

WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 66

Lockdown April 2021

Newsletter Editor's report

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

There are still no plans for meeting in the Village Hall but we hope to be able to put on small (COVID safe) exhibitions in the newly-refurbished Heritage Hut later this year. WLHG is one of the three stakeholders named in the lease as able to use the HH free of charge. It should be perfect in the summer for small numbers. These exhibitions will be a good opportunity to see the new HH in action. We will keep you informed.

Continuing on an optimistic note, we hope this may be the last lockdown edition this year. Normal service will be resumed next autumn!

This month's main article is, in my opinion, rather special. It had a small beginning with a box of old photographs being given to the archivist. Then the tenacious duo, Pat Lancaster and Kay Ungless, got their teeth into tracking down the stories behind the images and the article grew and grew. The story centres on a house in Lodge Road. But then does it? Originally I saw it as another "a house through time" article. Then I saw it as a family history. Then I saw it as a love story. It really is all those things. Now, again in my opinion, it would make a good basis for a novel and a film. The lead character would be a young man plucked from his home in Kansas and sent to rural Suffolk in WWII. There he meets a young girl and falls in love. He is the son of a plumber and the girl's parents are English middle class. We can only imagine the class and cultural obstacles they all had to surmount. At the end of the war he has to return to the USA and, eventually, she follows and they marry. If the story ended there then it would be of little interest. However, the couple plus young son return to the UK and Suffolk. The backdrop for this story is the beautiful village of Walberswick.

The story will resonate with many people of a certain age. The war took my father out of Walberswick. Before going over-seas he met a young girl in Amersham and after North Africa and seeing the war out as a POW in Italy then Germany he returned and married her. Back in Suffolk the gene pool had acquired some North American additions.

Imagining the 1950's then the above would be the A film. What follows would be the B film. Yes, the B film should come first but here it is second. This is definitely about a house but, more specifically, it is about a seat.

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

Jimmy and Joan Johnson of Lilliput, Lodge Road

In September 2020, Pat Lancaster, the WLHG archivist, was given a box of old photos by the current occupants of Lilliput, Lodge Road. The photos and other paraphernalia had been gathered up when the present owners moved in. It had been gathering dust for many years and was now destined for the dump. Pat searched through the photos in the box and found them remarkably interesting but mystifying. So she enlisted the help of Kay Ungless, who, like a terrier, searched and found out lots more information. Pat also put a note in the Village News which produced various telephone calls from people who remembered the Johnsons who once lived at Lilliput and had left these mementos in the house.

Getting started is often the most difficult part of research. Kay looked in the box and saw all those faces and places staring back, without a hint of who they might be, or where they were. But, hidden in the depths was a small card announcing the death of a baby, Marian Mae Johnson, July 18th - October 5th, 1926. A click or two of the mouse and there the baby was online, in Pawnee Rock Cemetery, Kansas, together with her brother Richard Robert who had died May 12th, 1936, the children of Edward and Della Johnson, and coupled with the Village Memory, this is what unfolded:

Lilliput was built for William Birks Garland and Winifred (née Young) in about 1934. Although married in Hampstead the year before, they were living at the Water Mill in Hoxne prior to moving into Lilliput. When the whole country was registered at the outbreak of War in 1939, Winifred's sister Dora and brother-in-law Eric Harding were staying with them. William Birks Garland was an automobile engineer and Eric Harding sold Dictaphones whilst the two wives were occupied with "unpaid domestic duties"!



Major Edward Borrow

Sometime during the war they sold Lilliput to Edward and Alys Borrow, Joan Johnson's parents, and to understand Jimmy and Joan's story, we need to look first at Joan's roots.

Edward Borrow was born in Hampstead on 8th November 1879, the son of William Henry, a grain broker from St Neots, Cornwall and Mary Alexander from Londonderry. By the 2nd World War, he was an Assistant Agriculturalist for British Sugar Corporation, but on his marriage certificate his profession is stated to be that of "soldier". He was indeed mentioned in dispatches three times, and awarded the DSO.

During the Boer War he served in the Imperial Yeomanry, and then re-enlisted as a Trooper in the 2nd King Edward's Horse in August 1914. He was soon discharged and then commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Durham Light Infantry. Immediately following his wedding, he was promoted to Captain, then Major. However, he was wounded at the battle of Ypres which is where he was awarded the DSO and the citation reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in an attack. When the leading troops were suffering severe casualties he kept the men together by his splendid leadership. Though twice wounded himself, he led his men to the final objective, and stuck to his post until he collapsed from the effects of his wounds. His courage and example were an inspiration to all ranks".

Edward served in Italy and was later awarded the Italian Silver Medal for Valour by the Italian Government. His numerous medals are now part of the DLI medal collection.

He met his wife, Alys Mabel Constance Read, in London and they married on 30th April 1915 at St Marks, Hamilton Terrace, London.

Alys was born on 24th August 1881 in Hampstead, the daughter of Thomas Frederick Read and Evelina Manning. She had been an actress before WW1 and appeared in several minor roles in the West End. She gets a mention in a review of a play called "His Highness my Husband" (translated from a French farce), at the Comedy Theatre, London.



"His Highness my Husband" at the Comedy Theatre - 1904



Alys as Blossom

Evening Standard, Friday, 30th September 1904 "...Miss Alys Read, Miss Volar, Miss Vidal, Miss Jean Morrison, as Ladies in Waiting, and Mr Lugg as a Lord in Waiting, all contribute with credit to the representation to the show, which, with its costumes and scenery of a costly and brilliant kind, certainly does not leave everything to the actors. One wonders, looking up whether in producing the piece as a comedy instead of as a light opera a fair musical play has not been lost."

Edward and Alys soon produced two children. Their daughter Joan Mary Alexander was born 8th May 1919 in Marylebone, and their son, George Henry was born at the end of 1921 in Kensington.

Leaving Joan's story on one side for the moment, because she and Jimmy Johnson are the protagonists of this tale, we'll continue with her brother, George Henry. The records are slim, but during WWII he was A.D.C to Major General Orde Charles Wingate and served with the "Chindits". Sadly, he did not return home as he was killed in an air crash in Manipur, India, with five Americans, two civilians (one a British journalist) and General Wingate, on March 24, 1944. They are buried together in Arlington National Cemetery, USA. He left £602.19s.6d. Papers relating to his service with the Chindits and as ADC to Major General Orde Wingate are lodged with the Imperial War Museum.



George Henry Borrow

As records have shown, Jimmy Johnson was American. He was the son of Edward and Della Johnson who were both the children of Russian immigrants. Jimmy, the second of five children was born 17th October 1919 in Ellinwood, Kansas and luckily survived whatever caused the death of his two siblings. His father was a plumber and had his own shop in Ellinwood. Having completed just one year of College, on the 23rd December 1940 James Alan Johnson was enlisted into the Field Artillery Branch of the National Guard and his occupation was



Arlington Cemetery

given as “actors and actresses”. He was drafted again on 4th September 1945 in Los Angeles, and it is from these records we learn he was 5ft 10in, weighed 160lbs, was freckled and had a scar on his left index finger!

But, we can better tell this story in Jimmy’s own words when many years later, he wrote to the Village News.

April 1997 AN AMERICAN AT HOME

It happened some fifty years ago -What? An energy sapping cycle ride of some sixty to seventy miles starting at Brome, Diss, on to Walberswick and return. My future father-in-law, Major E. Borrow, had bought Lilliput in Walberswick. Few people wanted houses on the East Coast because of a possible German invasion. Joan, Major Borrow’s daughter, and I cycled from Brome to have a look. The thought never entered our minds that we two might live there. I was an American in the U.S. 95th (Horham/Stradbroke) B-17 bomber Group. We two agreed that if Joan were to come to California, we would wait a few months and then, if we felt the same way, get married. After being separated from 1945 to 1948, she came. A few months later we were married in Los Angeles. Ten years later, in 1958, we returned to East Anglia, living in Ipswich for some years. After Joan’s parents died, Joan and I took over Lilliput. Though Joan died two and a half years ago, Walberswick is my home. I spent some time in Florida recently and could hardly wait to return to Walberswick. The things we value and treasure change as we go through life. At my stage of life I realise the value of friends, of someone in whom I can confide. The melancholy call of the night owl, the cackle of the early-morning pheasant, the wonderful places to walk, the fog, the rain, drizzle, sunshine - the extraordinary peace and quiet - this is part of Walberswick. This is my home.

It is not on record how Jimmy and Joan met, but we can make a good guess. The 95th Bomb Group was based in Horham in Suffolk from June 1943 until the end of the war. As an aside, it was famously the first US group to bomb Berlin in daylight during WW2. Horham lies a little east of Eye and Brome lies a little north of Eye. Joan was 20 when war was declared and with her background would surely have volunteered to do something for the “war effort”, or joined the services or the land army. It is easy to imagine the scenario. All indigenous young men were away, and in their place came these exotic Americans with their chocolate, silk stockings and other scarce or rationed goodies aplenty.



“The box” provides evidence of the seriousness of Joan and Jimmy’s relationship. It contained two photographs of the rear of Lilliput. Between them these show four figures, presumably Mr and Mrs Borrow, Joan and Jimmy. The rear of one photograph dates the photographs as taken August 1944. Significantly it refers to the house as “home” for the Borrow family. It could even be the day of the “energy-sapping ride” Jimmy remembered in his VN piece.



What is on record is that Joan set sail on the SS Nieuw Amsterdam on 24th January 1948, arriving at Ellis Island on the 1st February. The manifest of alien passengers tells us her occupation is that of secretary and her home address is given as Brome, Diss, Norfolk, perhaps still living in their old home Yellow Cottage. Jimmy married Joan Borrow in California on the 13th May 1948 but Village memories tell us that the union was not

looked on favourably by her parents.

On the 4th September 1950 they crossed into Canada at Niagara Falls and there it is on record that she is 5ft 3in, with a medium complexion, her hair is brown, her eyes are grey and she has no distinguishing marks! They made a fine couple.



Their son, George Henry Johnson, was born on 3rd October 1952 in Springfield, Los Angeles (seen with Jimmy far left and Joan left). Pat was given the last known address for George but sadly her letter was returned marked "not at this address".

Edward and Alys Borrow had bought Lilliput towards the end of the War and Jimmy tells us that he and Joan returned to the UK in 1958 together with their six year old son, and lived in Ipswich.



John Weston, Nick and Adrian (sons), Mum (Barry Last), Jimmy and Joan Johnson

Edward died in Bournemouth on 26th December 1960 but his address was given as Walberswick and Alys inherited Lilliput. Alys died at Lilliput on 21st October 1971 leaving Lilliput to her daughter, Joan. Jimmy and Joan moved in and it would seem they lived there happily for many years.

Pat & John Weston knew Jimmy and Joan well and provided photos and the address for George. Mary King (sadly recently deceased) knew them and worked at Bentwaters for a period from 1957 at the same time as Jimmy.

He taught the seniors there and she was the Junior School librarian. She recalled he led a colourful life. Dick Leon knew them and believed that Joan passed away first and Jimmy returned to America but died in a car accident shortly afterwards. Another memory tells that his mother-in-law didn't get on with him and turned him out of the house so he lived in the garden shed! But, perhaps like all folklore, the real story has been somewhat embellished with time.... He was a very good tennis player and was very popular as he always had an allocation of tickets for Wimbledon where he was a member. As a sideline he was known to sell sets of tennis balls but only the top ball in the tube was new.....

Jimmy wrote again to the Village News, and in June 1999 he seems to be having second thoughts about the benefits of living in Walberswick!

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Why is it that I miss the alarm call (cackle) of the pheasant after living in Walberswick for twenty years? Why is it that I miss my wonderful neighbour Barry Last and Tom and Lucy Lawrence? Why is it that I miss being in the same village as John Stanyer? Why do I miss the Village Fete? Why do I miss the quiet? Why do I miss the dull, dark, damp, dismal, dreary, disappointing days? Perhaps it is because we assume that everything will go along in the same way. Then something happens to upset the routine. My son George left Cumbria to come to Florida to be with me for 2 weeks. He liked swimming in the pool daily and spending time in the Jacuzzi. I don't mind playing tennis six days a week.

Joan had died on the 1st August 1994 leaving Jimmy Lilliput. Probate shows her estate had increased tenfold since her mother's death which probably reflects the growing popularity of Walberswick for 2nd homes and holiday lets. Her ashes are buried in Great Yarmouth. Eventually, the widowed Jimmy returned to the US and died on the 13th June 2004 at the age of 85, possibly as the result of an automobile accident, but it is unclear where exactly. Probably the accident occurred in the States as his address is given as Bradenton, Manatee, Florida, but without any evidence some other sources say it happened in British Columbia. There is no probate listed for Jimmy, nor any other record. His life was an enigma to the very end.

Pat Lancaster and Kay Ungless



POSTSCRIPT:

When Jimmy packed his bags to return to the USA he did not only leave the box of memorabilia that stimulated the writing of the above article. At some point before leaving he donated his war medals to Parham Airfield Museum (or anyway, that's where the medals are now on display). This states he was with the 390th and 94th Bomb Groups of the US Army Air Force. This is slightly different to records found from another source but essentially the same! We would like to thank Jennie, the Archivist, and Chris Pratt, Curator, both Museum of The British Resistance Organisation Museum for the medals photograph. Next time you drive by the turning on the A12 for the museum perhaps you might call in and remember a Suffolk love story.

Bell Cottage and a seat through time



Some years ago I was given the picture on the left. I now cannot recall who sent it to me. However, whoever it was told me that the man is "Captain" George English (my great grandfather) and the woman Rosa Gilbert. During lockdown I asked a member of the Gilbert family what she knew of her distant ancestor and if she could identify the house.

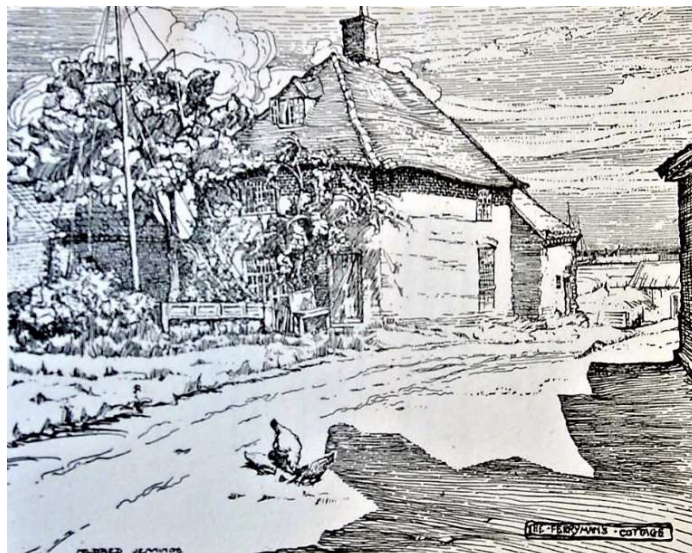
On the first request she could tell me very little. However, after consulting Kay Ungless, I can provide some biographical details.

However, the Gilbert descendant readily identified the house. Now, whether or not this is because it is opposite the entrance to The Bell I would not like to say! It is indeed called Bell Cottage. What struck us both is that the seat George and Rosa are sitting/leaning on and the tree are still there. Why George and Rosa are there is less clear as the house was the home of various members of the Cross family. Maybe at that time there was an access to the nearby Gilbert's house (destroyed in WWII).



Rosa Gilbert was born 1891. She was Charlie Gilbert's sister so a daughter of Herbert and Alice Gilbert. She married a Samuel Goodwin during WWI, had a daughter called Elsa Goodwin in 1916 and died in 1965. In 1938 the family were living in Tinkers Barn and described as poultry farmers. Elsa married a Joseph Hopewell in WWII (1942) in Newmarket. The Goodwin family had a number of members who lived in Walberswick at some time – see PAM HASLEGRAVE AT 87, Newsletter No 49 February 2016 for some details.

The Cross family according to Census returns appear to have been in Bell Cottage since at least 1891. However, in Carol Christie's book of 1911, "Walberswick's Note's", the frontispiece shows Bell Cottage as 'Ferryman's Cottage' and in the text the ferryman is called Mr. Cady. The



illustrator was **Mildred Jennings** the wife of Frank Jennings, Arts-and-Crafts architect of Walberswick. However, what again caught my eye was the seat. Is it the same seat, or like Trigger's broom has it had the equivalent of a new head and handle over the years?

John English