kitchen, which had to double up as a shared living space. Daisy was making pastry on the small wooden table while inches away, on the same surface, Jimmy was dismantling his Royal Enfield gearbox. No clear boundary seemed to exist between the two activities.

### **Living Alone**

Daisy's death was a major blow for Jimmy, but he continued to live at Rose Cottage for the rest of his life. In the later years the house was sub-divided to raise capital, but he seemed happy with the part of it that he retained. During this late-life solitude his eccentricity became more marked and he had little regard for his appearance, which became steadily scruffier. On rare occasions, though, he could smarten himself almost beyond recognition as, for example, for the funeral of the legendary Walberswick boat-builder 'Weary' Page, on which occasion he looked almost dapper.

Jimmy's greatest source of joy in retirement was the splendidly dishevelled *Melody*. Many will remember the black hulk, which resided a short distance just upstream from the ferry landing-stage. This picturesque vessel, of distinctive 'double-diagonal' construction, was originally a ship's lifeboat. It was powered by a diesel engine of Ford manufacture with which Jim was endlessly tinkering; a rattly diesel roar and a puff of smoke would often alert the riverside community to the fact that a satisfactory morning's work had been completed. We were all troubled by the possibility that Jimmy might in a rash moment decide to test his work at sea, as it was some years since he had taken *Melody* out of the harbour. The hull had deteriorated badly in the meantime, and luckily the boat remained on or near the bank throughout its final years.

The late Derrick Allen, in a very tender and affectionate obituary to his old friend in the Parish Magazine, recalled that Jimmy, for very modest charges, would work on other peoples' boat engines, but was reluctant to do so unless they were present when he did so. Not many, it seems, were keen to do this as Jimmy's shortness of fuse could lead him to fly into rages and bellow profanities at all and sundry. As an engineer, though, he was greatly respected for his resourcefulness and when a particular part was unobtainable he would quickly see the way to adapt something else to do the job. A very minor but comical example of this arose when he broke the stem of his favourite pipe. He repaired this by inserting a short length of plastic fuel hose, which worked perfectly. Toby Robinson remembers with amusement Jimmy's reluctance to remove the pipe from his mouth when he spoke, which caused the bowl to flap mesmerically up and down on its flexible connection.

## Later Life

A major source of trouble for Jimmy in his later life was his feet, about which he would grumble to anyone willing to listen. One day he appeared in the Anchor bar wearing dazzling white trainers, which contrasted sharply with the rest of his apparel, which was predominantly dark. He declared that the trainers, provided by a kind benefactor, were quite the most comfortable things he had ever worn, and thereafter he was seldom seen in any other shoes. After a while they lost their shocking whiteness, mellowing with time and acquiring the familiar Meekins patina.

Jimmy was much affected by the death in the spring of 1988 of 'Dinks' Cooper, his contemporary and the subject of the previous piece in this series. Despite a carefully maintained outward display of hostility, the two had been quite close and when Dinks died Jimmy was among the first to offer condolences to Violet Cooper. With hindsight it seems that Jim's health started to deteriorate from around this time. He was admitted to Southwold Hospital for a short spell, and was clearly apprehensive at the prospect, but once installed he found it much to his liking. Warm accommodation, regular meals, friendly staff – all the things his life at Rose Cottage had lacked were there on tap. So delighted was he, in fact, that he became very agitated when the time approached for his discharge. The late Michael Jeans recalled Jimmy's efforts to avoid release ('It's my leg, you see'), but of course the inevitable happened and he returned to his solitary life at Rose Cottage. Despite his increasingly dishevelled appearance, he lived the important parts of his life with great precision, his regular walks to the river and back for the boat maintenance session occurring at exactly the same times each day until ill-health finally closed in on him. He returned to Southwold Hospital and died, with a nurse holding his hand, at 1.30 am on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1992, aged 77. Derrick Allen's obituary in the Parish Magazine concluded eloquently with these words:

*There was a great cleverness about him which for some reason was never realised. His frustration was shown in great rages, and we all stood clear. I shall miss my old friend who had no pretensions and lived his life as a true English Eccentric. I can pay him no greater compliment than that.*

Those words seem to say a great deal, and sum up touchingly the esteem in which Jimmy was held.

**Richard Scott**  
**January 2010**

*I am particularly grateful to William Buncombe, Hazel Church, Vida Connick, Dick Leon, Toby Robinson and Tizzy Simpson for contributing anecdotes or confirming details for this short piece about Jimmy.. Thanks, also, to Kay Ungless for useful delving into census detail, and to the many others who contributed snippets in passing, sometimes confirming details already incorporated. I am also grateful posthumously to the late Derrick Allen and the late Michael Jeans for material placed on record during their lifetimes.*

**R.S.**

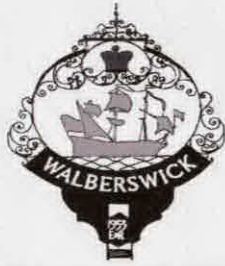
## HISTORY GROUP ARCHIVES

The following items have been donated to the Archives, for which many thanks:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Donated by</b>
Photos of Mafeking Well	Caroline Gilby
The Story of Southwold-Walberswick Ferry	Dani Church
Decoding Flint Flushwork on Suffolk & Norfolk Churches	Roger Cady
Fat Ollie's Book by Ed McBain	Grahame Godsmark
Cuttings from EDP re: Humphrey Jennings & Charles Keene	Philip Kett
Mostly Walberswick by Grahame Godsmark	Grahame Godsmark
The History of Dunwich—Fred Wase 1907	GG
Village Visitor Management Report & File 1995	Philip Kett
Brochure of Mercer's Hall 2007	PK
Walberswick Silver Jubilee 1977	PK
Walberswick Golden Jubilee 2002	PK
Memorial Notes William English died 1985	Jayne Tibbles
Sketches by Henry (Andy) Andrews	JT
2 albums of work by H (A) Andrews	JT
1971 Christmas at the Anchor	Joanna Saunders
Geoff's Opus by GV Galway	Grahame Godsmark

**Bill & Kay Ungless**  
**Archivists**





# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 36

AUGUST 2009

This issue features an account of the beginnings and history of the Walberswick Common Lands Charity Trust. The documents relating to the Trust, retained by the Clerk, Jayne Tibbles, begin in the early part of the nineteenth century, and give a vivid picture of the ways it has operated over the years. It has from time to time been a bone of contention, for various reasons! Nobody is better qualified to write this historical record than Barbara Priestman, who is currently Chairman of the Trust, and has been involved with it over the years. She bases the present article on three specific documents from the early years of the Trust's existence. I very much hope in future issues to follow the story further.

In our next issue Richard Scott will continue his survey of characters from the recent past with a piece about the life of Jimmy Meekins—"Diesel Jimmy", as he was known.

Finally, it is with sadness we record the death of Arthur Sharman, who had lived in the village all his life. He was very much interested in Walberswick history, and was part-compiler of *Suffolk Memories* and *Further Suffolk Memories*, two books that tell the stories of Walberswick and Blythburgh people during World War II.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

(All meetings in the Village Hall)

#### **HORATIO NELSON, NORFOLK TO TRAFALGAR**

A talk with slides by Peter Ransome

**Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, 7.30pm**

#### **XMAS CELEBRATION**

"Sloightly on the Huh": A Suffolk Dialect

evening with Charlie Haylock

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm**

(Note that subscriptions will be collected at this meeting)

#### **EXHIBITION AT SOUTHWOLD MUSEUM**

The small exhibition featuring photographs of Walberswick and its history continues until the end of October. The exhibition was assembled by Philip Kett, Bill Ungless and Julia Reisz. The Museum is open every day from 2-4pm.

## WALBERSWICK COMMON LANDS CHARITY

### Introduction

Three documents held by the Charity Trust reveal a great deal about social conditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as well as the history of Walberswick. The earliest dates back to 1815, the year of the Battle of Waterloo and two years before Jane Austen's death. That century saw the management and administration of rural communities develop from self-organising to more overtly democratic (and bureaucratic) systems.

The first Poor Laws, enacted during the reign of Elizabeth I, represented the beginning of a progression from private charity to Welfare State. Each town was responsible for the care and supervision of its poor and a Poor Rate was raised in every parish. Throughout this period the population of the country was increasing and provisions to help the poor were stretched to the limit. East Anglia was one of the poorer areas of the country as it did not benefit from proximity to the new industrial centres. Wages were low and contributions to the Poor Rate commensurately low or non-existent. Parishes became very defensive of their own resources, not having enough to share with 'incomers' from beyond their boundaries.

This article, based on extracts from the three documents, attempts to trace the evolution of the Trust from the earliest records of its meetings and accounts to its formation as a legally constituted charity. (All quotations retain the original spelling and grammar).

### Beginnings

The *Town Marsh Book 1815* has a sheet of paper dated 1808 inserted and attached to the first page, that appears to explain the origins of the administration of the 'common lands'. At a meeting in the pub attended by the Elders of the community, "the principal Inhabitants", it was decided that some rules needed to be imposed to ensure the smooth-running of the agricultural aspects of village life. The book is a record of annual income and expenditure kept by the Fen Reeves. The income is derived from fees paid by village people to graze their livestock on the Town Marshes (three marshes SW of the Blyth) and from ground rents, presumably due to the Parish as the 'owner' of communally-held lands. Expenditure includes the expenses of maintenance and improvement; and also regular contributions to the Poor Rate.

From the *Walberswick Minute Book 1871 – 1898*, it appears that the management of the Town Marshes worked very well at first so the villagers wanted to apply a similar system to the "waste lands" - the Saltings (Ferry Road car park and back of the beach) and the Common. The Minute Book details dates and times of meetings, attendees and resolutions relating to lettings and also to transgressions.

*Certificate to Her Majesty's Attorney General "In the matter of the Charity known as The COMMON LANDS, in the Parish of WALBERSWICK, in the County of SUFFOLK and In the Matter of 'The Charitable Trusts Acts, 1853 to 1894' Dated 16 December 1898.* This document makes the case for having a proper "Scheme" to regulate the operation of the Charity. Times had changed since the early part of the century and a formal system for directing charitable funds, in this case to support the poor, had become a legal requirement nationally.

### *Town Marsh Book 1815*

*Whereas there are several of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Walberswick who frequently make a Practice of letting their Hogs go loose about the said Parish to the Detriment of the Parishioners thereof, and which is a great Nuisance to them and contrary to Law and also there are several Persons in the said Parish, who frequently make a Practice of getting Furze and Flag on the Common in the said Parish, who do not belong thereto.*

*We the undersigned, being principal Inhabitants of the said Parish, do hereby agree and determine to prosecute every Person who is found offending in future as the Law directs.*

*Walberswick 13<sup>th</sup> May 1808*

The signatories were: Isaac Whales, Wm Whiting, Ed Garrard, Wm Lawrence, Jn Easey my mark, F Robertson my mark, Ed Debenham, J Hobart

A PAGE FROM THE MINUTE BOOK OF 1872

1872 A Special Meeting Held at Wallerwick Church 30<sup>th</sup> day of May 1872 Geo. S. P. Herdman  
 Whether the <sup>Rule</sup> ~~Formers~~ should be carried out  
 that is to say the Rules of 25 April 1872  
 In Wigg Phipps & M. W. Cleveland M. Gullingford should be  
~~for the rule~~ ~~Against the rule~~  
 Pounded at one Pound & 1/6 per Head unless the  
 the above sum is paid

Charles Stone	Charles Bloomfield
Robt English	Thos Kerridge
Bey Kerridge	Bey Gurdy
Will Knight	Thos Mottitt
Robt English Sen	Hy Jodd
Will Crisp	Robt Meadows
Bey Crisp	John Gorrood
Robt Kerridge jun	Howard
John Bloomfield	John West
Bey Marsh	No Ctrudge
Will Sewell	Hy Green
John Banks	Hy Chuland
John Bealls	
John Mottitt	

The first entry, in 1815, is a list of the names of 46 owners of livestock and a description of the animals grazed: "cow", "bull", "colt", "horse". The entry for 1816 is very similar. It is interesting to note that names from two centuries ago are still to be found in the Village: English and Muttitt in 1815 and by 1822, Kerridge, too, were paying for grazing; also Palmer, Robinson, Thompson and Leverett. The Book also records the expenses of maintenance: in 1820 to "Blacksmith, Iron for Gate, Stocks Lane - 3s 6d"; "mowing Salts and Marshes - 12s"; "ditching - £2" and income received from the lease of land and buildings such as "Blacksmiths Shop - 2s 6d", "Granary - 2s 6d", "Cliff Land - £1" as well as "7/- per head of 42 Persons" for the grazing (the Fen Reeve got his free).

### **Beneficiaries**

It appears that each year the children of the village were given cakes and some of the adults beer. The Poor Rate was paid annually to several unnamed people. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century land was let, the village's assets were maintained and improved and money surplus to requirements could be passed on to groups and individuals who became the first beneficiaries. By the end of the 1800s the names Stannard, Bloomfield, Cooper, List, and Cross appear as rent-payers and service providers. The Fen Reeve records in 1895 that a School Rate and a Highway Rate were paid and rents were being collected for beach huts; rent was also received from 1879/1880 for the Railway and the Station on the Common.

The last entry, explained in the *Certificate to the Attorney General*, is dated 1899 - 1900 and is a summary of legal expenses: to the Attorney General £222.13.1d; to Messrs Gowing and Co (presumably lawyers) £180.12.10d. £5.17.5d was transferred to a "New Book". The old regime was dead and Walberswick entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a legally constituted charitable trust.

### **Parish Of Walberswick Minute Book 1871 - 1898**

**12 April 1871** (opening entry)

*At a Vestry meeting held at the Parish Church on Thursday the sixth day of April for the appointment of a fenreeve (fen steward) and other purposes relating to the said Parish John Rimmington and Henry Cleveland were appointed to that office for the year now next ensuing at which meeting it was proposed to regulate the feeding (grazing) of the waste lands belonging to the said Parish at which meeting an adjournment took place to Wednesday the twelfth day of April at the Bell Inn Walberswick when the following propositions were agreed to by the majority of the meeting then present That we the Parishioners of the Parish Consider that the Pasturage of the Saltings and Common ought to be regulated in such a manner as to give every person belonging to the said Parish an equal right it is proposed that the number of Cattle depastured on the said lands that is the Saltings and the Common be limited to 60 head of cattle each to pay the sum of 21s/6d per head except weaned calves. Weaned Calves belonging to a parishioner to go free on the Common the first year. Year olds and upwards to pay the regular price that price to be determined at each succeeding May meeting It is also proposed that a fenreeve be appointed over the said lands the same as one appointed for the town marshes with one share extra for the office and be allowed to turn one year old Bull on the said lands free for his use that a keeper be employed the summer months as usual and be paid out of the Common fund also gates bridges and fences on the said lands to be kept up by the Fenreeve and be paid for out of the Common fund as before stated and the remainder to be equally divided share and share alike to all persons belonging to and having a legal right in the said Parish the lands to be fed by sound clean and healthy Cattle in case of any disease among them the fenreeve be empowered to remove the same at the expense of the owners thereof that the keeper remove the stock unto the Common in course weather or wet nights or at any time the fenreeve thinks fit no person being allowed to take more than two goings except they are not wanted by any other Parishioner and if not wanted in the Parish then they shall be considered free for anyone to hire whether belonging to the Parish or not all stock belonging to nonparishioners to be removed by the 20<sup>th</sup> day of October or the same as on the town marshes and that all persons belonging to the parish and having cattle on the above lands have the liberty to change them twice if they wish so to do also nonparishioners to change once if required it is also proposed that all persons belonging to and having a legal right in the Parish shall have the option of taking one right of feeding into his or her own hands to make what they can of the same by paying what trifling expense is incurred for keeping and other expenses as before named the fenreeve to manage for the remainder of the goings and for Widdows*

*and old people and such as cannot manage for themselves so as to make an equal benefit \_\_\_\_\_ at the same meeting the foregoing propositions were made read and agreed to and signed by the majority of persons present there being but one dissentient Voice the following are the majority of the meeting*

Robert English Snr  
John Goddard  
John Banks  
Wm Crisp  
Wm Sewell  
Chas Haward

Henry Curdy  
Benjn Cross  
Benjn Marsh  
Wm Knights  
Henry Cleveland  
Wm Cleveland

#### **4 May 1871**

Another meeting at the Bell was attended by 20 men including most of the above-listed and

G Cadey  
Lewis Cadey  
Chas Stone  
Jas West  
Robt Kerridge Snr  
Wm Balls

Robt Meadows  
Jas Balls  
Rt English Jnr  
John Bloomfield  
Chas Bloomfield  
John Muttit

*... to regulate the feeding of the Saltings and Common in such a manner that each person having a right to the same shall have an equal share of the same any one acting contrary to the above to be proceeded against as the Law in the case directs \_\_\_\_\_ and ..... it was agreed that the feeds on the Saltings and the Common be set at 21s/6d per head for the year now next ensuing £1 per head to be placed to the Common fund and 1s/6d per head be left for the keeper \_\_\_\_\_*

#### **15 May 1871**

*.....it was agreed that all keepers of geese do keep or cause them to be kept on the flats and greens till after the second goslings be sold or till after the month of August then they be allowed to go at large till the following spring acting contrary to this rule the person so acting to forfeit their right to the Common and Saltings fund \_\_\_\_.*

#### **4 April 1872**

At a meeting attended by 26 men, it was proposed "that a Secretary and Committee be appointed to perform the duties of the Fenreeve"; an amendment was added to the effect that they should continue to appoint a Fen Reeve, too. This year Mr Cleveland (Fen Reeve) was "... empowered to repair the roadway (to the Old Town Marsh) out of the Saltings and Common Fund." There were then 56 "goings" (or grazing lets).

#### **30 May 1872**

At a Special Meeting, the rules were being applied and Messrs Wigg, Cleveland and Cullingford were threatened with having their cattle impounded unless they paid their dues.

#### **1873**

On **9 January**, it was agreed that £1.17s.6d, received for "litter now growing on the Fenn" would be spent on improving the Fenn. On 1 March John Lusher, John Baker, Henry Cleveland and Benjamin Marsh were duly paid £1 11s between them, presumably for work on the Fenn, - as was the publican of the Bell: 3s 9d for the 15 pints of beer consumed by the four attendees.

On **8 May** Robert English was to "be summoned at the county court Halesworth" because he had not paid for some hay he bought over a year ago. A postscript to the minutes states that "the above relating to Mr English was this day (17 May) settled he paying £2.9s.0d for the hay and 14s court fees".

**1887** An intriguing entry states that "... it was agreed that Mr Pollard meet the Charity Commissioners on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1887". There is no record of that meeting but we do know that complaints

about the running of the Charity were received by the Charity Commissioners on the following and in subsequent years.

By 1891, the self-regulating system appears to have deteriorated somewhat: "... some of the shareholders have not paid up their share of the ground rents others say they will not pay theirs unless an understanding is come to by the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1891 by who and whom it is to be paid": also "... the fenreeve request the vicar to fill up the hole that he had dug and if he refuse to do so that the fenreeve is to get it filled up and charge the vicar with the cost".

### **The Minute Book**

Many of the Minute Book entries are quite difficult to read but there is much more information to be had from them.

### ***Certificate To Her Majesty's Attorney General 1898***

*The Board of Charity Commissioners for England and Wales do hereby certify the case of the above-mentioned Charity to Her Majesty's Attorney-General in order that he may institute proceedings or take such steps, if any, as may appear to him, upon consideration of the circumstances, to be requisite or proper with reference to the Charity.* The aim was to set up a formal 'Scheme' for the Charity. It appears that, by the end of the century, the Trustees had not applied for an order establishing a Scheme for the administration of the Charity despite the fact that, as early as 1830, formal arrangements existed for the registration of charities and there is evidence that the Walberswick charity did exist - in one of the parishes in the "Blything Union" in 1838.

Drawing on the 1815 Book and the Minute Book, the Charity Commissioners identified a series of key events. They noted that rules for the management of the Common Lands were originally agreed at a meeting held on 13 May 1828: they state in great detail who was allowed "feeds", when and where; and also that "no person whosoever is to be allowed to build a house, shed or any other building upon the Town Land" and yet at a meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1884 it was resolved that "the Fen Reeve be empowered to let any quantity of land on the Common ...", and that "no more than two houses be built on each plot of ground". On 1 November 1887, the Fen Reeve, Lewis Cady, leased a piece of the Common to the Southwold Railway Company "in consideration of the yearly rent charge of £6".

### **Problems with the Distribution of Parish Funds**

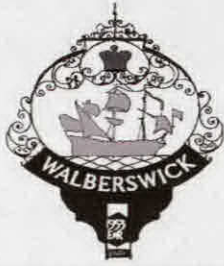
In 1888 the Charity Commissioners sent a letter to the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish pointing out that "the lands are property belonging to the Parish" and that it is the responsibility of the Churchwardens to ensure the just distribution of Parish funds, but they seemed to be powerless in the face of opposition from the Charity Trustees. Complaints were made to the Charity Commission in 1888, 1889, 1890 and 1893 and "disputes arose as to the persons entitled to participate in the benefits of the Charity".

The inference is that the "principal inhabitants of the village" were a 'cosy club', looking after their own interests rather than those of the Poor and those originally entitled to grazing etc. The Scheme, when finally established, insisted that people in receipt of regular benefits should be identified by the Trustees with "regard to the pecuniary circumstances of the recipient". Similarly, any "surplus income" could be applied "by the Trustees at their discretion in pensions or temporary allowances to meet cases of sickness accident misfortune old age and poverty amongst such persons as in the opinion of the Trustees are *bona fide* inhabitants of the Parish of Walberswick."

\* \* \* \* \*

I have attempted to present the above with very little commentary, because I think the documents speak for themselves. However, there is a great deal more information and interest to be gleaned, especially from the *Minute Book*. The documents are held securely by the current Clerk to the **Walberswick Common Lands Charity (Jayne Tibbles)** and can be seen by arrangement.

**Barbara Priestman**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 35

FEBRUARY 2009

We continue in this issue with another example of Richard Scott's survey of Walberswick characters from the not-so-remote past. Dinks Cooper was an outstanding personality and (like Blucher English) members of his family and his friends still live in the village, and gave Richard a great deal of help. There is really no substitute for personal reminiscence of this kind.

I am going to give Richard a break in the next issue, although he will continue to re-search Walberswick characters for future editions. Our August issue will contain a history of the Walberswick Common Lands Charity Trust, written by Barbara Priestman, who has been involved with the Trust for many years. Documents relating to the Trust go back to the early years of the nineteenth century, and have a fascinating story to tell.

On another page our Chairman, Philip Kett, draws attention to a small exhibition which the History Group has been asked to mount in the Southwold Museum for the summer season.

Our Archivists, Bill and Kay Ungless, are going to be very busy organising all the interesting items which have recently been donated! They are listed on page 6.

Editor

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

(All meetings in the Village Hall)

#### **FOSSILS AND VISIBLE ROMAN REMAINS AT PAKEFIELD**

A talk with slides, by Paul Durbridge

**Saturday 4th April, 7.30pm**

#### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Tuesday 14th April, 7.30pm**

#### **HORATIO NELSON, NORFOLK TO TRAFALGAR**

A talk with slides by Peter Ransome

**Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, 7.30pm**

#### **XMAS CELEBRATION**

"Sloightly on the Huh": A Suffolk Dialect evening with Charlie Haylock

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm**

## 'DINKS' COOPER

Those of us whose memories of Walberswick go back more than two decades will almost certainly have stories to tell about the legendary 'Dinks'. To the writer's knowledge he was known by no other name (except once, c1972, when his photograph appeared in one of the regional newspapers captioned 'Mr "Drinks" Cooper of Walberswick'). Nobody seems to know when or where the nickname was acquired, but publication often brings chapter and verse from some unexplored quarter, so with luck there may be a postscript.

### Early Life

Robert Henry George Charles Cooper was born on September 13, 1914 in *The Savoy*, the small riverside dwelling still in place near the ferry landing stage. His father was 'Tow' Cooper, whose nickname was derived from the appearance of his hair. Michael Jeans remembers him, and tells us that the hair resembled tow, a once-common absorbent material derived from hemp and used for general mopping-up. (Michael also found it useful for burnishing pots at his East Point Pottery c.1950).

Accounts vary as to how long the family lived at the Savoy. They were later based at *Tow's Cabin*, which had been moved to its present position from its original site on the Green. Dinks was the only surviving son, but he had five sisters; the difficulty of bringing up a family of this size in either property must have been formidable. When reminiscing about early life Dinks was more inclined to speak of the *Savoy*, then surrounded by a number of other sheds, some of which were being converted for use as artists' studios. A remembered feature was a drainage channel, still discernible in the 1950s and complete with a primitive bridge, running into the river close by.

Little is recorded about Dinks' time at the village school, but it was here that a life-long bond, carefully disguised with outward hostility, was formed with a future subject in this series, Jimmy Meekins. When he reached employable age Dinks went to sea as a Lowestoft-based trawlerman, enhancing the skills already learned from his father. The work was seasonal, and Dinks used to describe working at around the same period for the builder Bill Dunnett, who lived in half of what is now *Thorpe View*. The Dunnett working day had a gentle tempo, the small team of casual workers assembling quite early, loading a hand-cart with whatever was likely to be needed for the day, and setting off for the site on foot. Regardless of the distance from base, the team would stop work at mid-day to walk home for a 'proper' lunch!

### Working Life & Marriage

By the late 1930s Dinks was working for Trinity House at Harwich. Here he was based on the *Patricia* which was involved in the servicing and maintenance of lightships and buoys. Michael Jeans also spent time on the *Patricia* and recalls that buoy-maintenance could be quite dangerous in rough seas, as it involved making a carefully timed leap onto the slippery, bobbing buoy. Dinks was still working for Trinity House at the outbreak of World War 2 and on the day he was due to marry Violet – December 23, 1939 – he was fog-bound on a lightship. By special arrangement, the wedding took place two days late, on Christmas Day.

Eventually the long periods of separation from Violet and the Blyth became too burdensome and Dinks returned to Suffolk. Dinks and Violet rented a cottage in Southwold where a pattern of stretches of short-term work was established. At this time spells of unaccustomed work were commonplace; Dinks' sister Ruby, for example, rowed the ferry at various times during the war. The sea and fishing, though, remained Dinks' central passion and he was fully involved with the herring season every autumn, working from Southwold



**A CHARACTERISTIC PICTURE OF DINKS**



Harbour, and during the late 1940s he took the opportunity to fish for mackerel from Newlyn in Cornwall. In quiet periods he drove lorries for Walberswick builder Henry Block, and For Crick's of Southwold.

### **Family Life in Walberswick**

Dinks and Violet had three daughters: Kate, the youngest, was born in Southwold in 1950. Five years later the family moved back to Walberswick, living initially at *The Cottage*, which was the northerly half of the house now owned by Tony and Janet Kohn. The major incident during the post-war years in Southwold was the devastating flood in the evening of January 31, 1953. Blackshore was particularly badly affected: Dinks was at the Harbour Inn when the surge struck, and was marooned there for three days.

In the brotherly atmosphere of the Blyth fishing community, Dinks was apt to borrow things he assumed were not about to be needed. The story of Michael Jeans' boat was (in retrospect) an amusing example. Michael had rowed across the river to visit the cinema in York Road. Returning later he was dismayed to find that the boat had gone. Dinks, also in Southwold, had noticed it drawn up on the bank and perhaps thinking that he was bestowing a favour, had rowed it back to Walberswick.

### **Service on the Lifeboat**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Dinks served on the lifeboat, then based near the Harbour Inn. In those days the crew was summoned by two loud bangs, spaced a few seconds apart, audible for a considerable distance. Dinks' skills in seamanship and general boat-handling were regarded as second to none; Dr Buncombe (William's father) was not alone in expressing this opinion.

### **A Media Star**

It was during the 1960s that Dinks' media potential began to be explored. Much to Kate's embarrassment he featured frequently on the BBC's *Today* programme, his maritime Suffolk voice contrasting pleasingly with the plummy tones of the presenters of the time. He also enjoyed a regular flirtation with the medium of television, with appearances on Dick Joyce's gentle series featuring regional personalities.

Dinks enjoyed a good party, his 'decade parties' being particularly memorable. Kate recalls his 'fiftieth', in the Harbour Inn, where his party piece was to sing *Do You Know The Muffin Man* while balancing a glass of rum on his head. Others remember his 'seventieth' in the Bell in 1984, enlivened by the arrival of a strippergram, which pleased him greatly.

### **A Fixture at the Bell**

In his later years Dinks spent much time in the Bell, propped against a bar-corner post which survived the enlargement of the bar space and still has a small brass plate attached to it bearing the legend *Dinks' Leaning Post*. He had strong views on a variety of topics of local interest, often holding opinions at variance with prevailing thought. When Sizewell 'B' was at the planning stage the village was generally united in opposition to it, but Dinks was strongly in favour, believing (largely erroneously, it turned out) that it would provide a seamless supply of jobs for local people for years to come.

Another topic on which he would hold forth in the pub (although not, in Kate's recollection, at home) was the desirability of street lighting in the village. These may have been transitory rants, as he had been known on occasion to collide painfully with parked cars on his way home in the dark. At these times he sometimes spoke of acquiring a motor-cycle to ease the journey. We all imagined that this would be a lightweight runabout, but when the machine of his choice appeared it was a large twin-cylinder AJS. This mile-eating monster

flagship of the AJS range in its heyday, was a very brief feature of Dinks' life but it provided much entertainment at closing times. Departure, with more power than grip on the loose surface, was apt to be erratic and fellow-revellers instinctively stood well back until he had gone. Dinks was usually master of the machine, but Dick Leon reports that he once fell off it while swinging into Church Lane, within sight of home.

Dinks, an unforgettable Walberswick character, died on January 5, 1988, aged 73; Violet and her family received a deluge of letters and cards from far and wide expressing sympathy and describing happy hours spent in his company.

**Richard Scott**  
**February 2009**

*I am grateful to Kate Goodchild and her family for their help in assembling this short piece; also to Michael Jeans for sharing memories spanning many years, and to William Buncombe, Freddie Eade, Dick Leon and many others who have generously shared more recollections than I have space to use.*

**(Editor's Note:**

If any readers would like to send in recollections of Dinks Cooper, we would be pleased to receive them, and hope to publish them in future issues of the Newsletter.)

**A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

I was asked just before Xmas if the History Group would be interested in mounting a small exhibition at the Southwold Museum for the coming season, starting at Easter. We are now in the process of putting it together and it will feature some of the interesting history of the village. The exhibit is being arranged by Bill Ungless, Julia Reisz, and myself.

The Museum has recently been refurbished and is well worth a visit; I am very pleased that Walberswick has been given the chance of representation there, and I hope our members will give it their support.

**Philip Kett**

**EDNA LANGE**

Those of you who remember Edna will be very sorry to hear that she died on February 12<sup>th</sup>. Hanns and Edna Lange lived at Anchorlea in the summers, and were founder members of the History Group. In 2000 they decided to live permanently at their house in Purley and sold Anchorlea. Hanns predeceased Edna, but we are indebted to them both for many additions to our Archives, in particular their survey *Walberswick Families 1600-1900*, completed March 1993. Although Hanns was responsible for the research, Edna had the mammoth task of typing it. It has proved invaluable for people working on their family trees.

**Pat Wythe**

## HISTORY GROUP ARCHIVES

The following items have been donated:

**By Pat Wythe:**

Jill Worton - Family Tree (Sept 1908)  
Bertie Stannard (Tubby) – Funeral Service, 6 November 2007  
Pamela Kerridge – Funeral Service, 25 February 2008  
Robert Edward Trevelyan (Bob) – Funeral service, 11 August 2008  
Scrapbook – Edna M Lange, 1980-90's and folder of press cuttings 1972-92

**By Tony Rees:**

Daily Sketch and Daily Graphic (flood disaster), 2 February 1953  
Short History of Borough of Southwold – AFBottomly, 1974  
Visit to Southwold + 150 Photographs – A Barrett Jenkins, 1983-84  
Southwold River (Georgian Era) – Rachel Lawrence (signed) 1990  
Men of Dunwich – Rowland Parker, 1978  
Suffolk Landscape – Norman Scarfe 1972-87  
Southwold and its Vicinity – Robert Wake, 1839

**By Judy Morton:**

Guide to Walberswick – THR Oakes, 1889  
Guide to Holy Trinity Blythburgh, 1949  
Dunwich, The Rotten Borough – OGPickard, 1988

**By Alan Walpole:**

Three 4" x 4" tiles by Veronica Pawluk

**By Philip Kett:**

Exploration of Bulcamp Old Marshes, 4 July 1906  
Walberswick Houses – Prior to 1910  
'Mary Scott' (now Atanua)- Lifeboat Dunkirk, 21 May 1908

**By E E Stannard:**

Walberswick Notes – Carol Christie, 1911 (illustrated by Mildred Jennings)

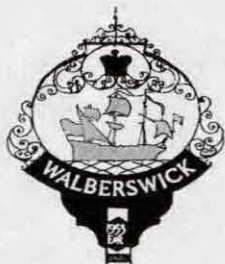
**By Piers Ford-Crush & Bill Ungless:**

DVD – A Walberswick Story (Frank Jennings)

**By Sandra Gordon:**

A Brief History of Southwold Haven – Ernest Read Cooper including 10 black and white photographs, 1907

**Bill Ungless, Archivist**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 34

AUGUST 2008

This issue sees the start of our series on "Walberswick Characters" - some of the people who made the village such a colourful place in the recent past. Richard Scott, who has been connected with the village since 1950, is the perfect person to write this, as he knew all of them well, and has a lively appreciation of their various quirks and eccentricities. I hope you enjoy making acquaintance with them!

Since our last issue we have had the sad news of the death of Don Thompson, one of the original founders of the History Group and its first Chairman, a post he filled very efficiently and devotedly for fourteen years. He was instrumental in setting the direction of the Group, with its emphasis on local research and the preservation of archives. An appreciation of his work is on page 6.

Pat Wythe, our former Hon. Secretary, is now home again and, I am very happy to report, making steady recovery. She continues to take a keen interest in local history and the research efforts of the Group, but is retiring from her secretarial duties. On page 6 there is a message from her. Fortunately Alan Walpole has agreed to step in and take her place.

Tony Rees has done a sterling job as Archivist but is now resigning as he is leaving the village; the Archives will now come under the care of Bill and Kay Unless, who have made space for them. We are all grateful to them for taking on this very important responsibility.

Finally, we welcome two new Committee members, Clive and Doris Brynley-Jones and look forward to having their input and fresh ideas.

**Editor**

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

#### **WALBERSWICK PORTRAYED**

##### **Resident and Visiting Artists 1880-1940**

Richard Scott will give us an illustrated lecture on artists of the past, of which he has a vast knowledge. An evening not to be missed.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October, 7.30pm, in the Village Hall.**

#### **CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

A true-life narrative by Neil Lanham of stories told to him by his mother Ruby, of the years before World War I and on into the agricultural depression of the Thirties. With original photos on the big screen and a sung accompaniment by Andrew Stannard. Everything you hear will come straight out of the oral tradition: a real taste of Suffolk in former times.

Meeting open to all, with a glass of wine and refreshments; also a Grand Raffle.

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm, Village Hall.**

## VILLAGE CHARACTERS

Those who attended the last AGM may recall that our editor floated the idea that we might run a series in the Newsletter about the characters of the fairly recent past who in various ways added colour, influenced local events, generated mayhem or simply lifted our spirits in Walberswick. It had been suggested that I might be a suitable person to pick up the quill – and giving my arm a gentle twist in public seemed to Julia to be a good way to ensure that something actually happened!

It did not take long to make a list of possible subjects, which has been whittled down to an initial short list for the next few issues. May we invite you, the readers, to contribute snippets of material – and also perhaps suggest other names for the future? Obviously I will consult surviving relatives in the course of writing these pieces, which I will aim to make as factually accurate and complete as possible; but I also seek to write with a light touch, allowing any eccentricity to shine through – a tricky balance.

We begin with Blucher English in this issue, and intend to follow up with Dinks Cooper, the Goodman sisters, Jimmy Meekins, Margaret Orbell and Francesca Wilson.

**Richard Scott**

## BLUCHER ENGLISH

Readers of recent issues of the Newsletter will know from Maurice Godbold's splendid study that the surname English was, until recently, quite common in Walberswick. Possibly to distinguish them (as many had the same forenames) many were known by nicknames. Thus in the 1950s we would find Boco, Dubba, Scarborough and the subject of this short piece, the friendly and much-loved Blucher. Why he should be nicknamed after a nineteenth century Prussian field marshal is not entirely clear, but he is thought to have been dressed for the part at a fancy dress party when still a child—or possibly he had a habit of arriving late!

### **Childhood and early years**

A true Walberswickian, William Ernest 'Blucher' English was born in a cottage at the top of the green in August 1907. His parents Thomas and Martha also owned the Pightle, a small paddock now occupied by the straggle of dwellings from Creek Cottage to Hidden House. When Blucher was three Thomas built Harbour View on this site, quite a large house of curiously sawn-off appearance, the intention having been to add the other half at a later date. This eventually happened some eight decades later.

Blucher's early life revolved around the village green, and at the age of seven he started at the village school, then located in the Congregational chapel (now the Heritage Centre). Here he was taught practical skills, such as making pot-hooks, before being introduced to the alphabet and arithmetic. Despite the rudimentary nature of his education, Blucher recorded his experiences and thoughts in notebooks and on scraps of paper, some of which have survived. He was clearly intrigued by poetry, and did not shrink from attempting to write it himself. His direct yet deeply evocative early recollections describe village life around the village green in the Edwardian years, and beyond. There were Italian dancing bears, visiting German bands, children dancing around the maypole, a blind man with a barrel organ who was given farthings and halfpennies by the children, and more mundane games with hoops and tops. Scrumping was a popular pastime for the boys, the paddock at the Old Vicarage being replete with apple, plum and pear trees. The adjacent Town Marsh

offered the opportunity to pick violets, primroses and wild orchids, and to collect birds' eggs. Sunday school took place in the old Gannon Reading Room, which had yet to be moved to the present village hall site and was then located in what is now the garden of Ferry House.

The outbreak of war brought many changes to the village. Most of the young men were called up for military service and the majority went into the Suffolk Regiment or the Royal Artillery. Blucher recorded that most local fishermen were drafted into the Suffolk Regiment's cavalry division. Trenches and wells were dug around the village, while wooden huts and a corrugated iron mess hut were built on the Cliff Field. Soldiers were billeted in the homes of anyone who had space to spare and second homes, which were beginning to be a feature, were requisitioned.

### **Between the Wars**

At this time Blucher was involved in both deep-sea and long-shore fishing, following the seafaring traditions of his forebears. His daughter Jane Tibbles mentions that he also spent some time as a cook aboard a yacht in the Mediterranean. In July 1935 he married Edith Kent, and for fourteen years the couple lived in The Bungalow (newly built next to Harbour View, and now called Longfield Cottage). Towards the end of their time here, in December, 1946, their daughter Jane was born.

During World War 2 Blucher was on active service as an infantryman in the Suffolk Regiment, but he was wounded in Normandy and sent back to Britain. After the war he earned a living in a variety of ways. Arthritis in his hands precluded him from resuming his fishing on the previous scale, although for many years he retained a long-shore boat which was moored in a now-filled inlet from the creek, next to the Kissing Bridge. In 1949 he moved into one half of Lima Cottage; his brother Norman, also with young family, was in the other half. He gradually set himself up as a jobbing builder, working eventually with his cousin Owen English and with Leslie Goodwin (also related) but was kept busy in the earlier post-war years as a window-cleaner and chimney-sweep. Jane Tibbles recalls seeing her father coming home blackened with soot and washing himself with carefully collected (and heated) rainwater.

### **Blucher's Museum**

Blucher's great passion in these years was beach-combing. He amassed a rich variety of objects including ancient coins, animal bones, fragments of old pottery, clay pipes, net-mending needles and a kidney dagger. Many of the bones were very old and included some from elephants, walrus and even an extinct ox. The many ancient coins included a gold coin minted in Spain in the twelfth century. Modern coinage was found on an almost daily basis, a disappointingly high proportion being copper rather than silver. In addition to the beach finds Blucher searched the site of the old church adjacent to the foot of Stocks Lane, where he found various brass objects, tile fragments and pieces of stained glass.

The collection became so large that one room at Lima Cottage was fitted with shelves throughout so that everything could be displayed and labelled. 'Blucher's museum' continued to grow and became a local curiosity which could be viewed by appointment. On occasion his own curiosity while scouring the beach got him into difficulties, such as the incident with some marine flares which had been washed up. He could not resist the temptation to light one to see if they still worked. Lack of relevant experience led him to stick it in the sand upside down, resulting in a trip to hospital with a badly damaged hand.



**A TYPICAL PHOTO OF BLUCHER, READY FOR BEACH-COMBING**



Also in the 'stuff of legend' category was the beach mine which Blucher found one morning, half-buried in the low-tide sand. Thinking that it would make an interesting addition to the museum collection he dug it out and commenced the homeward trudge. By the time he reached the beach huts its weight was becoming unmanageable, so he put it on the flat roof of one of them, with the intention of collecting it later. Then he forgot about it. Somebody else found it some days later, alerted the coastguards and almost immediately the bomb disposal squad arrived, cordoned off the beach and detonated it. The village was rocked by the explosion, but Blucher was unfazed. 'I *knew* they'd have to set a light to it', he said.

Scrap metal was also gathered and no doubt augmented income in a modest way. One morning he found a gas bottle (black, so presumably oxygen) on the beach. Here, the interesting part was the chunky brass fitting at the neck. Unable, luckily, to unscrew it by normal means, he set about bashing the fitting off with a large stone. This was eventually successful, but the bottle was a full one and took off like a rocket. Blucher's dog took off too, returning home a day or so later, bedraggled and still in shock.

In his later years gentler pursuits prevailed. He took to lighting a bonfire every Wednesday morning, just beyond the entrance to the beach car park and quite close to the water's edge. This was an informal service to the village and all were invited to put rubbish on it, much as they are every November now, but on a miniature scale.

Blucher was a benign presence in the village, replete with simple country wisdom gleaned from a lifetime of curiosity about the world around him. He died on March 7, 1985, aged 78.

**Richard Scott**  
**August 2008**

*I am indebted to Jane Tibbles for giving me access to Blucher's notes and other memorabilia, and for sharing her memories of her father. My thanks also to John English and Philip Kett for further information, and to the many others who helped to corroborate details*

## **DON THOMPSON & THE HISTORY GROUP**

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The inaugural meeting of the History Group took place in January 1991. A number of people in the village, including Philip Kett, Derrick Allen, Merle Rafferty, Richard Scott and Pat Wythe, had considered the possibility of forming such a group, which would be devoted to preserving and recording Walberswick's history. A chance meeting outside the Tuck Shop with Don gave Pat Wythe the inspired notion of asking him to be involved, as she felt sure he would be a very good organiser. How right she was! Under Don's guidance a committee was formed, a constitution was approved, and the Newsletter came into being.

An important early event that Don organised was the open meeting in April 1992, held in order to introduce the Group to the village: this included an exhibition of Miss Browton's paintings of the village and showings of Barrett Jenkins' videos of the Southwold Railway. Over 100 people attended, and long-established villagers such as Florrie Denny, Ellen and Bertie Stannard, Elsa Hopewell, and Ruth and Leslie Goodwin gave their support to the History Group – very important, as their recollections proved invaluable.

Don was convinced that research and recording should be the primary objectives of the Group, and as a result a large archive has been built up which will be of vital interest to future historians. The Millennium Project, which photographed every house in Walberswick, was another of his ideas.

For 14 years Don shepherded the History Group with enthusiasm and efficiency, and we were all saddened when he decided to stand down, though of course we understood. He could leave knowing that the Group is now a firmly-established part of the village – thanks to his vision and determination.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### **GRATEFUL THANKS**

A very big *thank you* to all members for the beautiful bouquet of flowers and box of chocolates you sent me when I resigned as Hon. Secretary of the Group. They were rather special and I am not ashamed to say that I did not share the chocolates with anyone! I rationed myself to two a day and they did much to speed my recovery. I was so sorry not to be with you at the AGM, but felt I just wasn't up to it. I am glad to say energy is now returning and I am working on house histories. I still have a set of the pictures of all the houses in the Village which were taken by Richard Steward for our Millenium Project – an update of the Village Scroll – and would be glad to show them to anyone interested. Please ring me on 724142 to arrange a convenient time.

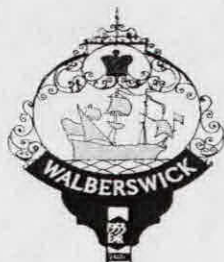
**Pat Wythe**

### **FRANK JENNINGS DVD**

The DVD of Frank Jennings' work and life, made by Bill Ungless and Piers Ford-Crush, has been on sale in the village and has raised £500. This will be donated to the Church Fabric Fund. The original lecture and first showing of the DVD were given under the umbrella of the Local History Group, so members can all take a little bit of credit for this most successful venture. Most members bought a copy of the DVD and some gave extra donations towards the cost of making it.

Thanks are also due to Gill Jones at the Tuck Shop and Sarah Lawrence at Tinkers who both put copies of the DVD on sale to the public.

**Editor**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 33

FEBRUARY 2008

At the time of going to press Pat Wythe, our invaluable secretary, is still in hospital, convalescing from her recent fall. Pat has been the backbone of the History Group for many many years, as you are aware. Happily, we hear that she is making good progress and hopes to be home soon. I am sure all members of the History Group and her many friends in the village wish her a complete and speedy recovery.

The article in this edition of the Newsletter is about the English family - a clan that was very numerous in Walberswick until comparatively recently. Only one member of that family remains in the village, and that is Jayne Tibbles (daughter of Blucher English); but John English still owns the house that belonged to his grandfather (Beach View) and visits regularly.

He has collaborated with Maurice Godbold on this article, and has been able to fill in gaps regarding family members, because he has compiled a detailed family tree from his own independent research. Kay Ungless has helped with Census details as well. So this a big collaborative effort which I appreciate very much, and it will be a valuable addition to the archives. The English family played an important part in Walberswick history for over a century and a half, and many of them were fishermen. Now the fishing is gone as well as the family - so this is a tribute to them both.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

**On Friday April 11th at 7.30pm** in the Village Hall, Bill Ungless and Piers Ford-Crush will be presenting their video about the life and work of **Frank Jennings**. He was the architect responsible for the many attractive arts and craft style houses in the village.

The video is based on Bill's entertaining talk to the Walberswick Local History Group in the autumn of 2006.

It has been entirely filmed (in high definition video) in the village including, with the kind permission of the present owners, the interiors of some of the Jennings houses.

As this will be an open meeting of the Walberswick Local History Group please come early to be sure of a seat.

Orders will be taken for a DVD of the video after the showing. It will include Bill's 50 minute conversation with **Rodney Jennings**, the 93 year old son of Frank, filmed on his recent visit to the village in his childhood home, Marshway.

**Philip Kett, Chairman**

## **THE ENGLISH FAMILY AND THE SEA 1841 TO 1901**

### **Introduction**

In the articles on the History of Fishing in Walberswick it was noted that there were more mentions of the English family in the censuses for 1841 to 1901 in connection with fishing than any other Walberswick family. No attempt was made to sort out the relationships between different individuals or to find out how often the same individuals were recorded in the different census periods. No distinction was made between members of the family who were clearly fishermen and others engaged in seafaring activities who may or may not have been connected with fishing. The following is an attempt to remedy the situation, making use of the English family tree and transcribed census data kindly supplied respectively by John English and Kay Ungless. It was hoped some wills of English seafarers would be found but the attempt was unsuccessful.

Sometimes there is a gap in the census data suggesting that the person concerned was at sea at the time of the census. Generally this has been taken to be the case.

### **Arrival of the English Family in Walberswick**

All the recorded members of the English family of Walberswick are descended from Edmund English, (about 1754 – 1823). Edmund appears to have moved to Walberswick in the early 1790's as there is no record of his birth in Walberswick and his two older children were christened in Covehithe (1786 and 1790). His third child, William, was christened in Walberswick in 1792. Edmund's move to Walberswick may have been related to the economic upturn in the village following the "Poverty and Decline" of the past 150 years (ref: Bloody Marsh). He and his wife Lydia had a family of six children (4 boys and 2 girls) of whom one, Robert (1800 – 1883), was noted as a fisherman in 1841 and 1851, as a boat owner in 1861 (living in Quay Street) and 1871 and a retired boat owner in 1881. None of Edmund's other offspring are mentioned as connected with the sea, so all the Englishes who lived off the sea are descended from Robert.

### **Family Members Who Were Drowned at Sea**

Robert married Louisa Chapman, also born in Walberswick, and they produced 10 children of which six were boys. Five of these boys have a documented connection with fishing. Two of the boys William (b.1829) and James (b.1830) were drowned at sea in 1845. The story of the drownings was recorded in 1900 by Samuel May, Coxswain of the Southwold Lifeboat (Ghost Stories and Smuggling Stories) and in a poem by Mary Smith of Wangford. The incident is also mentioned in the chapter on Sam May in "Storm Warriors of the Suffolk Coast". In short, both boys were drowned but the father (Robert) saved. Another of the brothers, John (b. 1833), was a mariner in 1851 but no further information exists. The remaining two brothers, Charles and Robert, were also fishermen and are ancestors of the various branches of the English family that can be traced down to modern times in Walberswick.

### **Living in the Village**

Charles (b. 1822), the oldest son of Robert, was a fisherman in 1851, not recorded in 1861, with his wife, living on The Green, being described as head of the household. None of the

family appeared in the 1871 census but Charles appears in 1881 as a master mariner. The wife's promotion to head of household was, perhaps, temporary. His eldest daughter (born 1849) was born in Southwold so possibly he and his family spent some time there. Robert Charles (b. 1853), eldest son of Charles (b.1827), was a master mariner in 1881. In 1891 his wife was living on Bell Green. Robert Charles was not mentioned in this census and was, presumably, away at sea. Robert Charles' descendants include Scarborough English. Accounts of his son's connections with the sea can be found in the two volumes of "Suffolk Memories" by Arthur Sharman and others. The connection with the sea detailed here concerns service in the Royal Navy. Other descendants of Robert Charles, through his son Albert Edward (and his son "Dubba"), still have a connection with the River Blythe though now it is rowing the ferry and not fishing (and the name is Church not English).

The other brother, Robert (b.1834) was recorded as a sailor in the censuses of 1851 and 1861 but not mentioned in 1871 when his wife Lydia was said to be living in the High Street. He was probably at sea. He did not appear in the 1881 census but was noted in 1891 as a fisherman employer, living in Bell Green. In 1901 he was living in Brisbane House (Crows Nest) occupied as a Mariner Seas on his own account.

Robert (b. 1834) had six sons and two daughters. Tragedy struck again when two of these sons, Robert Charles (b. 1860) and Isaac John (b. 1865) were lost at sea in 1883. A total of seven Walberswick men were lost at the same time (English x 2, Walker, Pipe, Curdy, Keridge and Goddard). The event is recorded on a stone in the Church.

### **A Skipper in Lowestoft**

The eldest son, George (b. 1858), later to be known as "Captain" George, appears to have prospered in the fishing industry and operated out of Lowestoft. He was tied up at Lowestoft as skipper of the Neptune at the 1881 census with seven other crew members including three Englishes. Of these, Charles and William were almost certainly George's brothers while Frank was almost certainly a cousin, Francis George, the son of Charles (b.1827). There is some confusion, however, as George's brother Charles and Francis were both recorded in the 1881 census as being at home in Walberswick. These two may have been recorded in both Walberswick and Lowestoft. In 1901 George was styled a fisherman worker and was still living in Fern Cottage. He was certainly prosperous and managed to buy a number of houses in Walberswick. The children who remained in the UK each received one of his houses. His residence, Fern Cottage, went to one of his daughters. Another daughter got the cottage subsequently sold to the Sharmans. His son Robert got Beach View. There was at least one other property including net sheds at the Harbour. George's son Robert joined the Royal Navy as a young boy and served in WW1, including the Battle of Jutland. In the period between WW1 and WW2 he turned his hand to fishing and was one of the "longshore" fishermen operating from the Blythe. His brothers emigrated to the USA and Canada. The last member of this branch of the family living in Walberswick was Owen English. After his service in the Navy Owen was an occasional Fisherman (like many Walberswick men of the time) but this was not his full-time trade.

Another of Robert's sons, William James (b.1862) was a Mariner Seas in 1891, but not mentioned in the 1901 census: his wife was living with his eldest son, an infant daughter and a servant near the Congregational Chapel. William's descendant through his daughter Daisy was the well-known Walberswick character and boat engineer Jimmy Meekins. The house near the chapel may have been Rose Cottage as the family lived there until Jimmy died. The

youngest son, Thomas, was a Mariner Seas in 1901 living on The Green at Lorne Cottage 3. His modern descendants include "Blucher" and the Goodwin family.

### **A Family of Fishermen**

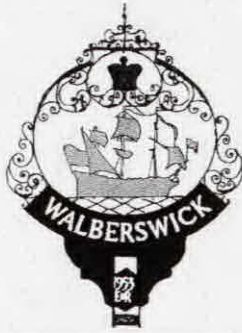
In total, in the period covered, 12 of the descendants of Robert (1800 – 1833) had careers connected with the sea, including four who were lost at sea and five who were described as fishermen. Two, Robert himself and George (b.1858) were clearly prosperous. The repetition of the same individuals in succeeding censuses shows that some had long sea careers. For example, this same Robert appeared in each census between 1841 and 1881, admittedly retired by the latter date. However, as he was 41 in 1841, he quite possibly had been a fisherman well before that date and had a very long career connected with the sea. His son Robert (b. 1834) was registered as a seafarer in every census from 1851 to 1901 i.e. 50 years. Another English, Charles (b. 1822), although he did not appear in all the censuses from 1851 – 1881, was reasonably certainly connected with the sea for the period covered, i.e. some 30 years. Seafaring was much connected with one branch of the family, namely Robert (b.1834) with him and 5 of his six sons having sea careers, thereby accounting for half of the recorded seafarers in the family. Lastly, with four members of the family being drowned at sea, the family suffered a very high casualty rate. Of these, three were aged about 15, 16 and 18.

### **The End of a Walberswick Clan**

The arrival of Edmund English and his family in the final decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century produced a large number of descendants, many with the same name, so that many were known by their nicknames (see previous article). In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the numbers diminished and by the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century none were left. There are now no members of the family with the name English living permanently in the village though the connection of the family with the village remains. The decline of the fishing industry in the area and the effects of two World Wars are surely responsible for some of this situation.

**Maurice Godbold,**

**With assistance from John English**



# WALBERSWICK

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 32

AUGUST 2007

Serious research in Walberswick history seems to have been occupying members of late. Our Chairman, Philip Kett, and Kay Ungless have embarked on a detailed study of the Census from the Years 1841 to 1901, which is enabling us to have a very good “snapshot” of life in the village during the century before last. There is a preliminary account of their work in this issue, which should whet the appetite for further information.

Maurice Godbold, with help from John English, is delving into the history of the English family: both their connection with fishing and their life in the village in general. I hope to publish this in our next issue. It is a painstaking business, as so many male members of the family bore the same first name, but their importance in Walberswick is very clear.

There is little information in the archives about the history of Walberswick during the Second World War. Alan Walpole has agreed to do further research and then consolidate the information that he has gathered, for eventual publication in the Newsletter and for retention in the archives. He is seeking information about village life, about those who lived in the village for some or all of the time, about the preparations that were made for war and the military presence in and around Walberswick. An appeal for recollections will be made in the September Village News.

**Subscriptions:** it was agreed at the last Committee meeting that the subscription should be raised to £5.00 from 1st January 2008.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Thursday 20th September**—Day visit to Gressenhall Museum of East Anglian Life  
(details and booking form with this Newsletter—page 6)

**Thursday 4th October** –Autumn Lecture: Professor John Allen on  
“Wartime Secrets of East Anglia”  
7.30 in the Village Hall

**Monday 10th December** – Christmas Celebration: Bob and Doris Ling will entertain us  
with their talk on  
“Two Suffolk Lives Around Snape Maltings”  
7.30pm in the Village Hall

## THE CENSUS PROJECT

Last winter Philip Kett proposed that the History Group should transcribe and study the census returns relating to Walberswick in the years from 1841 to 1901. (Details of the census held in subsequent years are not at present available). National Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths only began in 1837: before that there was only patchy information available from Parish Registers, Wills, and other sources of that kind.

Our project, which has been mainly conducted by Philip Kett and Kay Ungless, has begun by transcribing the information from the actual records – a very difficult business, as the writing is often very poor. In addition hardly any houses are named in the early returns: vague phrases, such as “near the church”, “near the river” are prevalent. The main task, therefore, has been to identify the various homes and link families to them, and as the work progresses we will report on it in subsequent issues of the Newsletter.

As an introduction to this project, we thought History Group members would be interested in a comparison between the first census (1841) and that held in 1901, reflecting some of the changes which took place in Walberswick during the intervening 60 years.

### 1841.

In this, the first census, very little information was requested or given:

**Name**, age to the nearest 5 years (except in the case of children)

Whether born in Suffolk. Those born outside the county were identified as S, I or F, signifying Scotland, Ireland or “foreign born”.

**Nature of employment.**

**Address.** Almost all were given as The Common, High Street or Quay Street. In fact only two houses were named: Keeper’s House (now thought to be the cottage in the woods just off the old railway track), and Tinkers (either Tinkers Barn or the derelict Tinkers Farm near the river).

#### EMPLOYMENT

There were two **public houses** – not named, but identified by the word “publican” as inhabitant.

Four **farmers** are named: Leverett (who farmed at the corner of Leverett’s Lane); Wigg (Manor Farm); Gayler (Valley Farm); and the inhabitant of Old Farm.

The majority of inhabitants were **agricultural labourers**, though the exact nature of their work is not given. In addition there were: 2 lime burners, 3 “preventive” servicemen (coastguards), 1 merchant, 1 wheelwright, 1 pauper’s widow, 1 carpenter, 1 butcher, 1 bricklayer, 2 shoemakers, 1 miller, 10 **fishermen/seamen**, 1 cleric.

9 **servants** (women servants were identified with the letters FS, denoting female servant).

#### SUMMING-UP.

This represents the bulk of the information gathered by the census takers in 1841. It will be seen that, apart from the farmers and the cleric (presumably the vicar) it was very much a one-class village, consisting of labourers and fishermen with a handful of craftsmen.

### 1901

Sixty years later, the pattern is very different, both in the information provided by the census and the population of the village. By now, most of the houses are named, and the following personal information is required:

**Number or name of house**, and whether occupied or uninhabited.

**Names of persons** with head of household listed first.

**Relationship to head of household.**

**Marital status.**

**Age last birthday and sex.**

**Profession or occupation.**

A final requirement was to specify if anyone was deaf or dumb, blind, lunatic, imbecile, feeble-minded or epileptic!



## PROFESSIONS

By 1901 these are much more varied, and descriptions are more precise:

Church of England **clergyman**.

**Servants**, mostly female, are listed as follows: cook, nurse, general servant, mother's help, monthly sick nurse, charwoman, housekeeper.

**Agricultural labourers** are also described: cattle stockman, cowman, horseman, groom, gardener, 2 gamekeepers, horse-driver, shepherd, vermin destroyer, watermill keeper.

**Trades:** 2 carpenter/joiners, sub-postmistress, several lodging-house keepers, ferryman/barge operator, 2 innkeepers, 1 baker/shopkeeper, several laundries, retired bank clerk, several shopkeepers, 1 fish merchant, 1 beetster (canvas)\*, 1 agent for lubricating oil, 1 grocer's assistant, retired draper, 1 innkeeper/pork butcher (at the Anchor), 1 housepainter, 1 bricklayer/labourer, carpenter's apprentice, miller's carter, Royal Navy pensioner, dressmaker, miller, 1 retired schoolmaster, 1 shoemaker, electrical engine driver (generator), railway porter, railway pensioner.

\*A beetster is a repairer of nets; in this case also of sails.

**Farmers:** 3 families are listed as farmers, and all said they were working "on own account" – ie., self-employed. They were the Valley Farm (Goddard family); Manor Farm (Wigg family); and Tinkers Farm (Cobb family). Mr Cobb was listed as "Farmer and dealer". Leverett's (The Old Corner House) and Borrett's (Old Farm) had by then disappeared. Leverett's was designated Sloane House and was unoccupied: almost certainly a holiday home. The Goddards, Leveretts, Wiggs and Cobbs are old Walberswick families, appearing on the Census in both 1841 and 1901; the Wigg family were at Manor Farm throughout this period.

**Jobs connected with the water.** There were surprisingly few of these: 2 ferrymen, 5 mariners, 6 fishermen and 1 sailor.

## SUMMING-UP

The coming of the Southwold Railway made the area far more accessible, and the presence of several lodging-house keepers indicates that the village was beginning to attract summer visitors. Among these in 1901 were 1 painter/sculptor and 1 artist (from Canada), revealing the village's growing reputation as an artists' colony with a "landscape" worth capturing on canvas. Also listed was a financier and "several living on own means" – signs that the social mix of Walberswick was becoming far more varied. One surprising omission is that no schoolmistress is listed; possibly she was absent from the village on Census Day.

By 1901 the village was a far more vibrant place than it had been 60 years earlier. It was beginning to attract wealthier inhabitants, retirees and summer visitors who required more services: the result was growing numbers of tradesmen and skilled workers in Walberswick. Fishing was clearly declining, as Maurice Godbold demonstrated in our last issue – but there were still enough fishermen about to make the place picturesque as they followed their traditional activities by the harbour. Many of them made extra cash by posing for the artists.

The 3 farms were apparently thriving, but within the next decade much of the farmland was to be sold off for building land, as the large Arts & Crafts houses in Millfield Road and Leveretts Lane were built for the wealthier residents.

Looking back from the present day, it is striking to see how self-sufficient the village was: all the requirements for everyday living were available close at hand – a necessity, as there was hardly any transport. With the coming of the motor car more and more of these services (which were still available in the 1930s) were gradually withdrawn – until now we are almost totally dependent on private transport, and the thriving army of shopkeepers and tradesmen we see in 1901 has vanished for good.

Julia Reisz

## WALBERSWICK VILLAGE SCHOOL IN 1933



From left to right starting at the top row:  
Douglas Bloomfield, Owen English, Arthur Sharman, Jack Fairs, Frederick Denny, Billy Cross  
Daphne Cross, Peggy English, Joy Barber, Myrtle Hambling, Kathleen Dowding, Rhoda Dowding, Joan Cady,  
Peggy Gilbert, Joan Backhouse  
Cissie English, Hilda Denny, Heather Block, Marjorie Cross, Lena Lane, Joyce Bloomfield, Ann Denny  
Edgar English, Tony English, Lionel Sharman, Cecil Lane, Ivan Cady

This photograph is of special interest to me, as many of the children were still in the school when I attended it about 4 years later. Joyce Bloomfield and Ann Denny were two of my particular friends. The older children in the photograph had gone on to Reydon School by then, but I knew most of them. Many of these children had younger brothers and sisters who attended the school later: I particularly recall the Fairs and Bloomfield families.

It was a one-room school, presided over by Mrs Piper, who was a bit of a dragon but certainly knew how to teach: I learned a good deal there.

Two of the children in the picture - Heather Block and Owen English - were living in the village until fairly recently, and Arthur Sharman and Joyce Bloomfield are still with us.

**Julia Reisz**

**WALBERSWICK LOCAL HISTORY GROUP**

An outing has been arranged on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2007

To

**Gressenhall Workhouse**  
which is truly a unique museum.

“The Workhouse Experience”, with free audio guides, tells the story of people who lived and worked there. Visit Cherry Tree Cottage and Village Row with its shops and schoolroom. The Laundry, the Engine Room, the Prehistory Gallery, The Museum of Farming Life and the Farm with rare breeds are only some of many excellent exhibitions.

We shall leave Walberswick at 9.20am and stop for coffee at the Honingham Buck, an historic coaching inn, and hope to reach Gressenhall about noon. We shall be back in Walberswick by 6.30pm The cost will be £19.00 each which includes coach travel, coffee and entrance, but not lunch. There is a very pleasant café at Gressenhall for a light lunch, tea, cakes, etc., or you may like to bring a picnic.

We do hope you will come.

To make your reservation for this very interesting outing, please tear/cut off the booking form below, and send it with cash or cheque to either **Mary Nuttall** or **Kay Ungless** no later than September 10th.

-----

Name/s.....

Address.....

Telephone number.....

I/We shall join the coach at The Anchor, the Shop, the Church. (please circle)

I/We enclose £.....cash or cheque (make cheques payable to Walberswick Local History Group. They will not be banked till nearer the date)

To: **Mary Nuttall**, Millside, The Street. tel: 723 288 or  
**Kay Ungless**, Winton, The Street. tel: 722 655  
by 10<sup>th</sup> September at the latest.

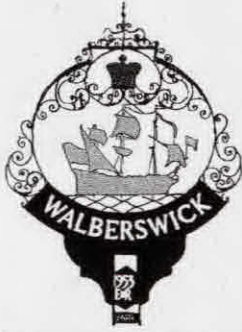
## THE ARCHIVE BOOKSHELF

James Maggs' "Southwold Diary" has recently been reprinted and a copy has been bought for our Archives. At the last Committee Meeting it was agreed that members may like to have an up-to-date list of books held in the Archives. These can be borrowed on signature from Tony Rees (Tel: 725061). The list is as follows:

- + At Walberswick by Oliver Rooke
- Artists at Walberswick by Richard Scott
- Bloody Marsh by Peter Warner
- + Ferry Knoll by Carol Christie (Caroline Pickthorn)
- Flower Show Minutes 1952-83
- Further Suffolk Memories by Arthur Sharman & Patricia Wythe
- The Golden Age Club Minute Books
- Ich hab's gewagt (I have dared it) by Tisa von der Schulenburg
- The Journal of William Dowsing edited by Trevor Cooper
- + History of the Church (Church File)
- + In and Around the Village of Walberswick by Merle Tidey (Merle Rafferty)
- + Parish Magazine 1896
- Recording & Analysing Graveyards by Harold Mytum
- The Southwold Diary by James Maggs
- Suffolk Maps - Kirby
- Suffolk Memories (WW2) edited by D. Shirreff & A. Sharman
- Vegetarians & Custard by Felicity Jelliffe
- + Walberswick 1889 -Rev. T.H.R. Oakes
- Walberswick Churchwardens' Accounts 1450-1499
- \* Walberswick Families 1600-1900 compiled by Hanns Lange
- + Walberswick Story by Allan Jobson
- + Walberswick Suffolk by Jean I. Carter & Stuart R. Bacon
- + West Wood by Mea Allan

Note: + Pamphlets

\* For reference only and not to be taken away



# WALBERSWICK

## *LOCAL HISTORY GROUP*

**NEWSLETTER NO. 31**

**FEBRUARY 2007**

Last October we had a tremendously interesting lecture from Bill Ungless on the architecture of Frank Jennings, who designed many of the Arts and Crafts houses in the village, mostly during the first decade of the last century. Bill clearly had done exhaustive research on the subject, and a copy of his findings will be presented to the Archives. Everybody present hoped that Bill will one day produce a book on this fascinating subject.

In this issue we continue with Maurice Godbold's account of the history of fishing in Walberswick. Census and other details have enabled him to paint a clear picture of the often very harsh life that the fisher folk of this village have endured over the last several hundred years. Now that fishing in Walberswick is over, it is very important to have a full account of it, and this Maurice has provided. We are all extremely grateful to him for his efforts.

**Julia Reisz, Editor**

### **CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

We welcomed as our guest speakers David Barnard and his wife Jenny, who came to show us a selection of their 600 or so finds made with metal detectors. The coins shown ranged from Roman and Iceni, through most of the kings and queens of England up to Queen Victoria, and were made of gold, silver and bronze. The silver hammered pennies were stamped with a cross, so that they could be cut in half and even quartered into farthings. There was also a range of belt and shoe buckles. Artifacts of various eras included Roman dog-lead swivels, a Women's Land Army lipstick, toy cannons, early buttons and cloak clasps, seals for impressing wax, thimbles and coin weights. There was also the snake from a small boy's belt (Anglo-Saxon, C20th).

Thanks are due to Richard Steward, who made this possible: with his video camera and the Village Hall projector, he was able to enlarge very small coins to a diameter which filled the screen, thus making all detail clear.

**Philip Kett**

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

Tuesday 3rd April 2007: Annual General Meeting, 7.30pm Village Hall

Friday 18th May 2007: A lecture by Pip Wright—"For the Rest of Your Natural Life".

**SUBSCRIPTIONS: These are now due and should be paid by the AGM on April 3rd. Maureen Thompson at Greenways, The Green, would be glad to receive your £4.**

## Fishing in Walberswick – Part 2

Poverty also affected Southwold, and the government attempted to improve matters by making the town a centre for the “Free British Fishery” aimed at overcoming Dutch dominance. The enterprise lasted 20 years and led, among other things, to the export of red herrings and sprats. Gardner, a well known local historian of the time, described herring as king. It is not clear to what extent Walberswick benefited from this operation but there could have been some spin-off.

There is no documentary evidence in the Walberswick Local History Group’s Archives for the importance of fishing in the approximately 100 years between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century and 1841. The census data taken every 10 years from 1841 to 1901 inclusive show that agriculture and fishing with ancillary occupations accounted for the economic activity of the majority of residents. The following table illustrates the point.

<b>Employment in Agriculture and Fisheries Census Data</b>								
<b>Year</b>	<b>Households</b>	<b>Population</b>			<b>Occupations</b>			
		<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Associated</b>	<b>Fishermen</b>	<b>Associated</b>
1841	74	143	189	332	47	9	4	5
1851	76	176	182	358	28	1	12	15
1861	80	136	178	314	38	-	4	29
1871	80	129	174	303	27	-	19	11
1881	77	130	159	289	36	2	15	10
1891	54	94	110	204	25	5	15	3
1901	74*	142	164	306	27	2	6	8

\*Plus 17 occupied but empty (second homes?) Note population data include children.

The contrast between the numbers engaged in agriculture and fishing are not as large as shown by the raw data, as occupations associated with fishing include people classified as mariners. Nevertheless this group includes some associated with the sea who were not fishermen: ferry men are an example. Fishing is a seasonal activity, and the census data show that family income was sometimes supplemented by taking in boarders.

At the time of the 1871 census, the fishing vessel Neptune (a Dandy type vessel) was operating off Orford with a crew of 8, including its master Benjamin Kerridge (38); two other Kerridges, Thomas (33) and Robert (28); George Stannard (24); and John Baker (54) all from Walberswick. James Spence (32) and Henry Hure (13) of Southwold and a William Clifford completed the crew. The 1871 census shows that the Walberswickians should be added to the list of fisher folk for that year. Thus 1871 was the only year in which the number of fisher folk in Walberswick exceeded those in agriculture.

The same individuals sometimes appeared in more than one census, so one can easily overestimate the total members of any one family working as fishermen. As we might expect, the English family name with 13 mentions occurs most frequently,

followed by Kerridge (10), Stannard (6) and Todd (5). The Kerridge and Stannard totals include those on the Neptune.

Various directories published between 1844 and 1937 list the residents of the village considered to be commercially important. Mentions of those connected to the sea include, in 1844, one master mariner, and in 1855, a fish merchant with another in 1933. A Robert English senior was recorded as a boat owner in 1873 while George, Robert and William English were each boat owners in 1888, 1890, 1891/2 and 1900 with, by that time, 2 of the 3 also registered as having apartments to let. By 1904 Robert English was the only boat owner left. In contrast up to 4 farmers were mentioned in every year for which records are available. In 1937 the list included 2 farmers, 2 cow keepers, 2 innkeepers, 2 builders, a number of shopkeepers, a boot repairer, a poultry dealer, an architect, a nursery owner, a motor engineer, a tea room owner and a boarding house keeper but nobody connected with the sea. Fishermen as such, although active in the village, were not considered sufficiently important to merit inclusion in these Directories.

For a considerable part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Scottish herring fleet came down the east coast; at one time some 40-50 boats were involved. Fishing for herring and sprats and curing of herring occurred on a large scale, mainly on the Southwold side of the Blyth. Scottish girls who followed the fleet undertook the curing. Some of them lodged in Walberswick, and census data show that some of them married locally.

There are few data in the archives about fishing from Walberswick in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was important in the first half though in decline. The Bacons write of fishing boats being dragged up on the river bank in 1903 with nets hung out to dry. As late as the 1930s the area near the river now used as a car park was known as Fisherman's Flats and used for drying fishing nets on trestles. In 1979, the foundations of the copper used to tan the nets could be seen located near a well. On the other side of the road several drainage ditches were located. They were crossed by small wooden bridges owned by fishermen and used for access to their huts. The owners were very possessive of their bridges and only fisher folk were welcome. Other visitors were often told "to get on their way". Walberswick was described in 1979 as being a quiet fishing village, the haunt of artists and holiday-makers.

The Walberswick History Group Archives contain a tape with the reminiscences of Dinks Cooper and Blucher English, both local fishermen. Dinks Cooper had the reputation of being one of the best known drifter fishermen on the East Coast. His recorded story only deals with his life as a schoolboy. Blucher English, born sometime well before 1915, as a boy used to catch mackerel, cod and herring off the pier with a home-made rod and hook. He used to be taken to Hollesley Bay by his uncle George in an 18-foot sailing boat for fishing. Uncle would sit relaxed in the boat with his arm over the tiller and a pipe stuck in his mouth, all the while scaring the daylight out of his nephew. As a man, Blucher English lived by catching codling off the beach and catching herring during the winter, when he also acted as a beater for the local shoot. As a drift fisherman off Lowestoft he earned a basic 50p per week in the 1920's but after deducting the wages paid to the crew the money made from the catch was shared out among the

crew. Catches could amount to 40/50 bushels/day. As shown above, family income was supplemented by other activities – in his case shooting and snaring rabbits in the winter, when 12-14 could be caught and sold for 2.5p each. He got 5p for a duck and 12.5 p for a pheasant. (All prices in post-decimal value).

Blucher states that the Walberswick beach used to be much straighter and deeper than it was when talking to his interviewer in 1974 and it was possible in, presumably the 1920's-30's, to catch 7/8000 herring in one haul. Blucher claimed the family lived well. It was the custom for fishermen to leave a bushel basket of herring or sprats on the Quay for people to help themselves. Farm labourers would return the compliment by bringing turnips or rabbits the following week.

### **Hazards**

Disputes with Dunwich, the Dutch and others occurred regularly, and some descended into violence. The first recorded difference with Dunwich occurred in 1281, but its course and outcome is not known. Dunwich objected strongly to the cutting out of the new harbour in 1590 as it meant a loss of harbour dues. They went to law about the matter but there is no record of the result.

The fishermen of Dunwich, and possibly those of Walberswick, required protection from the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as they frequently indulged in piracy and played a very significant part in the decline of fishing at this time and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1561 William Caston of Walberswick and others with Thomas Grey, master of a ship of 100 tons called the James of Walberswick, complained that in 1558 “being in harbour in Westonmoney in Iceland, the King of Denmark’s waters, was cruelly undercut and invaded by Thomas Nicholson of Aberdeen and John Hog of Leith who reft, spoiled and took with them two ships with their lading, boats and anchors to the value of £2,800 (£480,000 in today’s money)”. Mary Queen of Scots wrote from Paris on 13 July 1561 to Lord James Prior to inquire into the matter and award punishment if deserved. There is no record of the outcome of this dispute. The claim suggests that fishing boats and gear had a considerable value although there may have been a touch of exaggeration in the claim!

Disputes between fishermen could occur. One between the older and younger fishermen of Walberswick was settled at Beccles in 1609, when an order was made requiring that old men, former fishermen, should occupy the coasting business whilst young men should diligently attend the fishing craft. There is also a comment belonging perhaps to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that, when fishing was bad, fishermen could indulge in “bousing”: this was “fishing” for anchors which could be sold for £14.

Fishing can be a dangerous business. Records taken from 1852, when details of vessels lost off the East coast were first taken, show that as many as 1600-1700 could be lost annually at about that time. The same source suggests Walberswick could have suffered many unrecorded losses among its fishing vessels.



A George English tells a story (almost certainly fictional according to John English) as related by his daughter, of how on his first trip on the drifter "Prima Donna" (newly acquired with his father) they were harassed for a whole day by a much larger foreign vessel apparently determined to sink them. They were ultimately saved by the appearance of a merchant vessel to which they had appealed for help. George thought it was a case of mistaken identity. This incident supposedly occurred in the 1880s.

The most significant loss was that of the "Clipper" which sank without trace in the North Sea in 1883. Only its dinghy was found. 9 men and a boy were drowned, of whom 6 came from Walberswick. These were familiar Walberswick names: Charles English (23) Master, John English (18), William Walker (50), Henry Curdy (44), Frederick Pipe (22), Thomas Benjamin Kerridge (23), Lewis Goddard (17) - all from Walberswick. Also lost was George Pulphar (24) from Wenhaston, plus Robert Sadd (21) and William Dullard (16), both from Southwold. About 1904 a young fisherman, the only son of his widowed mother, was drowned crossing the river.

A Parish Magazine of 1915 tells of the gallant rescue of George English and Gilbert and George Buckenham by W. English, W. and Charles Cross, C. Gilbert, Charles Jackson and W. Page.

## **Discussion**

The very scanty data on the price of herring at the time of Domesday and in the Middle Ages suggest a substantial fall in value between the two periods, but this requires more research. Today's price of herring suggests a very substantial increase in value which, given the known fall in fish stocks, may have more credence but requires more research for it to be put in the context of food prices generally.

The economic value of fishing to Walberswick can only be assessed in general terms. It is clear that from as early as 1200 until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century the town was mainly prosperous and fishing made a substantial contribution to that prosperity. It also contributed to the prosperity of merchants who traded in the area both on land and sea. Expeditions to Iceland, whilst evidently hazardous, are likely to have been especially valuable. In the absence of solid evidence it is only possible to speculate on the nature of the town from 1700 to 1841, but it is likely to have become a rural hamlet with the core activities being fishing and agriculture with some sea trade undertaken. The standard of living may have been generally low, but fishing and agriculture were crucial in keeping the village alive.

Throughout the period 1841 to 1901, except for 1871, more people were employed in agriculture than directly in fishing. The numbers engaged in agriculture and fishing show that more households depended on agriculture than the sea. It was sometimes the case that a farmer's household included more than one member working the farm, but it was rare for there to be more than one fisherman in any one household. Thus a farm household, on average, employed more people than a fisherman's household. Fishing was a traditional occupation in some families, particularly the Englishes and

Kerridges. People from outside the village could be members of the crews of fishing vessels so Walberswick fishing was not an exclusive Walberswick activity.

Available data do not allow any measure of the relative economic importance of fishing and agriculture in Walberswick at this time. The agricultural depression of the 1870's would have lowered the significance of that industry and it is highly likely that agricultural labourers were considerably less well off than fishermen.

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the character of the village began to change. Tourism, second-home ownership and retirees have become important to the economic life of the village. What is certain is that professional fishing in Walberswick has now declined to the point that it no longer exists. Farming still takes place but the ownership and management of the land lies outside the village. I believe no agricultural workers live in the village today.

**Maurice Godbold**

(A list of the sources used in this article has been placed in the Archives)

#### **ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES**

Millenium Breakfast – Visitors' Book

Programme for "Murder Will Speak" – Sanderlings Production in November 2006

Many thanks to Mary Clayton for Land Charge documents, and an account of the Presentation of Rescue Awards to Dinks Cooper and Freddie Eade at the Parish Council meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1972.



# Walberswick Local History Group

## NEWSLETTER NO. 30

August 2006

Maurice Godbold's account of the life of Freddie Eade, the last fisherman in the village, created a great deal of interest – and sadness too, as we now come to terms with the fact that Walberswick is no longer a fishing community, as it has been for hundreds of years. Maurice has researched something of that history, and the first part of his article on the subject appears in this issue.

More recollections of the Walberswick Cottage Home have been coming in, and I have printed two of them, from different eras.

Julia Reisz, Editor

### **A Note from the Chairman**

I have booked the Village Hall Annex on Tuesday, September 12, in order for the Committee and interested members to examine and discuss some of the archives. This time the 1841 Tithe Map and Apportionments, and the Census from 1841 to 1901 will be available. If enough members are interested, we will arrange monthly meetings during the winter. If you wish to take part, please telephone me at 723800.

Philip Kett

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September: Visit to Sudbury and Lavenham

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October: "Frank Jennings, Architect and Magpie"

A lecture by Bill Ungless

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Celebration

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2007: Lecture by Pip Wright

(All at 7.30pm in the Village Hall)

## The Walberswick Cottage Home – Continued

The article in our last issue about Heath House (at one time the Walberswick Cottage Home) has attracted plenty of attention, and a number of Walberswick folk have sent in recollections of it.

*Philip Kett writes:*

My father Andrew Kett was born in 1908, and by 1920 his family were living at Church Farm, Blythburgh. Children at that time were expected to do family chores, and one of his Saturday jobs was to collect the dirty washing from the Cottage Home in Walberswick, take it back to Church Farm for his mother to wash, and deliver it clean the next week.

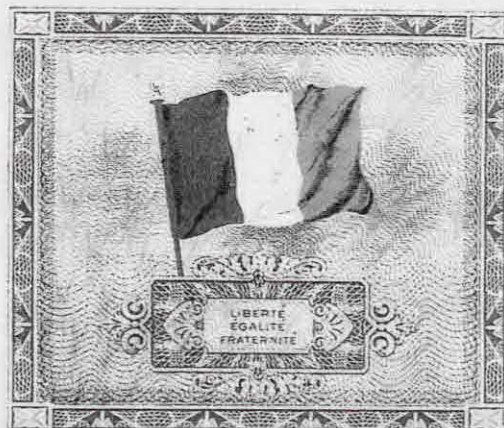
The Walberswick road was not paved until about 1927, and the two boys made the journey in a pony and trap – not perhaps the safest way to deliver clean washing! On one occasion the trap hit a deep hole, and the washing was dumped into the mud. The boys quickly scabbled the washing back into the basket with the muddy items underneath, and soberly continued with the delivery, wondering what would happen the next Saturday on their return. A week later they returned to collect the washing as usual – and to their surprise and relief not a word was said about the muddy items.

*From Dick Leon:*

At the start of World War II several houses in the village were taken over by the army, and Heath House was one of those. Different regiments came and went, and Derek and Muttitt and I, when we were boys, used to go and visit the soldiers.

At one time the Pioneer Corps were billeted there, and when we went to visit them they told us they would soon be leaving. They had just been paid in French francs, and showed us the notes. (*Presumably this was because they were being shipped out to France – Editor*) One of the soldiers gave me a 5 franc note, saying: "There's something to remember us by". I still have that note, and also the regimental badge he gave me.

**Opposite: The Pioneer Corps badge and the two sides of the 5 franc note, which Dick Leon still owns.**



## Fishing in Walberswick

As a background to my account of Freddie Eade's career, published in the last newsletter, I have researched the archives of the Walberswick History Society in order to find out something about the history of fishing in the village. Generally, Walberswick fishing is not extensively recorded, so there are large gaps in the story – and I have used a certain amount of guesswork in this attempt to assess the importance of fishing in the life of the community.

**Maurice Godbold**

In the Middle Ages, towns like Walberswick (so designated at the time) depended on trade for their prosperity. This was encouraged by the grant of Charters which Walberswick received in 1262, 1453, 1485, 1553, 1558 and 1625, exempting tradesmen from toll duties and taxes on businesses engaged in trade. In addition, officers serving processes of law were banned. As a result Walberswick enjoyed a considerable trade in butter, cheese, bacon, corn, timber, coals, salt and fish. This beneficial state of prosperity was, from time to time, interrupted by natural disasters. Four major fires occurred in 1583, 1633, 1683 and 1749; and there were storms and floods in 1286, 1347, 1560, 1570, 1703, 1740, 1898, 1938 and 1953.

Until 1590, when the harbour was cut, the Blyth and Dunwich rivers had separate entrances to Sole Bay on a shore line considerably further out to sea than it is now. In that year the present harbour was cut out by men of Southwold and Walberswick under the direction of Robert Richardson, a Walberswickian.

Although basically favourable to shipping, the harbour regularly silted up and had to be cleared. There is a long litany of the efforts required of the people of Southwold and Walberswick and the local area, either to support by duties and tolls the reconstruction of piers and clearance of the harbour, or to provide the necessary labour. These naturally occurring problems were compounded by man-made problems which, insofar as they directly affected fishing, will be dealt with later.

The general prosperity of the village was severely reduced by the dissolution of the monasteries, when the power and wealth of Walberswick, along with that of Blythburgh, passed to Henry VIII and subsequently to Sir Richard Hopkins. In 1632 the Lord of the Manor, Sir Richard Brooke, seized the Common land, preventing the townsfolk from grazing their cattle. Thomas Gardner, writing in 1754, held these events (plus loss of harbour dues and the decline in fishing) to be mainly responsible for the severe economic decline of the town.

Walberswick, part of the manor of Blythburgh, is not mentioned in the Domesday Book. This document makes clear that fishing was long established in the area, as it states that, in the time of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) Blythburgh paid a levy of 10,000 herrings. At the time of Domesday this had been converted to 50 shillings and 3000 herrings. Assuming there were no major changes in the value of herring, this

implies they were worth 7s.2d/1000. It is not clear whether Walberswick paid part of these dues: at the time, the entrance to Walberswick from the sea was via the Dunwich River, and it seems possible that the town did not have a fishing license. However, Walberswick owed allegiance to the manor of Blythburgh, which suggests it may have had to contribute.

The earliest record for Walberswick fishing belongs to the period when Margaret de Cressy was lord of the manors of Blythburgh and Walberswick round about 1200. She obtained a licence from Dunwich allowing the two towns to "occupy any number of merchant ships or fishing boats they thought fit, paying customs thereon". She was one of the earliest indirect beneficiaries as she charged a penny toll (approx. £2.25 in today's money) on wagons shod with iron traveling between Blythburgh and Walberswick, and half that without iron. Her second husband doubled the toll, specifically mentioning corn and fish. He charged a halfpenny for horses similarly laden. These were substantial charges which could only be justified if the fish being transported was valuable.

In the Middle Ages, the town got a dole of fish brought into the port: this contributed to the upkeep of the houses of the guilds as well as the church and the quay; it also paid salaries and taxes. According to a document of 1597 the town dues included the herring fish dole, the sperling fayre dole, and duties on every voyage to Iceland and the North Sea of 3s.4d (£35.00 in today's money).

No information has been found about the size of the contribution that fishing may have made directly to the building of the church. It is said that it was built at the expense of the town and, since fishing was important at the time, it could have been substantial. At least the will of John Fearnmes illustrates that a fisherman of the time could be prosperous - for he was the owner of two houses, a boat and land in Walberswick and Southfield (sic) and thus subject to local taxes and town dues. Fishing did make a direct contribution to the construction of the church tower: the remuneration to the builders included "a cade full of Herynge Eche year in tyme of werking". (A "cade" was the equivalent of 600 herrings plus: there may have been a good many builders, or perhaps fish was a major part of the diet at that time. Possibly it could be sold on, and thus represented cash in hand). About this time, in 1457, herring were priced at 6-8d per 1000 (£12.50-£17.00 in today's money). For comparison, the wholesale price of herring in October 2005 was, roughly £160.00/170.00 per 1000.

Trade with and fishing off Iceland played an important part in the Walberswick story. The existence of the trade was recorded in 1272. In 1451 there were 13 barques trading with Iceland and the Faroes. Forty years later the total was 18, plus 18 fishing boats. Joyce Youngs states that Walberswick had 5 masters in 1532 capable of taking ships to Iceland, the Low Countries and France. These data suggest a reduction in voyages to Iceland compared with earlier and later activity. In 1565, records show Walberswick having 122 mariners compared with 174 in Southwold and 166 in Dunwich; some or many of these could have been owners or masters of Iceland barques and fishing boats. Perhaps some were fishermen. In 1602 15 barques were said to be

voyaging to Iceland. According to a pamphlet written by Tobias Gentleman in 1614, Walberswick, Blythburgh and Dunwich had 50 Icelandic barques between them. Cooper estimates that the boats sailing to Iceland ranged, in 1528, from 35 to 150 tons which probably made, on the smaller boats, for a very interesting trip!

The Tobias Gentleman pamphlet describes how a Thomas a'Bury from Dunwich, who later moved to Walberswick, made a bargain in 1536 with Tooley, the owner of the Mary Walsingham, to sail her to Iceland. The stores on board included "18 wey of salt and to every wey a quarter of wheat, 2 pipes of beer and two fitches of bacon." Protection was needed for she also carried "1 great piece of ordnance and 2 serpentines, 4 heckebushes, 10 bows and 2 sheaves of arrows and a firkin of gunpowder."

In the late sixteenth century serious economic problems started to arise for the reasons stated earlier. It is clear from the Tobias Gentleman pamphlet (whose author described himself as a fisherman) that there was a need to revive local fishing which had nearly passed to the Dutch. He claimed, however, that at that time Walberswick, Dunwich and Southwold had 50 Iceland barques and 20 sail of seaboats. By 1627 80 Walberswick residents were said to be paupers. In 1654 Nathaniel Flowerdew, the intruder Puritan priest, complained that the inhabitants had suffered much by fire, by the loss of the common, and the death or removal of the ablest townsmen - they could scarce make even an insufficient contribution for the ordinance of God. About the same time the inhabitants of the town refused to pay Town Duties. From this time on, Walberswick was rated a poor town until it became more prosperous in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

While it is generally true that the town was impoverished, there is evidence there were some better-off people even in the poorest times. From 1383 to 1660 there were 33 wills and 6 admsons (administration of estates with no will) in which the occupations of the testators were recorded. 11 were fishermen or mariners. From 1605 to 1700, 12 wills and 10 admsons have been noted of which 7 testators were described as mariners. This demonstrates that in each period one third of the people prosperous enough to make a will or have their estates in administration were connected with the sea

The hearth tax returns of 1674 show that there were some moderately substantial houses in the town at that time. In 1674, 18 people were assessed for a total of 47 hearths. Of these 4 had 4, 4 had 3, 9 had 2 and 1 had 1. However, 15 of the 33 houses in the village had been empty for more than 2.5 years, which indicates a substantial proportion of the population had left.

Barwicke, a significant resident, claimed that Walberswick was one of the poorest towns in England. In 1752 there were only 20 dwelling houses in Walberswick which were occupied by 106 persons who owned 4 boats. John Kirkby, writing in the 1700s, described Walberswick as formerly a large place that traded considerably, but now very mean and only a hamlet. His guide book of 1764 stated Walberswick was not "full of ships".

(This is the first part of a two-part article).



## WALBERSWICK LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

### GAINSBOROUGH'S DOGS

As a sequel to the most interesting talk we had in May about two Suffolk artists, we have arranged an outing to Gainsborough's House in Sudbury on Wednesday, 27<sup>th</sup> September.

A major refurbishment has been taking place during the past 18 months, and we are lucky to be visiting during the first week of the re-launch of the House. To mark the occasion there will be a special exhibition on "Gainsborough's dogs", a theme not previously explored. Gainsborough had a countryman's love of dogs and excelled at painting them. As well as producing several pictures of individual dogs, such as his own pets, he included the animals in many of his greatest portraits and landscapes.

### LAVENHAM

Lunch will be in Lavenham (we can supply a map and a list of many suitable eateries) followed by a visit to the Guildhall. Lavenham is a beautiful example of a Suffolk wool town and is regarded by many as the finest surviving example of a mediaeval town in England with its 300 listed buildings. The exhibition we shall be seeing at the Guildhall includes a photograph of the large timber-framed house being dismantled before being carted to Walberswick where it was re-erected as Mercers Hall.

#### Itinerary:

Leave Walberswick 9.30am (to be confirmed)  
Coffee/tea and biscuits at Saracens Head, Newton  
Sudbury, Gainsborough's House 11.30am  
Lavenham Guildhall, 2.30pm  
Return Walberswick 5.30pm (to be confirmed)

#### Cost:

£17.00 per person, less £3 for NT members.

Further information: Mary Nuttall (before 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep.) t: 7232288 or Kay Ungless t: 722655  
e: [ungless@aol.com](mailto:ungless@aol.com)

## WALBERSWICK NICKNAMES

I am trying to make a collection of the nicknames which were used in the village in years gone by. Most of them seem to have originated in the English family, for obvious reasons, but there are one or two exceptions.

Those I remember are:

Blucher English  
Scarborough English  
Inky English  
Boko English  
Dubber English  
Owen English was known as "Major" when he was a boy, and his younger brother Tony was "Sergeant".  
Leslie Goodwin was known as "Heron".  
Dinks Cooper

If anybody can recall any others, please let me know.

Julia Reisz, Editor

## ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES

Many thanks to Jill Whitenbury for two photographs of the old path at the Vicarage, Ferry Road.

We are also grateful to Mr & Mrs Bard, the new owners of Valley Farm, for papers found there. Those relating to the Parish Council and the WI are being passed to the appropriate people, and those of local history interest will be added to our archives.



# Walberswick Local History Group

**NEWSLETTER NO. 29**

**February 2006**

One of the rewards of editing the Newsletter is the chance it gives me to ask questions about the village, with a very fair hope of having them answered. In our last issue (August 2005) we carried a reminiscence written by "Blucher" English about his childhood in Walberswick in the early decades of the last century. He mentioned performing plays at "the home for crippled children on the common", and I asked if anyone knew anything about it and where it had been.

I very quickly had a response from Dick Leon, who came to tell me that the home had been at the building now known as Heath House, on Palmer's Lane. Shortly thereafter I heard from Dr. Maggie Cochrane, the present owner of Bracken Cottage, to tell me that the Cottage Home (as it was known) had been started by two of her relatives in the early 1900s. Dr. Cochrane has written a short account of the Home, which I have included in this issue, together with some photographs which she has kindly supplied.

Also in this issue is an account of the life of Freddie Eade, Walberswick's last fisherman. For hundreds of years the life of the village was built round fishing and, with Freddie's retirement, we can truly say we have come to the end of an era: it is very unlikely that Walberswick will ever again support a full-time fisherman.

Maurice Godbold interviewed Freddie and wrote this very interesting account. He has also investigated the history of fishing in Walberswick, and written a long essay on the subject, which is an important background to Freddie's story. We will carry this in instalments in future issues.

Julia Reisz, Editor

## **A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY**

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March Annual General Meeting, 7.30 pm in the Village Hall Annexe

(The Spring Lecture will take place in May, on a date to be announced).

## THE WALBERSWICK COTTAGE HOME

This "home for crippled boys" was founded by Miss Elisabeth Ellen Powell (known as Ella) and Miss Elinor Jesse Miller, and occupied the house on the Common now known as Heath House. The exact dates are not known, but it was certainly functioning in the early 1900s.

Miss Powell and Miss Miller ran the home with the help of a matron, who appears in one of the photographs. Miss Miller was a trained nurse, and subsequently became senior nurse or matron of a hospital for wounded soldiers at Heveningham during World War I. It is not known exactly where the boys came from, but it is thought there may have been a connection with a doctor in London who was a friend of Miss Powell's brother. He was Canon Claude T G Powell, who later retired to Walberswick and lived in Bracken Cottage. Miss Miller and Miss Powell also lived in Bracken Cottage, after a period spent in the house known as Wayfaring.

I have a photo album in my possession which shows pictures of some of the boys as well as the house, which is easily recognisable. Three photos are reproduced on these pages.

Miss Miller and Miss Powell are both buried in Walberswick churchyard – together with two of the boys, their graves marked with two small crosses. In her will Miss Miller left a sum to the church to pay for the maintenance of all these graves.

Miss Powell was my grandfather's sister, and Miss Miller was my grandmother's sister: through them my grandparents met and married! The Powell family had lived in "The Elms" in Southwold from about the 1870s.

Maggie Cochrane



Canon Powell

Miss <sup>Ella</sup> ~~Christina~~ Powell

Miss Elinor Miller

Claudia Powell



A photo taken in 1908, showing some of the young patients. Matron is on the left, and Miss Miller in the centre. The formidable lady in the wheelchair is Miss Powell. Below: three of the boys, taken outside the houses on the hill opposite the Cottage Home.



## FREDDIE EADE

### Walberswick's Last Professional Fisherman?



Fishing has a long tradition in Walberswick, possibly extending in an unbroken line to before the Domesday Book of 1086. Freddie Eade's retirement in May 2005 is therefore a significant event, as it probably means that the village, for the first time in several hundred years, no longer has a resident professional fisherman – and it may not have another. The end of a long line!

Freddie very generously talked about his life to Julia Reisz and myself on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2005. This article is based on the recording of that discussion.

Maurice Godbold

Freddie was born at Union Farm, Bulcamp, on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1937, and went to school in Blythburgh, where he was taught by Mrs. Long. He left school at the age of 15, and went to work on the farm of Jack Middleditch, where he graduated to be the driver of a Fordson Major, the most popular tractor of its time. Later he worked with Fudger, his father, at Church Farm, Blythburgh.

When called up for National Service in August 1955 he served for three years in the army, one year more than the statutory requirement. His service began at Catterick, Yorkshire, the Army camp reputed to have the toughest discipline and the most uncomfortable living conditions. Apart from a visit to the Festival of Britain in 1951, this was the first time Freddie had left Suffolk, to find himself a member of a cosmopolitan bunch of young men from all over the country – including a Corporal Physical Instructor who immediately recognised his Suffolk accent.

Freddie had an unblemished disciplinary record in the Army, but his sense of humour often got him into minor scrapes. He suggested that numbering off on the barrack square could be made more interesting if rendered musically with a variety of notes: for this he received the not-to-be-refused invitation to run twice round the square with a 303 rifle held straight above his head. On completion he was asked if he was tired out and, being tough and honest, truthfully but misguidedly said he was not: another invitation had him running round the square with a rifle held above his head in one hand!

He was posted to the 6<sup>th</sup> Tanks in Germany as a lorry driver and, on return to this country, to Tidworth – where he spent some time waterproofing tanks for the Suez operation. He was sent out with the 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks to join the operation, but the cease fire meant he ended up in Malta. He returned to Tidworth, and was posted first to Benghazi and then to Tripoli as a lorry driver delivering food. Driving hazards included struggling to persuade an underpowered vehicle up and down winding, steep mountain roads, avoiding huge American oil exploration trucks; and on another occasion dodging a large cavalcade of vehicles in which King Idris was travelling. A virtue of the job was that he was excused guard duties.

On discharge from the army, Freddie returned to Suffolk to work for Anglian Land Drainage. Not wishing to get involved in agricultural spraying, he opted to become self-employed and did a variety of casual work in the area, including chopping out sugar beet. He also enjoyed the life of a carefree young man.

He met Shirley Church about 1960, and on their first date took her to the pictures. The courtship prospered, and they were the last couple to be married in Walberswick Chapel in 1961. At first they lived in Bulcamp, where their sons Stephen and Andrew were born; in 1963 they moved to 4 Adams Lane, and subsequently to their present house in Church Lane, where Scarborough English had lived previously. Their third son, Robert, was born in Walberswick. At the time of his marriage Freddie was working on the installation of the local sewage system, but he wanted to do something better, and so began taking an interest in fishing. At first he went out as a casual crewman, but one evening, after a night out, there was a knock on the door at 11.30pm from Dinks Cooper, who invited him to go fishing at 5am the following morning. So began Freddie's fishing career proper.

It was not easy to adjust to the new life: Freddie was used to normal working hours, with a good breakfast at the proper time. Out at sea he had to survive on cups of tea brewed up on a small stove when fishing permitted.

Still he persisted, and when he had learned fishing techniques Freddie bought his first boat, the Kingfisher LT54, for £265. Later it was replaced by the Three Js, so named because the seller had three daughters whose names all began with the letter J. His third and last boat LT543 was called the Three Boys after his three sons. This boat came by road from Weymouth; it was a Dixon, so very well built, but consisted only of the hull. Freddie, obviously a great DIY man, did all the work of refurbishment and maintenance, including the installation of a series of different engines. He was helped by Dick Leon, who built the wheelhouse. Freddie had a policy of regularly updating his boat, and he finished with a five-and-a-half-tonner, 30ft.4" long, equipped with a 70hp Ford diesel, a winch, and a radio plus fishing gear. Freddie always made his own nets, and they would take three to four weeks depending on other work requirements. The last net he made is unused because the permissible mesh size was changed just before completion! He was the first of the local fishermen of his time to build his own hut near the ferry, constructed of wood bought in Beccles for £20.

In his early days as a boat owner Freddie was helped by Dutta Doy, Dubba English occasionally, and Dinks Cooper. Working with Dutta meant that they could have one boat set up for sprats and the other for herring, so the gear did not have to be changed. His son Andrew, when he left school in 1979/1980, replaced Dutta – but fishing did not appeal to Andrew, who left to go poultry farming. David Church (Freddie's brother-in-law) replaced him, and Dinks continued to provide occasional support for a couple of years. Freddie then went solo and, after losing some physical strength from typical fisherman's problems such as bad backs and knees, gave up all fishing about 1998 except for sole in the summer.

In his time Freddie has fished for sprats, herring and sole. With this range it was possible to make an evening catch of sprats, then bait the cod lines, put them out early in the morning, and bring in the catch.

In the 60s a fishing catch could be worth as little as £3.00, but this was still quite good compared to agricultural pay. In the 70s a catch of cod, for example, would be valued at £1.25/stone, with up to 30 stone caught. This made it a profitable operation based on expenses of 25p/stone. A more likely catch was 50 stone.

Freddie's policy was to sell as much fish as possible from his house, with any surplus going into the wholesale market. This benefited both Freddie, as it cut out the middleman, and his customers who got fresh fish cheaply. Shirley played an essential part in this, as she sold fish in the afternoon while Freddie caught up on his sleep.

Unsurprisingly, Freddie's career included a variety of hairy experiences. Getting in and out of the harbour could be difficult. Sometimes in the early days it was so silted up that he had to walk alongside the boat with the engine ticking over gently, to avoid getting stuck. Once he caught an unexploded bomb off Dunwich in his nets, which broke before he could get it ashore; it was caught again the next day by a Dunwich fisherman and disposed of. Again off Dunwich, he "caught" an C18th anchor which now sits outside Dunwich museum. Perhaps worst of all, he fell overboard off some muddy nets he was



hauling in: at one stage he was upside down in the sea, but he managed to kick off his wellingtons, get a toe into the net and haul himself aboard.

It is obvious fishing involves antisocial hours. Freddie recalls, in his early days, meeting villagers on their home to bed after a night out as he was going to his boat. Nevertheless, talking to him leaves the impression that he enjoyed his work – and he has been much supported by Shirley who, as far as he is aware, has never complained about his way of life. Between them they have brought up a family of three boys, including Robert who had Down's syndrome; the care they took of Robert was much admired in the village. He has taken a lively interest in the fishing industry and thought deeply about it: clearly he has found the restrictions and bureaucracy of today, which are especially onerous for small businesses, difficult to accept.

Freddie fished for three years beyond retirement age. He made his last trip on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005, went into hospital the next day to have both knees replaced, and was soon back home half wishing he was out fishing. The operation was successful, and Freddie has made a fantastic recovery. He and Shirley are now enjoying retirement, and we wish them many more years together.

Maurice Godbold

ESTHER FRENCH - ANCHOR LEE & HANS & LOTTE LANGE.  
MANY THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING FOR ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES: WALBERSWICK PRIMARY SCHOOL.  
MANY THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING FOR ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES: SCHOOL.

DAVID BELL for a copy of the eulogy he gave at his father's Thanksgiving Service.

- x The late MERVYN BELL for old photographs of Walberswick and the immediate district, press cuttings about the retirement of Mrs. Sharman and the Hurricane, a copy of the Highway Code dated 1930 (price One Penny), and papers relating to the school. - Closed 1976.
- x FREDDIE EADE for a letter to him from the RNLI dated March 1972, thanking him for assisting them to bring ashore people whose dinghy had capsized at the harbour entrance.
- x VIVIEN FINNIE for a cutting from the Southwold Organ - "How I became the First Spy of WWII" by Elizabeth Forsythe.

GRAHAME GODSMARK FOR "Celebrity on Sea" press cutting re Walberswick Jul 05.

MAURICE GODBOLD for "An Account of the History of Fishing".

EVELINE HASTINGS for photographs of her father and brother taken by Walberswick Harbour in June 1933, also for an extract from her father's autobiographical writings.

MARY KING for a cutting from WI News re Southwold House Price Inflation 1984.

BARRY LAST for "A Very British Coup" - an article which refers to Jill Walford. \*

JUDY MORTON for a photocopy of a personal diary written by Miss Jessie Browton. \*

MARY NUTTALL for a copy of the talk she gave to the Southwold Historical Society about Walberswick as it was in 1946.

DAVID SHEPHERD for a list of Walberswick Youth Club members 1946/47.

JANCIS SMITHELLS for Rosamund Stracey's obituary in the Times (3 Jan 06).

BILL UNGLESS for a copy of "Architecture Today" containing an article on the Semperhaus which he has built at Winton.

\* MAGGIE COCHRANE, 'WALBERSWICK COTTAGE HOME' 1908.

POWELL FAMILY. Heath House, BRACKEN COTTAGE

EDITH & LEIGHTON BLOCK - 2 WW Docs -

1  
1939  
-45

2  
1960 Jan  
to Decembe

3  
1976



# Walberswick Local History Group

Tony Rees

## NEWSLETTER NO. 28

August 2005

I am very pleased to be able to include in this issue a reminiscence by William "Blucher" English, who is still well-remembered in the village. (His nickname derives from the Prussian general who arrived late on the field at Waterloo, and helped to defeat Napoleon). As he was born in 1907, his recollections span the years between the wars. Many thanks to Jane Tibbles, his daughter, who made this piece available

Blucher worked as a builder, but his main hobby was beachcombing, and he discovered an amazing number of artefacts on the beach, some of which were authenticated by the British Museum. He kept his collection in his front room at Lima Cottage, and would show it to interested people. After he died (in 1985) the collection was unfortunately broken up: some of it went to Southwold and Dunwich museums.

His Walberswick was very different from the one we know today. I remember him telling me that in his youth it was possible to drive a horse and trap along the coast road that stretched behind the beach between the village and Dunwich.

Also in this issue, Jacqui Morcombe continues her survey of Arts and Crafts houses in the village with a description of Mulberry House, her own home: this one was *not* designed by Frank Jennings.

Julia Reisz, Editor

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### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> September. Visit to the Time and Tide Museum, Gt. Yarmouth. There are still spaces available, and tickets can be obtained from Mary Nuttall (723288).

Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> October. Autumn Lecture. "Superstition and Witchcraft", by Stuart Bowell. 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> December. Christmas Party. 7.30 in the Village Hall.

## BLUCHER'S MEMORIES

I was born in 1907 in a house at the top of the village green. When I was three years old, my father had a house (possibly Harbour View – Ed.) built on the south-east side of a field belonging to my grandfather; the field was called “The Pightle”. I was christened in the Congregational Chapel, which was on the green (now the Heritage Hut).

When I was four I went to school, also on the green (probably what is now the Parish Lantern – Ed.). There was an average of 28 to 32 children split into two classes, the upper standards and the infants. There was a governess for the upper class and a local girl was the teacher for the infants. My first few weeks were spent learning how to make pothooks and hangers, before we started the alphabet and figures. We wrote on slates with a slate pencil. I remember that, when our teacher got married, we all took halfpennies and pennies to buy her a wedding present. Later we had other teachers who took lodgings in the village.

Before the 1914 war, German bands used to play on the village green; there were also Italians with big brown dancing bears, and an organ grinder with a monkey to collect the money. On Empire Day we sang patriotic songs, and on May Day we danced round the maypole on the green. Every March we would play with marbles, tops and hoops on the dusty village green.

When the first world war broke out I was seven, and I remember local boys and men in the Navy and Army coming home from stations abroad to join ships and be sent to France. Most joined the Suffolk Regiment or the Royal Artillery, but the fishermen joined the Horse Regiment. The Saint John Ambulance held exercises on the green, and we would pretend to be the wounded, which we all thought was very exciting.

As the war progressed, troops came to the village to dig trenches and build dugouts; the first to arrive were the Cycling Sussex. Troops were billeted in the village; they also took over the village hall and the adjoining field. They built a camp on the Cliff Field with wooden huts and a big corrugated mess hut. They dug wells for fresh water and built latrines.

When the Germans invaded Belgium, refugees arrived by boat, landing at Southwold Harbour; we used to play truant to go and watch them coming ashore.

My youngest sister caught a chill from which she never recovered (Ellaline English died on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1915, aged 13 years). My father brought coal to Southwold Harbour from the North Country in a ketch called the Achilles. I remember my mother receiving a telegram on a Sunday morning to say that the Achilles had been lost: we had to wait several days before we knew the crew had been saved by a patrol boat.

During the war the school was closed, and we were moved into the Methodist Chapel opposite Millfield Road; when peace came we were moved back to the Congregational Chapel on the green. I went to Sunday School in this chapel, and then I

went to Church Sunday School, which was held in the Gannon Reading Room, close to the Old Vicarage not far from Walberswick Quay. The Old Vicarage was a wonderful place: they used to hold fetes and other celebrations there. We used to scrimp from the apple, plum and pear trees in the paddock. On the Charity Marshes we used to pick violets, primroses, orchids and 'milkmaids', and we used to climb the trees in the "Oussey ground" to get birds' eggs. In the winter the ponds and dykes used to freeze and we could skate on them. The school governess would send one of the children down with the school bell to let us know it was time for school; we used to take the clapper out, so we could say we hadn't heard it.

We enjoyed Sunday School outings to Southwold Cinema or Bell Pier, wagon rides to Dunwich, and fairs on Southwold Common. In summer most of our time was spent on the beach, or in a small rowing boat on the river or the creek.

After school most of us had to fetch milk from one of the farms: it cost one and a half pence a pint. The fields round the lane and up the main road were used to grow corn, Swedes and turnips. We used to pinch a swede or turnip and slice it to eat raw – good to eat and good for your teeth! We put on plays such as Sleeping Beauty for the home for cripples on the Common: these were performed at one of the big houses in the village.

People said the war would all be over by Christmas – little did they know that it would last for four years. I remember the rationing, but we all seemed to manage well enough.

(Editor's note: The Gannon Room was originally built on Ferry Road as a reading room for sailors and fishermen; it was later moved to the site of the present village hall. The Old Vicarage was bombed during the last war, and was rebuilt as Marsh End.

The "Oussey" ground is the marshy patch at the lower end of what is now The Lea.

Does anyone know where the home for cripples on the Common was located? Was it possibly a hospital for wounded servicemen?)

## **Mulberry House (formerly Seahome), Millfield Road, Walberswick.**

Seahome was built in 1902 (the date inscribed on our elm weatherboarding) and can be clearly seen on the 1904 Ordnance Survey map (Figure I). It was commissioned by Thomas Davidson RA (1842-1919) who overcame deafness, due to childhood measles, to become an accomplished artist (Figure II). His work can be seen in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the Bronte Parsonage, Howarth.



The Davidson family taking afternoon tea in the garden at Seahome. Thomas Davidson is far left. (Courtesy of Pamela Carr).

Grander plans were produced in 1906 to extend the property, adding among other things an artist's studio - probably in anticipation of the Davidsons' permanent retirement to the village. The Building news, dated Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1906, states that "The house was originally built as a 'weekend' cottage, the studio, since added, not being contemplated till a few years after. The walls to the ground floor storey are of brick, roughcasted, the chimneys in red brick. The first floor walls are of studding filled in with brick nogging, and covered with felt and 1 ¼ in. rebated elm weatherboarding, painted dark ivory white. The roofs, which are steep, are covered with locally -made

pantiles of a pleasant orange-red tint. The complete building was executed for £1,250. Mr T. Gerard Davidson is the architect”.

Mr T. Gerard Davidson was Thomas’s son. His listing in Who’s Who in Architecture (1914) states that his education was privately supplemented “by study in Holland and Italy and at the RA London”. He commenced practice in 1902, which makes Seahome one of his first projects. He also designed “two other houses in Walberswick”.

The Architect’s drawings of the garden reflect an Italianate style, more in keeping with the previous era than the Arts and Crafts movement. It must have been a fine balancing act between pleasing Victorian parents and moving forward with current designs.. When recently repointing the paths we discovered that the original paving materials were highly decorative Victorian tiles laid on York stone. In the 1930’s “crazy paving” was fashionable: therefore these tiles were broken and re-laid upside down as plain stone. Also at this time one of the millstones, taken from the demolished Walberswick mill, was cemented into the paving as a focal point and remains there today. Still standing in the garden is a Black Mulberry (*Morus nigra*) contemporary with the building; it was the inspiration for changing the house name in the 1980’s.

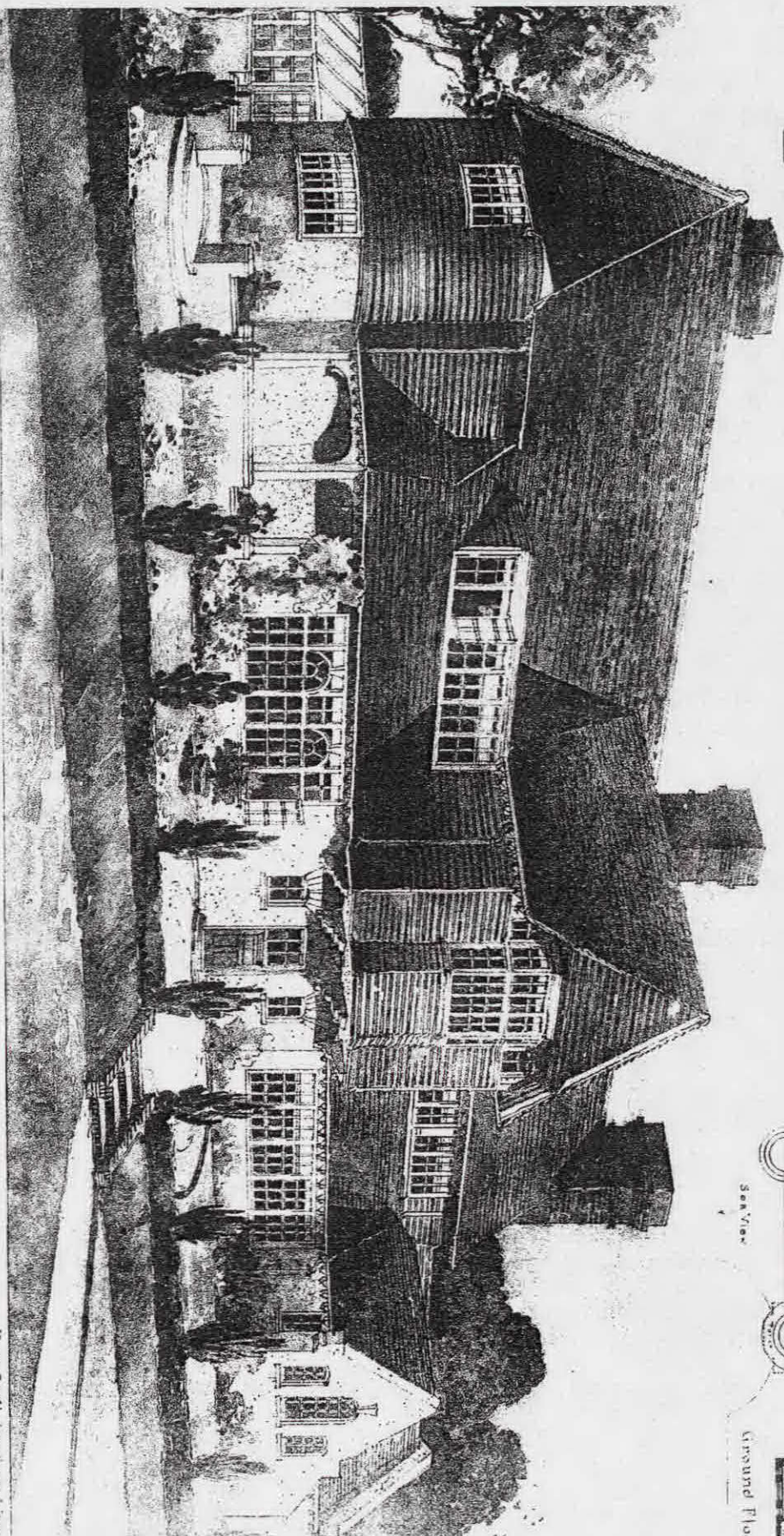
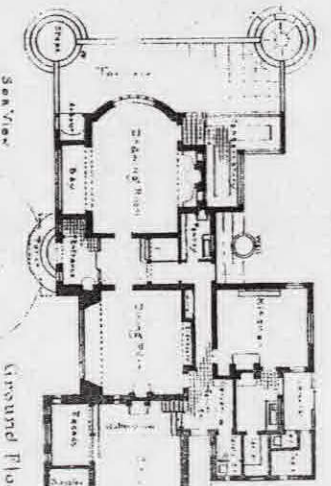
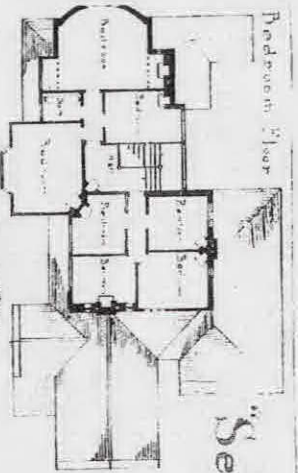
Thomas and his wife Charlotte are buried in Walberswick churchyard. In the church there is a window in their memory made of fragments of stained glass found in the ruins. On Thomas’s grave is the word EPHTHATHA meaning “Be opened” - the word spoken at the healing of the deaf and dumb man in the bible.

(I am very grateful to Pamela Carr, great-granddaughter of the original owner, who gave me many family photographs and information. Similarly, architectural plans from The Building News were posted to me by a complete stranger who happened to share an interest in the Arts and Crafts movement. If anyone knows which other two houses might have been designed by T. Gerard Davidson, I would be interested to hear).

Jacqui Morcombe

THE BUILDING NEWS, NOV. 2, 1906.

"Seahome", Walberswick Suffolk. T. GERARD DAVIDSON  
Architect.



The Building News, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1906. Photo-Tint and plans of Seahome, Millfield Road, Walberswick.

PHOTO-TINT BY JAMES ALLEN & CO. LTD.

## ARCHIVES

We are acquiring an excellent collection of papers and photographs relating to Walberswick. Papers and books are in the care of Tony Rees (Tel: 725061) and photographs in the care of Philip Kett (Tel: 723800). Items may be seen by arrangement with them. If you are shown items which you feel should be kept in the archives do please let them know. They would very much like to get copies.

## RECENT ADDITIONS

Many thanks to:

JILL DAY for her Family Trees relating to the following families: CADY, CROSS, ENGLISH, SPORE and JULER.

ANDREW BLOCK for the following which his parents, Leighton and Edith Block, had kept:

A copy of the WI News, January 1984, which includes an article on Walberswick.

Report of the opening of the Village Hall - Halesworth Times Thursday July 31, 1969.

Journal of the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society - Autumn 1970.

Membership Cards - The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. Southwold Rifle Club.

Notice of Family Allowances.

Receipts for: School Uniform, Rates, Electricity.

Wartime artefacts: Civil Defence Corps badge & armband, Clothing rationbook, First Aid to the Injured - St. Johns Ambulance Brigade manual, Identity cards, Thank You Letter from the Queen to Members of the Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service, Motor Fuel Ration Book, Newspaper cutting relating to war-time ship building in Lowestoft, Papers in relation to War Damage to "Marlish", Receipt for 7/6d. paid to the British Red Cross Society for an "Ambulance to take Tim & mother to Henry's because of being in the line of fire practice for army".

PAT WYTHE for a copy of "Vegetarians and Custard" by Felicity Jelliff.





# Walberswick Local History Group

Tony Rees

## NEWSLETTER NO. 27

February 2005

The report (in the last issue of the Newsletter) on the controversy surrounding the burial ground at Bulcamp Workhouse, aroused great interest, and many readers have asked to be kept informed about developments. Philip Kett convened a meeting in the Village Hall, to which representatives of the parishes which sent people to the Workhouse over the years were invited. It is certain that the proposal to pave over the old burial ground for a carpark has aroused great opposition. At the time of going to press, the developer has <sup>not</sup> lodged a planning application with Suffolk Coastal District Council.

Many people in Walberswick know about the Walberswick Peasant Pottery Company, which was started by the Jennings family. They sold their wares from the building which is now the Parish Lantern. Less well known, perhaps, is the East Point Pottery, which operated for a number of years shortly after World War II. It was run by Michael Jeans, who gives an account of it in this issue.

Jacqui Morcombe continues her survey of sunken gardens with a description of the garden at Te Awahou, designed by Frank Jennings. This is the house that started its existence as Gazebo, then became Mill House, and recently acquired its present name.

Subscriptions to the History Group are now due. If you have not already paid, please contact Maureen Thompson at Greenways.

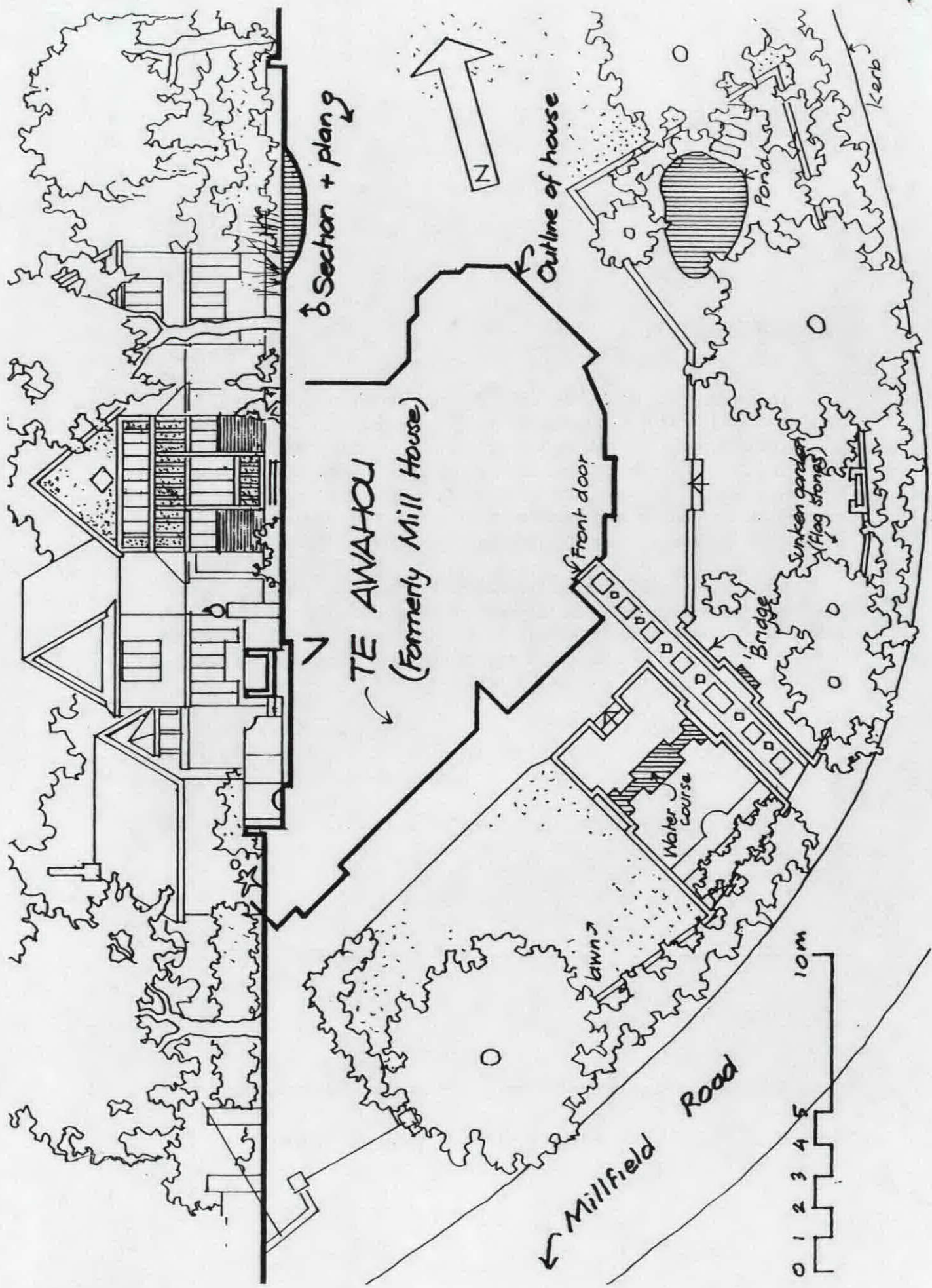
Julia Reisz, Editor

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> March: Annual General Meeting. 7.30 pm in the Village Hall Annexe.

Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May: Summer Lecture. Speaker and subject to be announced. 7.30 pm in the Village Hall.



Section + plan



Outline of house

TE AWAHOU  
(Formerly Mill House)

N

Front door

Water course

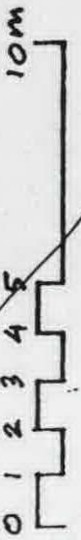
Bridge

Sunken garden  
(flag stones)

Pond

Kerb

Millfield Road



## THE GARDEN AT TE AWAHOU

The Arts and Crafts era reunited architect, artist, artisan and gardener, without discouraging individual creative expression. Emphasis was on function, unity of interior with exterior, and integrity in the use of structural components and materials. Architect Frank Jennings expressed these values in his design for Te Awahou (originally Gazebo). The house was built in 1905/06 and his son Humphrey, the surrealist artist and documentary film maker, was born there in 1907. Unusually, the Gazebo which inspired the house name was attached to the building; however, the area was demolished and a hall built in its place circa 1930.

Architects of this time tended to produce their own garden designs to ensure integration of interior and exterior. (The Lutyens/Jekyll partnership was a renowned exception). Certainly the sunken elements of this garden (those which contain the water course and pond) appear contemporary with the house. Jennings used the existing curve of Millfield Road, echoed it in his building's frontage, and projected its outline into the garden. This would explain why the sunken elements do not continue in front of the hall, which was added in the 1930s.

Continuity is achieved through the use of traditional materials: walls are constructed of red brick and local cobble. Roofed seats on the boundary wall act as focal points when viewed from key internal windows, and are constructed of the same roof tiles and reclaimed timber as the property itself. However, randomly jointed natural stone ("crazy paving") is used on the path bordering the house and the sunken area surrounding the pond. This pond does not appear on the 1926 Ordnance Survey map and, unlike the water course, is not fed by downpipes from the house. It seems likely that the pond and irregular paving were built when the hall was added in the 1930s.

The smaller of the sunken gardens, labelled water course on the plan, appears least changed over time. The water course flows under a stone "bridge" which forms the approach to the front door. The combination of brick and cobble is repeated in the paving. A low semi-circular cobbled platform towards the south-eastern boundary would have housed a focal point, such as a decorative urn. (Frank Jennings' wife was a gifted potter). Regular shaped flagstones edge the pond and are also set in between the cobblestone paving. This attention to detail makes the area a place of static contemplation, enhanced by the cool greens of the mosses, ferns and soleirolias ("baby's tears") that have colonised the site.

Originally the planting would have been more colourful: alpines were the favoured species for growing in gaps between walls and paving, their scale in keeping with confined areas. Gertrude Jekyll maintained that "florist flowers" such as carnations and roses should be "strictly limited to formal areas". Sunken gardens were often used to display roses, as they benefited from the extra wind protection.

The area opposite the hall is currently a formal rose garden with beds cut into the lawn. It is conceivable that the paved sunken garden could have also included rose beds, at a time when the garden was less shady. The lack of mature trees and boundary hedge (currently Escallonia) would have given lighter and more favourable growing conditions.

Planting generally became less formal as the garden retreated from the house. However, the photograph below of the rear garden taken prior to 1926 shows a grass tennis court and what appears to be a rectangular vegetable or cut-flower bed.

Due to a lack of original garden plans, any restoration programme must be a combination of "restoration in spirit" and new design. Gardens are essentially dynamic, and it is neither possible nor desirable to preserve them in the literal sense. Fortunately, in the current owners, both house and garden have found a sympathetic guardian.

Jacqui Morcombe



**Lawn tennis court overlooking Walberswick Mill**

## THE EAST POINT POTTERY

The pottery began in 1950 as the result of my getting jaundice, caused – so the doctor said – through working long hours as stage manager at the Liverpool Playhouse without proper meals. True, we did work right through 24 hours every third weekend when we changed productions; and I lived on sandwiches in the prop room – although I used to go out for the occasional soused herring and Guinness at the pub almost next door.

A quiet life in Suffolk would be better for me, so I gave up the theatre and went to work for nothing at a pottery in Kent for six months. I had learnt how to “throw” pots at school from Walter Jenke (a German with National Socialist leanings). He shared a basement studio with Willi Soukop, a Jewish refugee who taught me sculpture. As you can imagine, theirs was not a happy relationship! When I left school I carried on sculpting with Tisa Hess, who lived in a thatched house called Oak Barn down Stocks Lane. (Now named Elphinston Corner). Just before the war she suddenly disappeared, and we heard later that she had caught the last plane out of Croydon for Berlin.

All this has little to do with the history of East Point Pottery, but nothing could be more boring than churning out endless identical pots, particularly in the depth of winter, when clay can be very chilly. I did employ two men and two women, but none of them were local. Two of them – John and Toni – who were always running each other down, eventually took off for the Isle of Man, where they got married and started their own pottery. My wife Yve helped with the decoration, but only part time as we had two small children.

One interesting bit of Southwold history: because of the pottery, I revived market day there. It suddenly struck me that it had a market place but no market. So I had a stall made, and discussed payment at the town hall. As the last sum paid had probably been about three groats, it took them a long time and several meetings of subcommittees to work out what they should charge.

Inevitably, once I got going with my red-and-white striped stall (which I brought over the Bailey bridge on a trolley at the back of my bike) others decided they would join in. Much to the annoyance of the greengrocer, a stall appeared loaded with fruit and veg. Similarly, a clothes stall arrived just outside Denny the tailor. I was not very popular!

We also sold pottery from our showroom at East Point; and supplied a shop in Elm Hill, Norwich, and another in Aldeburgh. Heals in London was very keen on our blue hippos decorated with white daisies.

The building at East Point was originally an army hut from the First World War which was bought by Henry Block, the local builder, and set up on its present site as a carpenter's shop. He later sold it to Alfred Holland, an inveterate gambler who had just received a large winning. Alfred sold it to us when he went off to Tehran as Times correspondent. Later he came to a mysterious end in East Africa.

The pottery nearly came to an end in 1953, when the flood did a great deal of damage. We kept going for two more years, and eventually the pottery closed in 1955, just as the new Independent Television was being planned. ATV, having grabbed everyone they could from the BBC, started looking for people who had worked in the theatre – so in I went. And we in our turn sold East Point to Francesca Wilson, who owned it for a good many years.

Michael Jeans

Editor's note:

**Tisa Hess** was a gifted sculptor; she and her husband, Fritz Hess, built Oak Barn to the designs of Ernst Freud and spent several summers in Walberswick.

**Alfred Holland** was the brother of Sibby Mostyn, who lived with her husband "Tony" Mostyn at the Old Corner House in the 1930s. Mostyn was a well-known painter in the village.

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#### ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES

Many thanks to:

Andrew Block for copies of the linocut he made in 1959. At that time he lived with his parents at Marlish, and attended the John Leman School, Beccles. His form were instructed to make linocuts of the views from their bedroom windows: he therefore captured the only view we have of the bombed cottage in Short Lane.

Terry Ball for John Kirby's Suffolk: His Maps and Roadbooks. With a facsimile of The Suffolk Traveller, 1735.

Photos Clive Smith for Walberswick Sports Club Cricket Fixtures 1975 and 1976; and a gravure letter-card of Southwold. The six local views include one of the chain ferry taken from the Southwold side of the river, showing the numerous artists' studios which stood nearby.

Philip Kett for a Glossary of Old-Fashioned Words, by the Rev. J.B. Clare, 1903. Also reprints of accounts of the Bulcamp Riots, and the history of Blythburgh and District Hospital.

Ferry Photos

Cross Family

George Todd

Census Returns