

WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 56

September 2019

Newsletter Editor's report

This newsletter is a "bumper issue" due to the fantastic level of support received. We still need interesting and new articles so please keep them coming.

There is no overall theme to this newsletter other than perhaps "people". Some, like the evacuees in World War II (WW2), have left little trace. Their brief stay in Walberswick was probably a minute and possibly traumatic chapter in their lives. Some more permanent residents were responsible for houses or gardens. They and their families are long gone but what they left behind is recalled here. WW2 was certainly responsible for some comings and goings. Both British and American service men came and some stayed after the war. The generation that lived and loved in World War II is mostly gone but we remember them as parents, grandparents, friends and relatives.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All Saturdays in The Village Hall

28th September 2019 - Daniel Defoe, a Talk by Sarah Doig 7.00pm

Saturday 30th November 2019 - An Illustrated Talk by Paul Heiney 7.00pm

Saturday 14th March 2020 - Bloody Marsh, a talk by Dr Peter Warner on his book 7.00pm

This year, on Remembrance Sunday, in the Village Hall, there will be a programme to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-day. Nigel Walpole has written a synopsis of this event for the WLHG newsletter but you will need to attend on the day to appreciate the full effect of this act of remembrance.

In introducing Nigel's synopsis I have to be careful not to repeat any of the information he has carefully put together. However, I wanted to provide some further-related and local human interest. World War II was a war this country did not want. The generation of 1914-18 remembered only too well the price of war. However, it came and it changed the country and Walberswick forever. As in the first war, a crop of young men went and some did not return. We should be very grateful that the stories of our local people were collected just in time. In 1998 David Shirreff and Arthur Sharman published "Suffolk Memories – Stories of Walberswick and Blythburgh people during World War II". The book included 104 stories based on interviews with 85 people. In 2001 Arthur Sharman and Patricia Wythe published "Further Suffolk Memories". This included the stories of a further 30 people. Some were military stories missed in the first book and others, the majority, were from people who did not serve but were there, children, wives and those who could not serve in the armed forces. It would be impossible to mention all 115 stories.

D-Day was probably the most significant turning point of WW2. Arguably the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbour on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 may have been the most important event.

The attack led to the United States of America's entry into World War II the next day. In 1942 the Battle of El Alamein was another decisive event. Winston Churchill said "This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is perhaps the end of the beginning." D-Day was still about 18 months time away. The success of D-Day was crucial.

It is the nature of war that some families can be affected more than others. At the time of D-Day my father, Ron English, was in a POW camp in Germany. Captured at Tobruk he would have known nothing much about the progress of the war. Had D-Day failed then who knows what his fate would have been. He and his brothers George, Owen and Tony all returned home safely. This would not be the case with the Fairs family. However, as can be read in the two books mentioned above in the midst of war there was love.

The Fairs family caught up in WWII were the children of Sydney and Mildred Fairs of Eastwood Lodge farm and then Ivy Cottage. Their children were Geoffrey, Jack, Victor, Dennis, Margo and Audrey. In the D-Day commemoration you will hear of Harry Moreton. Harry Moreton, a Lancashire man, arrived in Walberswick with his battalion in 1940. In that year he met Audrey Fairs. Harry and Audrey married in Walberswick in 1942. Audrey's sister "Margo" also met a Lancashire man posted to the area in 1940. This was Charlie Harwood from Bootle, Lancashire. Charlie and Margo married in 1941, 8 months after meeting. They lived in Walberswick after the war before moving back to Crosby. However, they never forgot Walberswick and visited most summers. Tragically though, the Fairs family had more than it's share of sadness. In the D-Day commemoration you will hear of Geoffrey Fairs. In addition, Jack Fairs, veteran of El Alamein, was killed on 22nd April 1945, days before the end of the war in Europe. Such is the randomness of war.

D-Day was, thankfully, a success and in 1945 the war ended. Normal life was eventually resumed and below we see the football team of 1947 including Hon Sec Margo, goalkeeper Charlie Harwood, Harry Moreton with the ball and Victor Fairs.



Back Row: Harold Piper, Ted Beard, Ginger Winyard, Ted Buggs, Wally Goodwin, Ray Fisk
 Centre Row: George Parneil, Vic Fairs, Charlie Harwood, Owen English, Dubba English, Les Goodwin, Margo Harwood (Hon Sec)
 Front Row: Maurice Muttitt, Richard Connick, Cliff Land, Harry Moreton, Roy Pearce, Joe Hopewell, Gerald Muttitt
 Trophies included: Halesworth League, Leiston League Div 3 and 2, Southwold and Halesworth Cups (Both 3 years consecutive)

MEMORIES OF D-DAY – 75 YEARS ON

At 1800 hours on Remembrance Sunday, 10 November 2019, in our Village Hall, Libby Purves and Jan Etherington will present a programme of personal memories from D-Day, 6 June 1944, related by our local thespians. Further details will be published in the September edition of the Village News.

The programme will include tributes to those known to us who have lived in our village and who contributed to this great event. We will highlight significant features of the plan and preparations for the invasion, then draw on memories from the critical night before and the crucial following day, adding some German and French reactions.

All proceeds from the evening will go to the military charity 'Combat Stress'.

D-DAY: A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The basic strategy for a second front was agreed by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at the 1943 Casablanca Conference. The British General, Frederick Morgan, who would head the planning staff for 'Operation Overlord', was given the simple directive: 'Defeat the German fighting forces in North West Europe'.

In December, General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR); while British officers General Bernard Montgomery would command all Allied land forces, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay the naval forces and Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory the air forces. Specified armed services were to be ready to go when the tides, state of the moon were right and weather likely to be acceptable, between 4-7 June 1944, the preferred date for D-Day being 5 June.

The main seaborne offensive with 156,000 men would take place on a broad front from the Carentan Peninsular, east along the Calvados coast to Ouistreham; it would be preceded by an airborne assault involving 18,000 soldiers, and a heavy bombardment from the air and sea.

The location and timing of Overlord was withheld from combat units until the last minute, every effort being made to convince the Germans that the invasion would take place in Norway or the short sea crossing to the Pas de Calais. A 'phantom' army was created in the south-east, under the command of the fiery US General George Patton, while the whole of southern England harboured real or dummy vehicles and aircraft, and the air above was filled with bogus communications and false intelligence.

When it became obvious that the weather on the original day selected would be unacceptable, SACEUR ordered a 24 hour postponement, D-Day would now be 6 June.

With a few exceptions, the airborne operations, beginning at 0100 hrs on 6 June, did not go well. Poor weather made air navigation very difficult, while the lumbering transport aircraft, flying at 120 knots and 700 feet, were easy prey for the German gunners. Some pilots who took avoiding action missed their drop zones, and pathfinders who dropped first to mark them had little or no time to find themselves and complete their tasks before the main force arrived. So it was that the airborne troops were very widely scattered, many having to find themselves and then fight their way to their targets. The two American airborne divisions each lost 1,000 men and failed to take some of their objectives, but they secured a firm foothold on the Cotentin Peninsular.

Although the British Airborne Division was similarly spread, its commanders managed to rally just enough troops to complete their operational tasks. Major John Howard's glider-borne Ox and Bucks Light Infantry took and held the now legendary 'Pegasus Bridge' over the Caen Canal, and that over the adjacent River Orne, where Walberswick's Harry Moreton saw action. Lieutenant Colonel Otway also captured the huge Merville Battery with only 150 of the 650 men of 9 PARA, while Lieutenant Colonel Pearson's depleted 8 PARA destroyed the bridges over the River Dives.

Many of the Canadian paratroopers were dropped 2 miles from their target, and suffered badly when Allied bombers targeting the Merville battery overshot and dropped their bombs among them, but they too took their objectives, albeit with the loss of some 800 men.

Before the seaborne landings, the RN's Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP), were put ashore at night in midget submarines and rubber boats, to learn about the beaches, the underwater obstacles and defences along the coast. Then on D-Day, they helped guide landing craft safely to their correct zones on the beaches.

Five Walberswick men were known to have been at sea on D-Day; Geoff Gallway with the COPP on Juno Beach, Donald Kett, who was wounded in the head and face, Reggie Hyne served on the minesweeper HMS Boston, Vic Roland on HMS Pursuer and Arthur Clarke on the merchant ship Empire Ness.

Invaluable updates on the Rommel's 'Atlantic Wall' and the disposition of enemy forces, came from Allied aircrew and the 100,000 brave men and women of the French Resistance, trained, equipped and reinforced by special British troops, to disrupt enemy communications throughout the invasion.

Walberswick's airmen were among those who provided the indirect air support essential to the invasion, Robert Noden flying many raids over Germany and France in Lancasters, while Geoffrey Fairs helped keep German submarines away from the invasion fleet in Liberators of No 224 Squadron. Geoffrey was shot down off the coast of France on the night of 6/7 June 1944, and later certified 'Missing, presumed dead'.

The men who left England on 5 June had a very rough ride to Normandy in appalling weather and ferocious seas, an estimated 90% of them suffering severe seasickness.

The British 3rd Infantry Division landed on Sword Beach at the right time and place, the Royal Engineers soon clearing the beach obstacles with their armoured vehicles. Their Sherman Duplex Drive (DD) 'swimming tanks' having been launched sensibly close to the shore survived and by nightfall all its brigades were firmly ashore with less casualties than had been expected. Critically, however, they failed to take Caen on D-Day.

On Juno Beach, the Canadian 3rd Division had more difficulty overcoming the imbedded sea defences, and then became embroiled in bitter street-fighting before naval gunfire and air support helped them reach their planned defence line by nightfall, with the loss of 1,000 men.

The 50th Northumbrian Division, also launched very close in, came ashore successfully on Gold Beach, the specialist armour of 79th Armoured Division proving invaluable. Heading for Bayeux, the Northumbrians took Arromanches *en route*, ready for the big, artificial Mulberry harbours. After fierce fighting and 1,000 casualties, La Rivière and the guns at Mount Fleury fell, during which actions Company Sergeant Major Hollis, Green Howards, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

There were only four natural exits and a 100 ft. cliff line behind Omaha Beach, which became a veritable killing ground for the US 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions when their 32 DD tanks were launched too early into the raging sea and 27 of them sank with most of the crews. Many of the amphibious lorries carrying field guns suffered the same fate, leaving the lightly armed infantrymen, most suffering badly from seasickness, very short of support weapons. The US 2nd Ranger Battalion needed to scale the cliffs to silence the heavy guns at Pointe du Hoc, the Germans quick to cut their ropes, throw back the grapnels, drop grenades down the cliff face and rake it with automatic fire. However, those GIs who did reach the top soon overcame the defenders, only to find that the guns had been moved 700 yards inland. Some 3,000 Americans lost their lives on Omaha Beach.

The American 4th Infantry Division landed on Utah Beach while its defenders were still heavily engaged, six miles east, against the American paratroops around Ste-Mère-Eglise, so the initial opposition was relatively light, and the division suffered only 210 casualties from the 23,000 men who landed.

On a D-Day of very mixed fortunes, the Allies lost an estimated 10,000 men, well below the number expected, and they had gained a firm foothold on the Continent of Europe.

While D-Day may have been the beginning of the end it was very different in 1939. With the benefit of hindsight why Walberswick was considered a suitable place to send evacuees is a mystery. Our second article remembers those that were sent here.

Evacuees in Walberswick 1939 by Edward Wright

September 2nd, 2019 is the eightieth anniversary of the arrival of the first group of evacuees. Thirty-two reached the village at 9pm and a further group arrived a day later.

Operation Pied Piper involved the transporting of 1.5 million people in the first few days of September 1939. London and other major cities were regarded as threatened by bombing and many children from East London and its Essex suburbs were moved to Suffolk. In fact, the absence of bombing persuaded many mothers to bring their children back home, contrary to official advice. The Blitz in 1940 prompted a further wave of evacuations. As well as school children, often accompanied by their teachers, those evacuated included pregnant women and mothers with pre-school children.

Most evacuees travelled by railway, trains were leaving London's main stations every nine minutes. Some London children were taken by ship to East Coast ports including Lowestoft. Nine months later, Lowestoft children were themselves being evacuated to the midlands under the threat of invasion. Southwold children were also evacuated at that time.

Autumn term at Walberswick School began on 18th September with 20 Walberswick children and 25 evacuees on the roll. The School Log Book records that "The Evacuated Children were inspected (cleanliness) on admission and all found to be perfectly clean, with the exception of Violet Hall".

It seems that Violet Hall lived at Mill Croft in Millfield Road with her mother and two siblings. The house was owned by Mrs. Van Oss who lived there with a housemaid and servant. This information comes from the 1939 register, taken on the 29th September in preparation for full scale warfare. At Kuruman (now Millstones) there were 23 people, nearly all of them evacuees. 15 were at school or under school age and 5 were described as performing "Unpaid Domestic Duties", probably meaning they were mothers accompanying their children.

The 1939 Register does not make it easy to identify those who were the evacuees and those who were locals. At Shirley (Millfield House), there was a children's nurse, a domestic servant, a married lady and two children. The house was owned by Roger Notcutt the Woodbridge nurseryman and used as a holiday home and so it seems likely that most of the 1939 residents were evacuees.

Walberswick was part of Blyth Rural District which was expected to accommodate 5,000 evacuees, most of whom arrived at Saxmundham Station. Finding accommodation was a struggle for the WVS and billeting officers whose job was not made easier by talk of evacuees bringing diseases with them.

At a Blyth Council meeting on the 4th September Dr Burns the Medical Officer of Health reported that there were indeed several cases of infectious disease among the evacuees. An empty house had been set aside for them at Dunwich and a Walberswick lady, sadly unnamed, had offered premises.

Prosperous families could make their own arrangements to move their children to places of safety and so the evacuees tended to be from families with little money. Many could ill afford all of the items the government advised parents to pack, for example: two sets of underwear, a tooth brush, spare shoes, a warm coat, a sweater, handkerchiefs, pyjamas or a nightdress. A gas mask was compulsory, and each child had a name label attached to his or her coat. Parents were also told to supply a bag with enough food for one day. The children were often traumatised by the unexpected and sudden farewell to home and arrival at a strange place for an unspecified time. The selection process sometimes, but by no means always, involved the evacuees lining up in public and householders picking the ones they wanted.

If anyone has any information about the Walberswick Evacuees, we would love to hear about it.

The next article is the second instalment of Nat le Roux's work on Westwood Gardens. *The first part of this article appeared in Newsletter No 55*

The History of Westwood Garden

Part 2 – The Mea Allen era and afterwards - *Nat le Roux*

The second age of Westwood garden dates from 1947, when Robert Allen bought Eastwood and the west end of Westwood (Arthur Dacre Rendall's old studio). Robert's daughter Mea Allen (1909 – 82) was a pioneer woman journalist. She began her career with the [Glasgow Herald](#) and during World War II was the first woman war correspondent accredited by the British Army. Afterwards she became the first woman News Editor on Fleet Street. In 1949 Mea quit journalism, moved into Westwood Studio, which at the time lacked electricity or running water, and began a second career as a novelist, gardener and biographer. With her father, she set about clearing and restoring the garden after years of wartime neglect. In *The Englishwoman's Garden* (1980), (ed. Alvilde Lees-Milne and Rosemary Verey) she describes the scale of the undertaking:

Nowhere was a path to be seen: walks had merged into borders, shrubs become entangled in overgrown hedges. It was frightening to see how quickly Nature had obliterated gardening skill and architectural design in what has once been an acre famed for its plantsmanship and beauty.

Mea inherited Eastwood from her father in 1954. She sold the house, but retained most of the land including the original gardens designed by Algernon Winter Rose at the beginning of c 20th. The Eastwood garden thus became the Westwood garden. In 1960 Grace Woodbridge, who was to be Mea's companion for the next 22 years, bought the eastern part of the Westwood building, then in separate ownership: they knocked through to Westwood Studio to make a single house.

Mea Allen's first major work of horticultural history is *The Tradescants*, published in 1964. John Tradescant the Elder (c. 1570 – 1638) and his son John the Younger (1608 – 62) were important plant collectors, nurserymen and, successively, gardeners to Charles I. They were responsible for introducing many now common plant species into England, including Scarlet runner bean, Horse Chestnut, European larch and of course *Tradescantia*.



Fig 2: *The Tradescant plaque*

Mea Allen installed the Tradescant plaque (Fig 2) in the Westwood garden, probably in the 1970s. There is a similar plaque in the Garden Museum in London, which is housed in the redundant church of St Mary at Lambeth, the site of the Tradescant family tomb. That Lambeth version commemorates John and Rosemary Nicholson, founders of the museum. It is not known which plaque is a copy of the other: it is perhaps more likely that both are copies of a so far unidentified original.

Mea Allen was convinced that the c. 17th Tradescants had a connection with the Westwood garden, and that their nursery at Lambeth was the source of some of the plants still growing there. The basis of this thesis was her discovery from parish records that Robert and Thomas

Tradescant, cousins of the John the Elder and beneficiaries of his will, had owned property in Walberswick, including the triangle of land which is now the site of Westwood garden. While there is no documentary evidence of an ornamental garden on the site before c. 20th, Mea believed that the presence of unusual plants introduced by or associated with the Tradescants demonstrated the horticultural connection.

The evidence is inconclusive. Some Tradescant introductions are naturalised in the garden today, including *Lysimachia punctata* (Yellow Loosestrife) and *Lathyrus vernus* (Spring Vetchling). There was an old specimen of *Jasminum humile*, Tradescant's 'Unsavoury (i.e. scentless) yellow Italian jasmine', growing in the garden before its demise c. 2012. These are all relatively common garden plants, and perhaps not much can be inferred from their presence. However in *The Englishwoman's Garden* and other writings, Mea Allen describes her discovery of two unusual plants with Tradescant connections, whose presence at Westwood might be more persuasive evidence.

The first is 'Tradescant's great rose daffodil', introduced from the Mediterranean by John the Elder in 1621. It is illustrated in John Parkinson's *Paradisi in sole, paradisus terrestris* of 1629 (Fig 3).



Fig 3. Tradescant's great rose daffodil

If the great rose daffodil were present, it would certainly be significant, because it is now rare, can only be propagated by division, and has probably not been available in the nursery trade since c. 19th. Mea Allen described them growing in profusion at Westwood in the 1970s. There are none extant today. Did they die out over the past 50 years after surviving the previous 300, or did Mea romantically misidentify some more common variety of double daffodil?

Mea's second, and perhaps strongest, piece of botanical evidence is a very old specimen of *Eleagnus angustifolia*, the Oleaster or Russian Olive, still growing at Westwood today. It is an unusual garden plant in England: the Tradescants did not introduce it, but it is in the 1634 stocklist for their Lambeth nursery, when it was probably not readily available from other sources. Mea Allen recorded that in the 1970s visiting botanists told her that the Westwood specimen was 300 years old. If so, it is possible the sapling came from Lambeth.

Alongside her works of garden history, Mea Allen wrote a number of novels. *Rose Cottage (1961)* is set in the fictional Suffolk coastal village of Staveney St Andrew, a thinly disguised Walberswick; the eponymous dwelling based loosely on Westwood.

Mea died in 1982. Grace Woodbridge subsequently sold the land to the west of the historic garden, then a tennis court, together with the Pleached walk which divided it from the Rose garden and Pool garden. Mea described it as consisting of 100 Huntingdon Elms, 49 on one side and 50 on the other. Sometime after the sale, the Pleached walk disappeared: it may have been deliberately removed by the new owners, but it is perhaps more likely that it succumbed to Dutch elm disease.

The Garden today

Westwood had three subsequent owners before Karen and I moved here in 2008. We found the garden somewhat overgrown, but in nothing like the neglected state Mea Allen

described 60 years earlier: all the paths were clear and the box hedging neatly clipped. We had ideas for various building projects, but decided from the start that we would not alter the parts of the garden which had been laid out by Winter Rose, or remove any of the original structures. The tree cover made it impossible to restore the oldest part of the garden to its early c. 20th state. By trial and error we found a planting scheme which worked in this environment of thin, sandy soil and semi-shade. The spring bulbs were as far as possible left undisturbed. We found that peonies did well: their buds develop in April, before the beech trees come into leaf, and rabbits will not eat them. In late summer *Agapanthus*, usually thought to require full sun, is a surprising success: *Crocsmia* is more or less a weed.

In 2008 The Pool Garden was overhung by a large yew, probably self-seeded, which cast year-round shade and frustrated any replanting scheme. We had it cut back to a 6 foot stump: it quickly regenerated and is now kept clipped in a column, mirroring the yew columns in the hedge behind. The area around the pool is the driest part of a dry garden: Mea Allen grew alpines here. In recent years we have used it mainly for irises, especially the cultivars bred by the artist Cedric Morris 60 years ago at his garden at Benton End near Hadleigh.

In 2008 the beds in the Rose Garden was partly overgrown with Buddleia and other self-seeded thugs, which we cleared. Three very old, unidentified shrub roses survived, possibly from the original 1920s garden. These continue to flourish, and we have planted more roses, mainly old varieties. The pergola, supporting ancient wisterias and a *Campsis radicans* (Trumpet Vine), seems to have retained its original configuration, although partly reconstructed, and we have left it alone. The ground plan is asymmetric, with six paths of uneven length leading onto a circular path around the central bed. We removed the remains of concrete paths laid in Mea Allen's time, and redefined the edges with dwarf box hedging.

Mea Allen recorded a number of relatively unusual plants which she and her father uncovered when they cleared the garden in the late 1940s. Most of these had, perhaps unsurprisingly, disappeared when we came to Westwood 60 years later. We have re-introduced some of them, with mixed success. A 20 ft *Arbutus Andrachnoides* (Strawberry Tree) was lost in the great storm of 1987: its replacement, planted in 2009 on the same site, is already 8 ft tall and growing well. Mea described an uncommon climbing single yellow rose called 'Mermaid', with an unusually long flowering season, as present in the garden in the late 1940s but subsequently lost in a cold winter. We planted a replacement in 2010: it flowers sporadically, but has never been entirely happy. Two years ago we planted a new *Jasmiium humile* in a different location to the lost original: it is thriving after the wet spring of 2018.

Mea Allen described a spectacular specimen of *Carpentaria californica* (Tree anemone) in the Rose Garden in the 1980s. It was no longer there in 2008. Last year we planted a replacement in approximately the same location: it suffered severe predation in its first winter, but is now recovering well.

The venerable, and possibly Tradescantian, Russian Olive may be nearing the end of its life. In 2013 we succeeded in talking a cutting which is now a well-established potential successor. It has not been a one way street. In the 1960s Mea Allen planted various Tradescant introductions, including a European Larch at the far North West corner of the garden, opposite the church. 60 years later it was a menace, tangling the power lines and shedding a thick carpet of needles over the neighbours' driveways. In this case practical considerations trumped garden heritage and we had it felled in 2014.

The Westwood garden is a work in progress. Meticulous restoration is neither possible nor desirable. There are few ideal solutions, and in case of doubt it is usually better to leave things as they are. Mea Allen concluded her chapter in *The Englishwoman's Garden* with these thoughts:

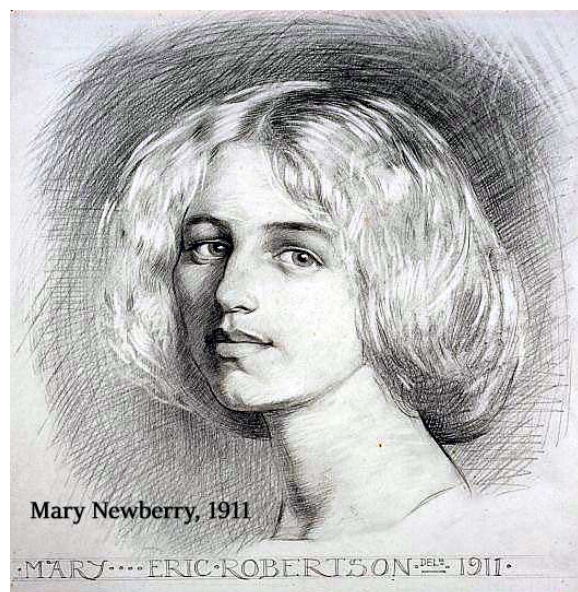
In writing about the garden here I find it difficult to call it my garden. Too much of other people's planning and planting have gone into its making, and I grudge its earlier creators not a whit of praise for the green architecture of its bones...True, it is mine by choice of inheritance. Mine, too, for love of its every inch and corner. In another way I have made it mine, by piecing together its history, which otherwise would have been lost....Gardens grow, like the plants in them. They change in their growing, as owners can change. I shall hope...that some other gardener will pick up the green torch lit so long ago, and bear it with joy,

Our final article is the second instalment of Edward Wright's article on Millfield Road. ***The first part of this article appeared in Newsletter No 55***

The Edwardians in Millfield Road - Edward Wright

On the 6th September 1910 a seventeen-year-old girl wrote to her fiancée from Rooftree, a house in the Street overlooking Mill Field (see right). He was Rupert Brooke and she was Noel Olivier (see far right) and their secret engagement was only a few weeks old. Noel would go on to become a doctor but in 1910 she was at Bedales School and visiting the Newberry family in Walberswick. Francis Newberry was an artist and president of Glasgow School of Art. His wife Jessie was an embroiderer and their daughter Mary (see right) was at Bedales with Noel.

From Rooftree, Noel would have had a good view of the recently completed houses in Mill Field, most of them owned or occupied by artists, writers or architects. Rooftree is next to Millside, a guest house used by many visiting artists including C R Mackintosh, a protégée of Newberry.



Noel wrote:

“There is a strange new atmosphere here, Walberswick has been famous for many years as a resort for landscape and other painters; they come down in quantities every summer and stay in lodgings and villas. I get taken round to teas and tennis and into lovely drawing rooms after supper to see exquisite furniture and hear music, also I am introduced into picture shows and elegant studios...”

The tradition of artists visiting the village began in the 19th century but by 1910 a wider group of middle-class people had settled here permanently or built holiday homes.

Claud Mullins’ diary supports Noel Olivier’s account of a busy social programme. His family had built Shirley (now Millfield House) and he recorded visits to several houses in and around Mill Field.

In 1910 the social circle would have included Fanny Goulty at Kuruman, a large detached house of ten rooms plus bathrooms and scullery. There was plenty of room for parties at Kuruman, which even had its own billiards room. Fanny and her husband Wallis Rivers Goulty had bought a double plot from the owner of Mill Field, Willam Howard in March 1901 and their house was one of the first in what would become Millfield Road. Kuruman was named after a missionary station in South Africa founded by Robert and Mary Moffat. The Moffats spent many years in Africa and their daughter married the explorer David Livingstone. Robert Moffat was a close friend of Wallis Goulty’s father, a Non-Conformist Minister called John Nelson Goulty, a cousin of Admiral Lord Nelson.

Kuruman was to be the Goulty’s retirement home, but Wallis died in 1904 and so Mrs Goulty lived there alone. Unusually for Millfield Road at that time, Wallis was not an artist; his fortune had been made as an engineer. Fanny Goulty’s sister Amy, also a widow, lived in Windmill Cottage, just over the road. She, her sister and brother-in-law bought their land on the same day and so there was obviously a plan for the two sisters to keep each other company. Amy was an artist and the widow of Robinson Kay Leather, a man sixteen years her junior who was famous for his skill at chess; on one occasion playing six opponents at once. He was also a writer and poet and is recorded as being a Uranian, which at the time was a word used to describe people with the psyche of a woman in the body of a man. Robinson died six years before Amy bought her Mill Field plot.

The Mullins’s sometimes took tea with the Pickthall sisters, Caroline and Constance who were both water-colour painters. Under the name Carol Christie, Caroline wrote *Ferry Knoll* (1911) which is a miscellany of information about Walberswick based on the recollections of older villagers. The book was illustrated by Mildred Hall who was married to the architect Frank Jennings, designer of Gazebo, (now Te Awahou) and many other houses in Mill Field and Leveretts Lane. The Pickthall sisters’ first home in the village was Rose Cottage, they then moved to Red Cottage and finally, Rooftree. They held exhibitions at Red Cottage in Mill Field between 1909 and 1911. Red Cottage, also known as The Red House, is now called Lu-Shan.

Another pair of artistic sisters were the Kirkpatricks, Ida and Ethel. Ida painted local landscapes, many of which became postcards and Ethel exhibited several times at the RA Summer Exhibition and other galleries. The Kirkpatricks stayed in Walberswick for lengthy periods between 1907 and 1913.

Seahome (Mulberry House) was the home of artists Thomas and Charlotte Davidson. The house had been designed by their architect son TG Davidson and completed in 1902. By

1910 Thomas was an established and successful painter, best known for his naval scenes including a well-known series based on Lord Nelson's career. Another series is based on scenes from the Bronte's novels, including a colourful and lively one of Mr Rochester falling off his horse on first meeting Jane Eyre. Davidson's work can be seen at the National Maritime Museum, Buckland Abbey and many other galleries. Like the Pickthall sisters, Thomas held exhibitions at home, and this was surely one of the places visited by Noel Olivier.

In 1902 Old Farm on the Street had been sold to Albert Seward and his wife Marion. Marion is remembered for her watercolours and she painted many Walberswick scenes. Her husband was a fellow of the Royal Society, Professor of Biology at Cambridge and later, Master of Downing College. Professor Seward must be the only eminent scientist to have a mistake named after him. "Seward's Folly" is the name given to his erroneous dismissal of the notion of a biological origin of stromatolites. Ignorance prevents me from any explanation.

Another working artist was Philip Alexander at Far End, (now Aldebaran). He was a silversmith in the Arts and Crafts style and bailed out Charles Rennie Mackintosh when he was arrested on suspicion of spying in 1914.

As she was taken on drawing room visits in 1910 Noel Olivier would have met the children of the new houses. The Davidsons had three grandchildren, Marcus (13), Tom (9) and Colin (8). Tom would go on to become a well-known artist.

At Far End, the Alexanders had Margaret (8) and Catharine (6). Catharine (see right) attended the Slade where she befriended Dora Carrington, whose brother Noel she went on to marry, thus becoming a junior member of the Bloomsbury Group. Margaret became a leading calligrapher and taught at the Slade, eventually becoming calligrapher to the House of Lords.

**Catherine Carrington,
nee Alexander**



If she visited the Jennings family, Noel may have met their son Humphrey who would become a writer, documentary film maker and surrealist artist. The only real poet that British Cinema has yet produced, according to film director Lindsay Anderson. Whether Noel spotted any of this promise in the three-year-old Humphrey is impossible to tell.

Mill Croft c.1902



The Waymouth family owned Mill Croft (see right) as a holiday home. It shares a boundary with Rooftree and Noel could well have met the Waymouths and their children Winifred and Gilbert. Like so many

Edwardians in Millfield Road, William Waymouth was an architect.

It is not clear how much social contact there was between the newcomers and the other villagers. Claud Mullins records a "Visitor's Dance" in the Gannon Room (then the village hall) in 1907 but whether this was exclusively for visitors I do not know.

The new houses built in Mill Field and elsewhere in the village in the first few years of the 20th century changed the look of Walberswick and it is easy to understand any resentment felt by local full timers.

Claud Mullins records that a Mr Debney (Francis Debney, I believe) told his parents that they were welcome to build a house, but they should stay away on census day because a few more residents would mean there had to be a parish council. In fact, the council was formed in 1894, before any of the Mill Field houses had been built.

Despite these reservations, Francis Debney became clerk to the Parish Council in 1903. Francis Debney had a draper's shop in the village; an offshoot of the long-established family business in Southwold. By the second half of the 19th Century, Debney's included a bank, a wine merchant, a grocery and an insurance agent.

A Debney ancestor was the smuggler Robert Debney who died at Tunstall in 1778 when he became overcome by fumes in an underground vault that he and a companion had dug to hide a stash of gin. They had concealed the entrance with horse manure; hence so the story goes, the fumes.

Another issue dividing the village was drainage. The new houses tended to have cess pools and there was a suspicion that their contents were seeping into the locals' wells. In 1925 the Parish Council received an analyst's report which concluded that "most of Walberswick is on soil sodden with sewage".

The analysts sampled 14 wells, the water in all but one being found to be quite unfit for domestic use. They also noted that when the Terrace was built the water was of the highest quality but "today it is unfit to drink". This bone of contention was removed when mains water arrived in 1927. It was nearly forty years before mains drainage arrived.

There was also a feeling that the houses in Mill Field were responsible for the demise of the Mill. A drawing by Charles Haite dated 1895 shows the Mill with a field of barley and nothing else to the South. None of the houses, trees and shrubs that now occupy the land was present. When Mill Field was bought for development the Mill and its immediate surroundings were not included in the sale and so its owners could do nothing to protect the flow of wind from the South. Richard Scott and Julia Reisz confirm that the miller blamed the new Mill Field houses and their trees and shrubs for the windmill losing its wind. Ironically, it was destroyed by a gale in the 1920's.

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