



WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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Newsletter Editor's report

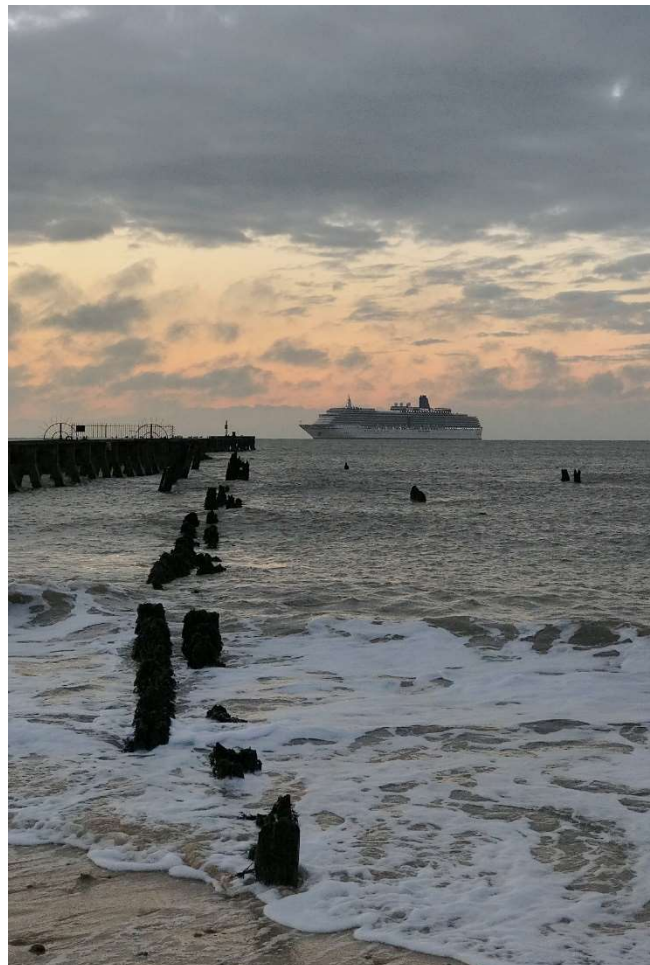
DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Still no dates for meeting in the Village Hall but we are working on other ways we may bring presentations to you.

The summer is over and what a summer it has been! Since our first lockdown edition we have gone from deserted streets to crowded streets. Friends are telling me that trying to book a holiday in the UK has become quite difficult. Barring another lockdown we may find that winter may be relatively crowded as well.

In this issue a number of Walberswick residents have contributed memories of their experiences over the last six or so months. These are all very positive accounts. This does not mean that we lucky Walberswick people do not appreciate how difficult lockdown has been for some people and how it will impact all our lives "going forward".

For those like me who keep an appointment diary the pages show a series of crossings out. We have all probably had to cancel or postpone planned 2020 trips or events. The frequent visitor to our shoreline this summer (see right) was an indication of this. Strange how it looked bigger the further you were away. One such event that suffered was the VE day celebrations. In this issue we feature some people and events from WWII.



Finally we take a brief look at a Walberswick character who lived through both world wars and made it into the 21st century.

John English - Newsletter Editor – email johnrenglish@tiscali.co.uk

Covid-19 Lockdown in Walberswick (first wave)

The UK lockdown started on Monday 16th March 2020, when Matt Hancock told the House of Commons that all unnecessary social contact should cease. It was not until Monday 23rd March that Boris Johnson told the country that people ‘must’ stay at home and certain businesses must close.

Sue and I were in Walberswick the weekend of the 14th and 15th March. Lockdown had not officially started but it was moving that way. The pubs were still open and everything was strangely normal. We had lunch in The Nelson on the Sunday, came back on the ferry and had a drink in The Bell. Saturday night we should have been at a WLHG meeting in the Village Hall. Sunday morning we were due to show the scroll in the Heritage Hut. Both had been cancelled but I sat outside the Village Hall for 30 minutes on Saturday evening in case anyone turned up for the postponed lecture (2 people actually did making it all worthwhile). Monday morning, with the writing on the wall, we had an early-morning walk on the beach (see left, suitably deserted) and then drove home - Monday 16th March, the day Matt Hancock announced “all unnecessary social contact should cease”. Full lockdown was a week away.



As full lockdown got underway the WLHG committee agreed that as a service to members we would produce newsletters monthly. In a number of issues I appealed to members for lockdown stories. I wanted to capture some thoughts of life in the village during this unusual time. The spring and summer of 2020 brought challenges for people of all ages. Easing out of lockdown brought another challenge to a beautiful coastal village – dealing with increased visitor numbers. I would like to thank all the following for their recollections.

Lockdown Diary, Day One – Erica Donnellan

Because of Covid 19 and my suffering from COPD and asthma I somewhat reluctantly agreed with my daughters to self-isolate, although not 70 until next year. My biggest sadness is that I will not see Gus, Jenny or Gordon as it is no longer sensible for them to drive down from Scotland. My self-imposed isolation started on Tuesday 17th March 2020

I woke at 6am. It was a fine morning but I stayed in bed and listened to the radio as I normally do. This time however it was funny to think I had no timetable of commitments or activities to adhere to. My first task was to cancel various appointments the most disappointing being the hairdresser. Goodness knows what my hair will look like by the end of this – a mess!

As the morning wore on more and more activities were cancelled. No bridge no singing no society meeting, the village has closed. Everything has ground to a halt. Within the village a support group has been set up in addition the village shop is offering to deliver shopping. Phone with an order by 11am for delivery after 1pm. The Anchor, The Deli and Sue Flack are all offering to deliver meals. So very quickly things have been put in place to make it easy for people to survive whilst isolating.

An unexpected surprise was a phone call from an old school friend from my Leicester days. She assumed I would be hunkering down and knew I was on my own. Also another call from a long standing friend. A very sociable morning.

On top of that lots of WhatsApp message from my daughters suggesting all sorts of things to keep me cheerful. I can now read the Times on line and try and do the crossword. I am very rusty.

Another plan is for us to collectively walk the length of Britain 874 miles. I set off for a walk it was warm and sunny and I managed 3.4 kilometres. I shall have to find out what that is in miles. I am putting up the gate leg table and breaking out a jigsaw puzzle. I usually only do these at Christmas.

As Charlotte is not coming to clean I set to with some domestic chores. I have no doubt the novelty will wear off!!

My first day left me with a sense of how kind people are. How lucky I am to be living where I am but I shall have to ration my jobs as I have only completed one day in lock down.

Lockdown 2020 Walberswick - Pat (80) and Philip Kett (82)

For two weeks there had been talk of a lock down and by the time it happened the Supermarkets had been cleared of most of their stock of dry goods. Toilet rolls seemed to be on everyone's list. The middle of March and the order came, "Stay at home and save lives" and so lock down came into force. When you live in a rather isolated village more thought than usual has to go into how you are going to survive. The village shop, which is part of the chain of East of England CO-OP, holds a good stock of most items, but it had not a lot of space around in it for people and quickly put up a notice of two customers only. The village was all behind closed doors and nobody ventured out. It was like a ghost town. With 50% of the houses being holiday homes they should have been vacant but some were not, with their owners escaping from the cities to the countryside. Where we had been virus free, this gave worrying thoughts as to how long that would continue.

The Village News, the monthly news sheet, was delivered through the letter boxes of all houses and the editor had gleaned all sorts of useful information. After this issue the next copy was online, if you signed up for it, and for those that did not use that system, those that did helped out with a printed copy. The online copy arrived through the inbox every two weeks keeping everyone informed as to what was going on in the village, with useful updates.

Thursday evenings became a ritual, "The Clap" for NHS and Carers not forgetting essential workers including our Co-Op staff. Residents of Church Lane assembled at 8pm for the "Clap" and a song, music and lyrics provided by John Flack, on the 2nd Thursday evening and one a night thereafter, Who do you think you are kidding Mr Virus (Dads Army), Imagine, The sun has got his Hat on, You'll never walk alone, (75th Anniversary of V.E. Day), We'll Meet Again, Sweet Caroline, Roll out the Barrel, We're Gonna Hang Out the Washing on Siegfried Line, Somewhere over the Rainbow. It all added to our "Clap" but spaced out over 100yds the singing did not carry a lot of weight, but good fun. The music was recorded on an i-phone and played through a Bluetooth Speaker.

We had to rearrange how we shopped for food, the biggest problem being getting delivery slots from the major super markets. We were lucky having two sons, one single, Richard living in Walberswick and one married, Andrew, living in Blythburgh with his wife Samantha and three sons. They have been an enormous help in the food sector. Richard made forays to the Co-Op on a regular basis to collect some supplies, Andrew went off to various supermarkets to see what was available. Both had lists of basic essentials. In the early days some items were not available, but as the weeks rolled on Samantha was able to get slots with various supermarkets. She was also looking after her family and an elderly lady across the road from where she lived, her widowed mother living in Wenhaston and us, when she could get a slot. Sometimes we mixed two lots in one delivery when a slot was available, then came the great sort out. Flour became the most sought after item, we were told that there was plenty of it but not in small bags, but the small shop and Post Office on the Caravan Site in Wenhaston had it, a sack-full of it, which they kindly weighed into 2lbs in plastic bags that really helped out the home bakers.

Our grocery shopping used to be the highlight of our week with the trip to the Supermarket our one-stop shop, where every item of food is on show to browse past and a meal out in the cafe afterwards, top up with fuel for the car and the lawnmower and do a bit of shopping at the other stores. Lockdown was all about lists, one for the greengrocer, the butcher, the CO-OP and a Supermarket. Everything gets delivered to the door. We do not need to go outside the gate for anything. There was a help group set up in the village to assist the older residents who are self-

isolating, collecting medicines, shopping, dog-walking and maybe a friendly voice down the phone, in fact anything that a person may need. It is a case of just ask the coordinator and it will happen. WONDERFUL!!

When it comes to exercising we don't need too much. With a fairly large garden one can always find something to do. Fridays used to be the day for the "Short Walkers". These are a group of residents who liked to walk and talk and have a chat over a cup of coffee in the Cafe on the Green. The walking was limited to about a mile and a half and with the coffee it took around two hours. That has all changed now. Pat and I go for a walk on the Friday, do a round trip and arrive back home after we have had enough, then have the coffee. We are spoilt for choice of where to go with the Common, Sheep Walks, Beach and Marshes and miles of footpaths over open-access Land. If the ground is wet under foot there is the option of the path to Southwold over the Bailey bridge or the road to Westwood Lodge. Some of our walking trips have turned up people that we have not seen for several months who live in the village, one or two joggers getting their exercise, the odd Bird watcher or two, but mostly couples taking a stroll.

Although having a large garden and vegetable plot would keep me busy the weather turned hot and bright with no rain. I also had a seat to repair which was owned by the Parish Council. This seat had been placed on the Common over 60 years ago by Mrs Phyllis Neame at a point on the high ground which overlooked the marshes with great views of Southwold at sundown. Now it is resigned to a sunny spot in a valley under a Crab Apple tree, I had repaired it some 30 years ago and it now needed sorting out again, with new timber and a coat of paint. In this respect I had been very lucky. I had managed to order the timber for the seat and some timber to repair one of two sheds that needed some serious tlc. The timber arrived two days before lock down and the fine weather meant that I could take the whole side out of the shed in one go some 25ft, which was good news.

The other shed that needed some serious work done on it was an old aluminium-sided Caravan which had seen better days. The roof had started to leak and had rotted the battens which the sheets of Aluminium were screwed to and the roof had become seriously loose in a winter's gale - in fact it was held down with 2 concrete blocks tied to a rope to stop it lifting. This caravan had been rescued from the beach after the 1953 flood which swept down the North Sea on the night of January 31st, and had been in situ some 65years. Although the sides had some holes in them they didn't let a lot of weather in but kept the shed well ventilated. This was duly repaired and made fit for purpose for a few more years.

When the hunter became the hunted. May 14th I remember it well, a few days before my birthday. Still under lock down, I was getting restless. On our various walks around the Common I had spied in various places odd pieces of firewood that needed a friend to put them in a nice dry place for winter use. Having lived in this village all of my life I could not let a decent piece of firewood go to rot. There have been too many forays onto the Common for firewood over 82 years and it is always better to bring two small pieces home at a time, it balances the load. In this case a wheel barrow was needed but to make my journey necessary I would do another small job. On the way to what I know as the Cattle Arch by the Western edge of the Common, there is another memorial seat, to the memory of Miss Elsie Bally, close to the Cattle Arch, a nice spot on a sunny day. It needed a bit of levelling up and infilling where the footfall had worn away the turf. This was duly done and the seat then got a coat of wood preservative, job done. So onwards and upwards onto the track bed of the old Southwold Railway, which closed in 1929, a victim of the petrol engine and progress. At the end of this first part of the rail cutting through the Common were the lonely pieces of firewood that needed collecting together. These pieces were duly collected together in the wheelbarrow and now loaded I headed for home, pushing the barrow up onto the path above the railway cutting, then meeting the path that leads directly to the bottom of Church Lane and home. As I pushed the barrow I became aware of a lot of noise but being 50% deaf it was still a lot of noise. Having just crossed the fire break I stopped and looked about. Where was the noise coming from? Looking around nothing to be seen, but then I spied it looking very ominous. The other side of the fire break there was a range of gorse bushes about 5ft high and there like a giant spider creeping towards me

was an Army Air Corps "Apache" Helicopter. All that could be seen was the Camera on top of the Rotating Blades and the top part of the Pilot/Observer Perspex dome. So I continued up the slope towards the top of the hill, the highest place on the Common, thinking that the "Apache" would pass behind me and left them to get on with it. The Gorse bushes got taller and the noise got louder. As I came to the top of the hill I stopped and tucked into the bushes. Right in front of me was the "Apache", 20ft in the air and 30ft away, hovering and kicking up a din and all the dust, debris and detritus it could muster with the Pilot and Observer so close I could see the whites of their eyes. After they had decided what to do next they headed on towards the harbour and eventually returned back up the river, maybe to find another target.

Lock down over we survived it, the village survived it and now we are inundated with hordes of people in the holiday homes and day trippers. The village is heaving with people enjoying the glorious weather, the CO-OP has stood us in good stead and has served every customer it has seen, still maintaining social distancing. The pubs have now tried to make the best of what they can of the remainder of the summer and hopefully we will survive virus free until at least the crowds go home and life returns to a semblance of normality again.

Pat Lancaster - Spring and Summer 2020 from the perspective of someone living alone

Lockdown has been an interesting time in the village. Although living alone, I have not been lonely. Filling my days with birding round the village and catching up on lots of History Group items to add to the archives has meant that I was always doing something. Of course, on the few rainy days, I was able to do some much needed housework but that was very boring so I was delighted that the weather meant that I could be outside most of the time. Before the official start on 23rd March 2020, our bridge clubs had closed its doors which cut out something I enjoyed, not only because it was supposed to keep my brain active, but I got to see lots of friends. When overseas birding trips were cancelled, I realised how fortunate I was to live in such a wonderful place. The time has also shown that we have some very decent, considerate and caring people in the village who have been helping others.

Julie Winyard - Life during Lockdown

It was the quiet that I loved. Waking up to birdsong not drowned out by the constant drone of traffic up and down the village street. The scent of flowers not mingled with exhaust fumes - a fragrant, fragment of Heaven on earth. These are a few of my perceptions of that extraordinary three weeks. I was also helping with home schooling which was great fun – revisiting my classroom roots of 20 years ago. I called this, 'keeping it real,' as I have been a Her Majesty's Inspector for the past 12 years! Another joy of lockdown was keeping fit. I began slow jogging and rediscovered this beautiful place called Walberswick. And finally, I have learnt not to rush around, finding positive alternatives to busyness: reading, cooking, prayer and joining online morning-prayer. The beautiful weather helped of course!!

Jayne Tibbles

My first thought at the start of April was how wonderfully quiet it was. No cars or delivery vans or lorries on the Main Street, no second or holiday home vehicles. It reminded me of my childhood in the fifties (I was born in 1946). My parents and those of most of my friends did not have cars - bicycles or "shank's pony" were our options. If a journey was necessary my Father hired a vehicle from Rogers Garage complete with driver or you cycled to Southwold to catch a bus. One December we went to Norwich in the hire car. When we came to leave thick fog had descended over the city, my Father had to walk in front of the car with a torch until we got outside the city!

I was dubious about having Brian under my feet 24/7 (no golf) but we both really enjoyed spending the time together, completing several jobs that had been put on hold. We also have a large garden which kept us busy especially as the weather was so good. Walking the dogs became a real pleasure, not having to dodge white van man on a tight schedule.

As we are in the risk category we are still self-isolating, so a few more jobs have been added to the list and golf is back in a restricted way.

Someone not in Walberswick (the editor)

We left on the 16th March and did not return until the restrictions started to be lifted. Like those above, being retired helped with financial and job worries. This we learnt was not universal, with some older people (and some young people) severely “spooked”. Getting our daily exercise became a healthy obsession. Venturing out to the local shop during early lockdown made us appreciate our local convenience store and the staff. Writing the lockdown newsletters and talking to Pat Lancaster, Bill and Kay Ungless and Edward Wright on the ‘phone about content provided some purpose to the days. Crossing things out in my diary and thinking about things we had planned were reminders of reality. Eventually returning to Walberswick the take-away jugs of beer from The Anchor were the start of the new normal (thanks Anchor for helping to make our summer). The Co-Op and the Black Dog need a special mention as well.

There were rainy days but all I can remember is the sun. Here are some other random thoughts - the strange deserted streets at the beginning - worrying about our children - not being able to cuddle our grandchildren - being allowed to meet again as a family - dusting off a real camera and going out on “photo-shoots” - eating sourdough bread every day when Sue got the flour - the garden, painting the shed and the garage door – too much gin-and-tonic - sadness about those in education – empathy with those unable to see a doctor - playing bridge on-line via BBO - not being able to play badminton - the Amazon van - Zoom meetings - talking endlessly about “the virus” and then getting fed-up with it.

It has been a unique summer and in many ways we have enjoyed it. However, let’s hope that next summer sees a return to normal, even if that means rain!

75th Anniversary of VE-Day

The year 2020 will remain in our memories for many years. Those born in the next few years will probably grow up with a type of memory of it. I (the editor) was born in 1951 and I cannot recall anything like it. There are those a few years older who will remember the changes forced on the population by WWII and the massive relief when it ended.

WWII saw a local lockdown in Walberswick when it became a restricted area. The pillboxes and concrete blocks that refuse to disintegrate 80 years on are testament to the threat of invasion on this coast. Luckily for us, and holiday-makers, the various metalwork on the beach has long gone. To the right is Owen English using some of it for a photo-opportunity (thanks to Wayne Haslegrave for the photo possibly taken by his mother).

The country should have seen big celebrations this year to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day. By necessity these celebrations had to be limited. No doubt Walberswick celebrated but not all together. I went to a brilliant, socially-distanced, street party. The weather was perfect and I thought of my father who was set free in Germany in March 1945 by the advancing US army. On what date he eventually made it back to Walberswick I do not know. It must have been a surprise to his mother though as she had let his room!

The first two of the following WWII stories are linked by connections to the Alfred Corry. The third one reminds us that it was not only the armed forces that won the war. Knowing where the enemy was and what they planned to do also played a large part in the Victory.



A DOT ON A SCREEN - Peter Wagstaff

Loaded with a 4,000lb bomb, a Vickers Wellington took off from RAF Waterbeach at 18:25 on October 20th 1941. The sky was clear as the navigator set a bearing towards oil installations and dockyards of Bremen in northern Germany.

Teenage sweethearts, Ralph Wagstaff and Catherine Chapman met at Letchworth Grammar School. During the early part of WW2 they remained in Letchworth, Ralph, my father, was training as a chartered accountant and Catherine was working in the Spirella Corset Factory which was converted to produce and pack parachutes for the Irvin Airchute Company. Doreen Humphreys was also working at the factory during the war and would later marry my father. In 1940, putting his accountancy training on hold, my father aged 20 signed up and joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and in February 1941 travelled to Winnipeg in Canada to commence an entirely different training as a Navigator and Bomb Aimer. Catherine packed her last chute and joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

The skies above Bremen were illuminated by fantastic spears of light searching for the enemy. 8.8 cm Flak guns followed the vulnerable bomber. Identifying the dock yards, Ralph released the bomb, praying that it would hit the target and not the innocent below. Turning for home, small pieces of metal ripped through the linen covering the wood and metal airframe and holed the fuel tanks. As the plane limped over the coast of Holland the dawn was breaking over Suffolk. Catherine Chapman walked below the 240ft wooden receiver towers and 360ft steel transmitter towers at Bawdsey Radar Station. Preparing for a day with a cup of tea she settled at her station monitoring the aircraft movements over the English Channel. Pilot Sgt Morgan knew that they could not reach base and asked Ralph to give a location to ditch the plane. Catherine watched the dots when she noticed one vanish. Off the sea at Lowestoft the crew hurriedly abandoned the plane to spend 10 anxious hours in a dinghy before being rescued. Ralph would become a member of The Goldfish Club, a badge awarded to those who took their aeroplane for an impromptu swim! Later Ralph and Catherine learned that they had shared the final moments of Wellington Z8891. The theatre of war was to come between them. In January 1942 my father joined 38 Squadron and was stationed in North Africa to commence laying mines in Benghazi. Catherine, from the balcony of the ballroom at Bawdsey Manor, caught the eye of an American Officer, Donald Clayton who was stationed at Martlesham Heath flying P-47s and later P-51 Mustangs. Returning from leave to Letchworth, my father met my mother, who was now a Red Cross Nurse. Catherine married Donald Clayton and eventually moved to America. Mum and Dad married and settled in Letchworth where Dad became a Chartered Accountant.



During the war my father took part in 82 war operations, he was shot down twice, crash landed twice and sustained Anti-aircraft damage on eleven missions. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice and ended his service as a Flight Lieutenant. When leaving the RAF the world was still unsettled and Dad joined the SAS reservists. In the mid to late fifties Dad took the family to Lowestoft to visit the docks where he had landed after the rescue as well as to seek out locations for elicit SAS exercises. He chanced upon Walberswick and there began a long romance with the village and the beginning of countless family holidays. Over the years, the two families, the Wagstaffs and Claytons have remained in contact and formed a close friendship. My father, Catherine and Donald

have passed away but Sarah Clayton, Catherine's daughter regularly visits the UK and always visits my Mother. Last year Sarah too came to stay with us in Walberswick with her grandson Max and we walked and talked and had supper in The Bell. As well as going to the Battle of Britain display at Duxford we walked over the Bailey bridge to the Black Shore and on to the Alfred Corry Lifeboat Museum where there is an exhibit of a Perspex panel from a Wellington Bomber gun turret that was caught in a fishing net. Sarah and I like to think it could be from the Wellington Z8891.



Southwold lifeboat that saved hundreds of lives at Dunkirk returns for the first time in 80 years

I am grateful to Nigel Walpole for bringing my attention to an event on the Blyth on the 13th August that I missed. I guess that if not for lockdown this would have received more attention. Luckily the event was not only witnessed by Nigel and Richard (Dick) Leon but was covered by ITV news. The title above comes from the ITV news item and can be seen by clicking on:

<https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2020-08-14/southwold-lifeboat-that-saved-hundreds-of-lives-at-dunkirk-returns-for-the-first-time-in-80-years>

It is well worth visiting the above web site and also, once there, clicking on the video link to view the news item. I was amazed to learn that a boat from the river Blyth was amongst the many boats that made their way to Dunkirk. This was The Mary Scott, Southwold's first motorised lifeboat, launched in 1926. This was the boat that replaced the Alfred Corry which is on display at the harbour's museum (see it when the museum re-opens).

The Southwold crew sailed her to Ramsgate for the navy to take her into Dunkirk. The Mary Scott joined the fleet and saved more than 200 men in 1940. After the rescue mission, The Mary Scott broke down and was abandoned in France, never returning to Southwold, until this week when a new owner, Mick Killoran, sailed her home.

One Walberswick resident who would remember VE day very well is Mary Nuttall. Mary described post-war Walberswick, "Walberswick in 1946" in issue 50. It's an article well worth revisiting and you can do so by clicking on the following link:

<http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WLHG/WLHG-news-letters/HISTORY-GROUP-NEWSLETTER-SEPT-2016.pdf>

Mary's family (the Newcombs) came to live in Walberswick in 1946, though they had visited before the War, as they had lifelong friends who lived in Holton. Their first house in the village was Dudley Cottage. Mary recalls that the Army, who had occupied a lot of houses, had left so there were a lot of empty ones, all with very neglected gardens- Dudley Cottage being one of them. In this issue Mary describes her part in bringing the War to an end in 1945.

Mary Nuttall - My life in the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service) as a Codebreaker

The outbreak of war found me at boarding school. Wadhurst College on the Kent/Sussex borders from where I had an excellent view of the Battle of Britain.

I left school at 16/17 and made up my mind I wanted to join up. I thought the WRNS; their hats were much nicer. In order to do so I had to have a birth certificate and having been born in India where I was registered, my father wired the India Office for it. Unfortunately, the ship carrying it was sunk, so there was some delay waiting for it. That's how things were in those days.

Finally, armed with my certificate I went to the Recruiting Centre. There I was told, "Oh, we're not recruiting for the WRNS at the moment" and offered me other openings, such as munitions, (Ugh!). I firmly replied that I had connections with Nelson. That did the trick.

This was partially true as my Great, Great, (several greats) Grandfather, Frederick Newcomb was Paymaster General in the Navy in Nelson's time. His portrait hangs in the dining room. He seems to have been quite chummy with Nelson and said to him "I shall put my sons into the Navy to follow you". "I shouldn't" replied Nelson, "put them into something that serves the Navy". That is how the firm of Newcomb was set up, making uniforms, and was a successful and prestigious establishment. It survived until the end of the war when it was demolished to make way for a new road and roundabout system.

When my call up papers came in August 1943, I was sent to Mill Hill. It had been a boys' school, taken over by the Wrens as an intake centre. After an initial period, the Authorities noted that I had done rather well at school and had higher maths. They suggested that I went into something they called P5. When asked what it was and where would I be going, they didn't know but it required maths and was very important war work. Of course, I said "yes". If I had known what I was letting myself in for I might have said "no". I was then allowed to wear uniform and learnt how to salute, finally a minibus came to collect myself and a few others and we went to Stanmore, Middlesex. Not a very exciting location and I was there for two years or so.

At the outset, we were sworn into the Official Secrets Act and it was impressed into us how important this was. Then followed about a month of training on how to operate a code-breaking machine known as a bombe, mainly hands on, at the end of which there was a written exam, and then we were trained bombe operators.

It is difficult to describe a bombe. Think of it as a large dresser, with at the back lots of cables and wires and at the front four rows of drums. One was given a "menu" from Bletchley and this was plugged at the rear. For instance, cable "A" into slot "X" and cable "B" into slot "N" etc. Then the machine was switched on and at the front the rows and rows of drums rotated. When they stopped one took a reading which was phoned through to Bletchley to see if it was a genuine message or not. Inside each drum were wire contacts which sometimes would get out of true and had to be teased back into line with tweezers, like eyebrow tweezers.

The bombes, which never stopped day or night, were housed in a building in a highly walled area which was guarded by Naval Police and one had to have a pass to go in or out. There was one, long passage, with bays going off it which were named after continents. I was in New Zealand and my bombe was Christchurch with part time on Dunedin. We worked eight-hour shifts, or watches as they were called being naval, Day Watch 9 to 5, Middle Watch 5 to 12 and Night Watch 12 to 9. We worked a week of Day Watch, then a week of Middle Watch finally a week of Nights then we had much needed leave.

On occasion if we heard a German ship had gone down there would be cheers. Unfortunately, we also heard of our own ships being sunk. It was tough. Once, one of my friends heard that a certain ship had gone down and knew that was the one her brother was on. She was due for 48 hours leave, but her family would not yet have been informed, she had no alternative but to cancel her leave as she could not tell them. Such was the code of secrecy.

Our living quarters, which were outside and quite separate from the working area, were also on a plan of one long passage with bays leading off. At the start were dining room, recreation areas and offices and then dormitories or cabins as they were known. There were bunk beds in sections and of course blocks of toilets and baths. Once a week, when it fitted in with the watch we were on, we had to clean the cabin, mop and polish the floor etc which was then inspected. There were also various parades, including pay parade once a fortnight!

One amusing incident. It was a very hot day so several of us were sunbathing in one of the grassy areas between bays, which had high walls all round. We didn't have sunbathing clothes and being an all-female establishment were in bra and pants if that. That morning a small plane went

overhead. In the afternoon a non-stop stream of planes went over and one let down a weighted white scarf with a message: "We are having a dance on such and such a night at Air Force Headquarters, to which you are all invited."

We did have the occasional dance in our quarters. The WRNS were not allowed alcohol on their premises. However, one of our WRNS had parents with an apple farm in Somerset who made barrels of rough cider and this was deemed OK, though of course it was pretty alcoholic. The WRNS were fairly sensible but some of our guests, Americans for instance, just thought "Oh, fruit juice" and were glugging it down and some getting a bit tiddly so had to be persuaded to leave.

What was the food like? In one word "awful". I suppose there were some exceptions, but mostly large chunks of unpalatable stuff. We would often go off to a local café to get something decent to eat. When we were on the Night Watch was the worst. There was a rule that Wrens should have a hot meal sometime during their 8-hour shift. So, the lunch time dish of the day was reheated in big ovens (no such thing as microwaves then). So, we had 30 minutes, having arranged with someone to take over one's machine, to walk over to the cookhouse and try to eat this inedible dinner.

For recreation we amused ourselves with amateur theatricals, there were riding stables nearby and I remember a country style pub with gardens. But of course, London was the magnet, despite the Doodlebugs followed by V2 bombs the Nazis were sending over. We did have a doodlebug near our living quarters. With a bang in the night we woke to find windows blown in, glass all over the floor, even on my bed. Nowhere was safe.

But London, on the end of the Northern Line, had many attractions. There were socials and dances at the Overseas League. There was an ice-skating rink, and piano recitals by Myra Hess in the emptied National Gallery which were free to anyone in uniform. The theatres, because people were not coming up to London, were easy to get into and of course there were shops and cafes and much else, all to be enjoyed when time allowed. Going back on the underground one saw those who were sheltering and preparing to pass the night there hoping their house would not be hit. There were many bombed sites.

When peace in Europe was declared the bombs immediately stopped and all fell silent. Our job was over, and we were all, with some difficulties, transferred into other categories in the Wrens, with strict instructions that we were still under the Official Secrets Act and on no account could we divulge what we had been doing.

As I had done a short course in mechanical drawing while waiting to join the Wrens, I was posted to a drawing office near Portsmouth but that is another story.

It had been an arduous, exhausting and rather boring two and a half years for me. However, it has been cited that breaking the German Code helped to shorten the war by up to two years thereby saving some thousands of lives, in which case I am glad that I perhaps played an infinitesimal part.

Driftwood - In celebration of Margaret Orbell 1910-2006

Born in 1910, many local people (and campers) will remember Margaret Orbell (born Thompson) who reigned over the campsite in Walberswick for many years.

In 2018 Driftwood was first performed at The Cut bringing this fascinating character to a wider audience. Written by Peppy Barlow and performed by Pauline Dent the monologue was directed by James Holloway. It is now recorded as a film which you can view on:

<https://vimeo.com/367276417/86a967d4b4>

There are also CDs for sale via Peppy or Pauline at £9 including postage.

Either way (CD or web), it is well-worth watching.