

## THE SYDERSTONIAN

Issue No. 5 – April 2010

### Village News

#### Docking Recycling Centre

The possible closure of this facility has been mooted recently. Following a lively meeting attended by 150 residents of Syderstone, Bircham and Docking a three month reprieve has resulted. Closure of this amenity would undoubtedly result in fly tipping and additional expense placed on local councils to clear and tidy the resulting eyesores.

Thefts of heating oil have occurred at Syderstone and Bircham. a handbag was stolen from a parked car on Syderstone Common. A similar crime was committed at Docking.

#### Obituary

It is with considerable regret that we announce that John Langley passed away at Courtney House Nursing Home, Tittleshall on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March. John, who had been ill for several weeks, will be much missed in the village where he served on the committee of the Amy Robsart Hall and was a regular attendee at the Old Syderstonians Reunions.

#### St Mary's Church

Work is shortly to go ahead with the installation of the hearing loop and amplification system. Major renovation of the south wall has yet to be carried out. Last autumn the church suffered a burglary when a forcible entry was made through a window on the north side. A jar of copper coins amounting to little more than one pound in value was taken. Sadly the damage to the window will cost about £1,600. The lead window will have to be removed and restructured.

#### Open Gardens Day

This year on 20<sup>th</sup> June.

#### Flower Festival

14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> August.

This is the church's major fund raising event and attracts visitors from far and wide. Some, incredibly, have not previously heard of Syderstone but they take away a most favourable impression of the village.

### Art Exhibition

To be displayed in the church and the Amy Robsart Hall to be held between 22<sup>nd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> October.

### Amy Robsart Hall

The indefatigable hall committee have hit another target. The portacabin storage area at the south-west corner of the building is now up and running. Much credit is due to Roddie MacCleod (Project Manager) and Barrie Wells who installed the electrics. Other help was readily and freely given and the transformation has fulfilled all the committee's hopes. This was made possible with grants of £9,000 from West Norfolk Partnership and £3,000 from the Norfolk Community Foundation. The hall contributed the remaining £2,000 of the total project costs.

### Renewable Energy System

A 75 per cent grant towards a feasibility study to assess the suitability of the hall for a renewable energy system. The hall could qualify for a government grant. This project is viewed as long-term and its fulfilment is seen to be some way off at present.

Since the reunions started in April 2006 the hall has undergone a continuous series of improvements. New roof, all windows modernised, new window lintels, floor renovated, new crockery, state of the art film projector, carpet bowls equipment and trolley provided and now the portacabin storage area. This is a fine achievement for a small village community.

### Photographic History of Syderstone

Photographs are needed of family members, christenings, weddings, village scenes, working life, schooldays, sport, leisure from any period and in any condition. Do, please search out any appropriate material. These will all contribute to a valuable local history collection.

### Village Screen Cinema

Following in the steps of former head teacher, Jimmy Goult, the hall hosts a series of films throughout the year. Tickets are £3.50 (pre-booked) or £4 on the door.

Films for 2010 are:

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm - 'The Hurt Locker' - study of a bomb disposal team in Iraq.

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May 7.30pm - 'A Single Man' starring Colin Firth.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm - 'An Education' starring Carey Mulligan.

Prebooking ring – 01485 578588/578171

Many thanks to present and past contribution to the newsletter. The greater spread of contributors the better.

## Uncle Maurice

My cousin, May, is the custodian of one of those large family bibles that many families had in Victorian times. It has been passed through the generations of our family to her from our grandparents, Robert and Rachel West. It has become rather dog-eared over its long service and although having reached the status of an antique its value is modest. Where its true value lies is in the annotations inside the front cover and on the fly leaf proclaiming the dates of family weddings, births and deaths. A potted history of our family since the 1880's and we occasionally turn to it to refresh our memories of past events.

All those mentioned we have known and loved over the years. Undoubtedly they have left a lasting influence on us – marked us for life, you might say, with a single exception, Uncle Maurice.

I must have been staying at Glandford, with my Aunt Aggie and Uncle Ernie, aged about 8 or 9 years old, when I asked Auntie Aggie about a photo hanging in her front room. It showed a young man in sailor's uniform and I was curious about this young sailor. 'Who's that?' I asked. 'It's your Uncle Maurice' said Aunt Aggie. I was doubtful. Mentally I went over a list of uncles but no Maurice featured among them. 'But I don't have an Uncle Maurice', I said. 'Oh, Maurice was real enough although you wouldn't have known him. He drowned at the Battle of Jutland'. This information satisfied me and Aunt Aggie said no more on the subject. Maurice receded into the background for many years, 1967 in fact, when I brought Mavis to meet the family. We called on my Uncle Billy who lived at Holt and Mavis wandered round the sitting room looking at the photographs. 'Whos that, is it you?' she asked Uncle. 'No, no, my woman that's my young brother Maurice. Killed at the Jutland in the First War. Mad keen to join up, he was. Wild horses wouldn't have stopped him. My mother and father were against it but he was that determined. He wanted to serve in submarines eventually. Mother and father were living at Barmer when they received the news of his death. Her hair turned white overnight'. Uncle Maurice took a further back seat in my thinking until the 1970's when May came to Romford to join us for a holiday. She brought with her a small cardboard package labelled Maurice George West R.N. (Boy) and his service number. Inside were three medals wrapped in tissue paper and three detached ribbons. It seemed they had seldom been opened since our grandparents would have received them. May said 'I thought you ought to have these although what you'll do with them I don't know'. Neither did I at that time but I felt a keen sense of pride at receiving them and resolved to hold and preserve them and find out as much as I could about Maurice's service for King and Country. I thought that the medals ought to be mounted for display but I wasn't sure which ribbon corresponded with which medal nor in which order the medals should be arranged.

I sought the help of Jack. Jack was a grizzled old retired copper who now worked as a civvy at Dagenham nick in the stores. I knew that Jack was something of a student of World War One and I took the medals to show him and ask his advice. 'Ah', said Jack. 'First War – Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.

Shows his name which they didn't put on World War Two Medals. Battle of Jutland, you say. Mmm, 1916. Biggest naval battle of the First War. No clear cut result. Mind you the Germans never regained the high seas after Jutland. They stayed bottled up in harbour and by the end their navy was mutinous'. Jack went on to talk knowledgably about 'crossing the T'. In naval parlance this meant being able to bring the guns of your battleship to bear upon the enemy without him being able to bring his guns to bear upon you. Jack also told me to contact Naval Records at Kew with what details I had of Maurice and could expect to receive some information about his service history. I thanked Jack and , in due course, wrote to Kew and received a reply.

The records officer apologised that Maurice's service history was brief. At the time of the Battle of Jutland on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1916, Maurice was serving on H.M.S. Defence, the flagship of Admiral Arbuthnot. H.M.S. Defence was an early casualty of the battle when an enemy shell caused the ships magazine to explode. Records had Maurice's date of birth as 29<sup>th</sup> December 1898 but I was sure that this was wrong. I remember it being recorded in the big family bible as 29<sup>th</sup> December 1899 and thinking at the time that he had only just managed to see in the new century by just a few days. Maurice clearly was not going to allow the odd inconvenient year to prevent him joining up. After all, 'wild horses wouldn't have stopped him' as Uncle Billy had said.

We can only speculate as to what sort of a man Maurice might have become. He was sadly a few years short of manhood at his untimely death. Certainly he had shown a spirit of adventure and determination to join up in the face of opposition from his family. That much at least we can glean from the sketchy facts. Only his medals and the brief, official record of his service and a few handwritten notes in the family bible serve as a tangible reminder of him. Sadly the photographs were either lost or destroyed when their custodians died and their belongings were dispersed.

My Uncle Billy said that Granny West never got over his loss so he may well have been her favourite child although the four others would have been loved and cherished for certain.

I shall let Rudyard Kipling down the curtain with these lines from 'My Boy Jack'.

'Oh dear, what comfort can I find?'  
None this tide,  
Nor any tide,  
Except he did not shame his kind -  
Not even with that wind blowing and that tide.

Then hold your head up all the more,  
This tide,  
And every tide,  
Because he was the son you bore,  
And gave to that wind blowing and that tide!

KEN EDGE.

### Syderstone Church is Hit by Lightning

'The little St. Mary's Church, Syderstone was damaged by lightning during a heavy storm last week.

A three foot gash was made in the roof of the nave. The flash divided. One part travelled along the zinc riggings of the roof towards the tower, where it reached the lightning conductor, which brought it to earth. The other part travelled on the inside of the roof along the line of the electric light cables to the vestry where switches, fuse boxes and a meter were smashed, putting all electricity supplies to the church out of action and causing some debris to fall into the vestry.

The Rector, the Rev N.D. Fourdrinier, was in Lynn when the lightning struck the church and knew nothing about it until his return. He said that people living near the church heard a loud bang but did not think that damage had been done to the church.

#### NO FIRE DAMAGE

The Rector said that it was fortunate that the church was not further damaged by fire which could have developed.

The hopes that some temporary lighting may be put in the nave for the services on Sunday, so that the services will not have to be cancelled.

The charming little church which stands on a hill overlooking the village attracts many peoples attention. It was begun about 1100 and the quaint round tower dates back to about 1200. It is thought that the church once had a central tower which fell about 1200.

There were once two aisle, that on the south dating to 1180 and that on the north being built in 1340, but they were taken down in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The church is now fairly small'. – 'Lynn News & Advertiser 5<sup>th</sup> March 1957. – I am indebted to Ann May nee Mussett for this cutting.

What a thorough piece of local news reporting. Knowing the rector's penchant for local history I don't doubt that he personally furnished the historical data perhaps with a view to making the best of a bad job by using the publicity as a 'plug' for the church.

K.E.

## Amy Robsart

The following letter was recently published in the E.D.P entitled:

'Norfolk Word Has a Long History'

- "A recent national newspaper included the 16<sup>th</sup> century coroners inquest report into the death of Amy Robsart, the wife of Robert Dudley, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth I. The report states that there were two impacts causing two deep wounds in Amy's head sustained supposedly (but controversially) when she fell downstairs at Cumnor Place, Berkshire.

The report was in Latin but included the medieval English word "dyntes" to describe the nature of the impacts to Amy's head. Amy Robsart was born at Syderstone and it seems poignant that the pronunciation "dyntes" should survive in the country of her origin where it is used for "dents" the modern English equivalent'. -

Reproduced by kind permission of Mr Richard Shepheard of Barney. Thanks to Mrs May Allen for sending it. I contacted Mr Richard Shepheard who lived in Syderstone between 1977 and 1987 before moving to Dunton. He kindly provided details of Chris Skidmore's book 'Death and Virgin: Elizabeth, Dudley and Mysterious Fate of Amy Robsart' – published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson priced at £20 but can be purchased from Amazon for £12.50 ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)). It is 430 odd pages and was favourably reviewed in the 'Sunday Times'. If you feel the cost might be hard to bear chivvy your local library to get it in their stock – K.E.

## A Norfolk Childhood

I've distant childhood memories  
Of this county that I love  
Summer went on forever  
Under wide, blue skies above.

The cornfields and the hedgerows  
Large estates? Well, simply none  
The many breeds of wildlife  
Most of them long gone.

We'd run across the common  
Till we reached the chestnut wood  
And spend all day there playing  
My word, it felt so good.

The little market town to where we used  
To catch a bus  
Mum and I sometimes biked there  
It was a weekly treat for us.

And the busy seaside town  
Within such easy reach  
it still remains unspoilt  
With its lovely, sandy beach.

When strangers came to visit  
They thought us such quaint folk  
They couldn't understand us  
The accent that we spoke.

I often sit and reminisce  
And sometimes give a sigh  
Thoughts of growing up in Norfolk  
In the far off days gone by.

Carole Gilham nee Havers.

## Book Review

It is a pleasure to review two books by two Old Syderstonians this time. David Newton has written previously about his time in the village and about the ghostly happenings at R.A.F Bircham Newton. This time his story is set at Bagthorpe.

Bagthorpe is a tiny village which has held a fascination for me for a long time. As a fledgling cyclist, my father and I would often ride from Syderstone down the Bircham road into Bagthorpe, Frizzleton, past North Pole (now demolished) to the edge of Coxford Wood the road gradually descending towards Bluebell Wood on the left culminating in the steep descent of Rudham Hill bringing us hurtling past the common to the T junction by 'The Buck'. I loved those quaint cottages in Bagthorpe with the pointed windows. On visits to Norfolk, I usually make a point of driving through there and find the place as much a draw as ever. Little seems to change. The cottages are as picturesque. Roadside herbage grows in profusion around the phone box undisturbed by any telephone user. I bought a jar of honey from a roadside stall outside a cottage on one occasion. Self service, take the honey, pop the money in a tin. An ambling hedgehog brought my progress through the village to a halt one evening. My cousin May and I waited patiently while it made its unhurried progress across the road. The only sign of life that I've seen in Bagthorpe. That there is life I don't doubt. I've heard the distant drone of a tractor. Seen the occasionally wisps of smoke escaping from a cottage chimney but of human presence – nothing. That there was life there I know for sure.

My dad played cricket for the village. My great uncle Jimmy worked briefly on the farm, where his father was steward, before leaving to join the Metropolitan Police. in 1887.

David's story is reassuring...'The Scarecrows Revenge' is peopled with a rich cast of characters. The story is set in 1940's wartime Bagthorpe. A time of great uncertainty. The Luftwaffe is raiding Norfolk aerodromes, there is rationing and a member of the workforce, Horrie, brings to light some disquieting information. Since the village first existed the land was farmed by heavy horses. These men have worked with horses all their lives. Like the horses, some men are still in harness in their eighties. Turning out at the break of day for two pounds a week. They know no other way of life. Change is unthinkable. Horrie says it will come and soon. His relative at Holme Hale says so. It's a done deal. Farms need to produce more and be more efficient. The way forward is mechanisation. Tractors. Massey and Bridges at Fakenham have lots of them! What about our horses?' asks Jimma the eighty plus veteran to whom all the horses are friends. According to Horrie some of the more useful might find employment hauling coal, bread or a milk float. The older ones will go to supplement the meagre meat ration. Horrie's creative imagination is very vivid concerning the detail about the horses disposal. A damper of gloom is cast over the workforce. Horrie loses no chance to exploit their vulnerability to the extent that he is shunned and ostracised by the others. This doesn't bother him but suddenly the

tables are turned leaving Horrie gibbering and conscience-stricken. Read on and find out the climax for yourselves. It is a first rate story related with considerable panache.

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- 'An East Anglican Rural Life and Submarine Exploits in World War II' by John Negus -

Jack Negus, nearing ninety, has been persuaded to recall his memories of his early days and his wartime service in submarines. That he does so is of great benefit to those of us interested in local history and Syderstone in particular. Jack was born in Chatteris, Cambridgeshire and at the age of seven moves to Whitehall where his father takes a position at Whitehall Farm. By any standards the farm is a large operation of over 1000 acres. The farm has a hierarchal structure where the workforce is divided into teams. The lowest rung on the ladder was that of a holdye boy who led the horse in the harvest field and called 'Holdye' to warn the man on the wagon of its impending movement. Next came the elevator boy whose job was to keep the horse turning under the elevator which provided the motive power. At about 12 years old the boy would graduate to horse rake boy, where one became responsible for one's own horse. A big step for a young man. Whilst still at school there was mangold carting and chaff cutting at the weekends. There was church on Sundays and in fact a full programme of events throughout the week. Jack describes his time at Syderstone School. Even in the 30's the staff will be familiar to many of us. Mrs Baxter, Polly Parrott and Mr Tommy Hand, the head teacher. A fuss was caused when Polly became the victim of a pupil's practical joke. Jack's account indicates the perpetrator was not discovered. We didn't get away with much at Syderstone School and that somebody did do so at Polly's expense warms the heart.

Jack volunteered for the Royal Navy at 18 and began training at Chatham and began service which was to last until the end of the war. An officer came on parade one day and asked for volunteers for the Royal Marine Commandos. Jack considering this to be dangerous work abstains but 20 others volunteer. A short time later volunteers are asked for submarine service and by this time Jack having had his fill of drill and parades puts up his hand. Looking round to see who his companions might be he finds that he is the only volunteer. He is further discomfitted when reporting at Gosport for submarine training is regaled with the current rather long list of submarine casualties for that month by the 'Jeremiah' on guard duty. He must have wished he was back home at Whitehall. His service takes him to USA, Canada, Bermuda and Australia. In USA a haircut costs a weeks wages but Jack doesn't actually say that he parted with that sum!

He rises to leading Seaman and eventually to Petty Officer. This is a comprehensive and clearly recalled account of a significant part of a long life. The book carries a good number of splendid photographs.

Both books are on sale to raise funds for the Amy Robsart Hall and I strongly recommend both of them.

K.E.

### A Rose by Any Other Name

Scene – West End Central Police Station, Savile Row, W.1 one weekend in the mid 60's. A member of the public has found a stray dog and brings it to the Front Office. It is a small, mostly brown, unkempt, tatterdemalion specimen. A veritable canine vagrant which the Station Officer receives grudgingly and directs Fred, his PC assistant, to take him downstairs to the kennel in the basement. he is watered and left to ponder upon the folly of his ways.

After a couple of hours the Communications Officer takes a call. The caller is a well spoken lady who enquires if her Shi-Tzu has been handed in. He calls through to the Front Office. 'Sarge, a lady is on the phone. She's lost her dog and its valuable. Have we got one handed in?' 'A scruffy little mutt was brought in a while back. I should hardly think that its valuable. What breed is it supposed to be?' 'She says it's a Shitzoo, Sarge'. The Station Officer regarded the Comms Officer with a blank stare and said levelly, 'I asked you what breed it is, not what it bloody well smells like!'

KEN EDGE.