

THE SYDERSTONIAN

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Village News – Post Office

The village has lost its satellite post office following the retirement of Phil and Eileen Dennis of Bircham who used to provide the facility at the Amy Robsart Hall on Wednesday mornings and Friday afternoons. The hall also loses out financially through loss or rental of its premises.

Betty Broughton – Betty, a regular attendee at our reunions, has been unwell recently and is at present in care at Docking.

Cosh Havers Junior – Cosh is awaiting a knee replacement and has been unable to drive since June. Mobility is a considerable problem for him. I am much indebted to him for the Sedgeford article. We wish both stalwarts a speedy return to health.

St. Mary's Church

The flower festival in August raises £1,450 and the Open Gardens event was also successful.

October 26th-30th – Art Exhibition

October 29th-20th – Craft fair at Amy Robsart Hall

9th November – Coffee morning and Bazaar

November 24th – Band Concert at Green Park Centre, Wickham Green with Fakenham Town Band and performances by local schoolchildren.

It is hard to believe that this is our 16th reunion. When we first met back in April 2006, it was very enjoyable, but no one knew whether it was going to work or not but I'm sure we are all pleased it has.

I look back fondly on that magical afternoon seven years ago, but one of my happiest and memorable days was in October 2011 when my daughter, Paula from Canada, came with me. She really enjoyed meeting folk who grew up with her mum and talks of coming over again to a reunion next year.

Best wishes to everyone.
Carole Gilham (nee Havers)

Tragedy at Sedgeford

Cosh could not recall precisely when this unfortunate event took place. "Wartime, I'm sure. Towards the end of the war I should think. About 1944, I was sixteen and working with my Dad". The threshing tackle was from Joe Bushell of Ringstead. A Burrell traction engine of about ten tons towing the threshing drum of about 7 tons and finally an elevator of some two tons". These old steam engines were tremendous workhorses and although their days were numbered they were still working albeit in diminishing numbers into the early 1950's. This outfit was crewed by the engineer Jack Spinks, the steerer, Bert Drury and a chap in attendance on a push bike who presumably gave

advance warning of the engines proximity. [Cosh] "There were no brakes on these engines you know. They had two gears, a road gear (the higher one) which gave you about 6mph and a land gear which gave you about 2mph. To change from one to the other the engine had to be stopped and once the gear was engaged away you went. There was a facility to brake by using a lever on the left, the reversing lever. It worked on the ratchet and pawl principle and you had to keep it squeezed and not let it drop into the ratchet and you could move it freely backwards and forwards according to the degree of braking needed".

The outfit reached Ringstead Road, Sedgford without incident and reached School Hill a short, sharp descent to the T-junction which was the main village street. The road train turned right towards Heacham and shortly afterwards left in the direction of Snettisham where the road descends in a quiet gradient. It was at this point that the crew first became aware of the problem. For reasons that were never clearly established the road train was gathering speed and resisting all Jack Spinks' efforts to slow it down. After an abortive session on the reversing lever Jack shouted to Bert that, "She's out of control, I'm going to jump for it". They were fast approaching a bend beyond which lay the old chalk pits. The time had come to leave the lurching, clanking engine to its own devices. Bert, however, said he would take his chance in the coal tender and as Jack jumped clear Bert borrowed into the coal and braced himself for the inevitable impact. The accompanying cyclist had been left far behind the runaway road train and had found it quite impossible to catch it up. With a tremendous clamour the engines front axle sheared in two and parted from the steering forks. The forks ploughed and gouged a crater in the road causing the engine to stop abruptly and flip over in a somersault. The drawbar attached to the threshing drum snapped like a dry stick. "That metal drawbar was near as thick as a man's arm!" said Cosh, "yet it snapped like a match". One can only imagine the ensuing carnage. The engine lay upside down with only the body and big wheels attached.

Bert, where was he? Jack returned to the debris and hastily looked about. No Bert. He rightly concluded that Bert was trapped under the coal tender and found the enormous bottle Jack and with a superhuman effort raised the tender sufficiently to pull Bert out. Bert was in a bad way. "He was about done then when he was pulled out", said Cosh. "Did he survive?" I asked. "No", Cosh said solemnly, he died in spite of Jack's efforts. Of course, there was an enquiry and the investigators asked how he raised the tender to pull Bert free. He told them he used the big bottle jack. These chaps were very doubtful and there is no doubt that they didn't believe him. They arranged a test to see if he could repeat this feat and do you know what, try as he might, he couldn't do it. Now there's little doubt that he did so at the scene of that accident. So what got Bert out? Do you think the Lord lent a helping hand? "Yes", I said, I think so, along with the desperate desire to help his friend and the sheer urgency demanded at the moment, he pulled off a feat that he never could have in the cold light of day under the gaze of officialdom!

We mused about these threshing contractors of yesteryear. I remember Harry Bushell of Thursford coming to my Uncle Billy's Farm at Glandford with his steam engine and its spark guard like an upturned kitchen sieve which was fitted during the threshing. The road trains were often so unwieldy that gates and gateposts had to be removed to allow them free passage. "There were a number of contractors about then", said Cosh, "Shackcloths of Snoring, Oliver Rix of Sculthorpe, was the Thursford Bushell related to Joe Bushell at Ringstead?" "All the Havers brothers worked on those old steam engines you know. My father (Cosh Senior), Stanley from Barn Cottages, Bob and

Herbert from Burnham, they called him. 'Toughleather' you know, I enjoyed my time working on those old engines – lovely things they were". Cosh summed up with real affection not just for the engines built the days filled with camaraderie of times past.

Ken Edge
September 2013

Reggie Hipkin - Professional Footballer

Did you know that Reggie Hipkin was a professional footballer? Peter Pells posed the question about a year ago. "No, I had no idea". Indeed I knew little of Reggie at all. "How did he fit into the Hipkin family?" "Well, there was old Jack who ran the farm and lived in the Manor House. He had two sons, Jack and Reggie, and a daughter, Una." Una is the only one I can remember. Jack and Reggie attended Fakenham Grammar School and according to Sid Negus they covered the journey by pushbike. I expressed some surprise at this but Peter said it was very likely and lads of the 1930's would have thought nothing of it. Reggie played for the school team and was noticed by Fakenham Town for whom he played when he was not committed to play for the school. He attracted the attention of Norwich City as an apprentice but before he could make any headway war was declared and his career was put on ice. After the war he briefly joined Wolves although he did not play a game and moved to Charlton Athletic on a free transfer in September 1946. After two games in the First Division, Reg arrived at the Goldstone Ground and played in fifteen games for Brighton and Hove Albion. Reg was signed by Brighton for a fee of £1,750. Between 6th March 1948 and 6th November 1948 he was a first team regular at half back and scored against Newport County. Gates at this time in Division Three South ranged from 5,295 away at Torquay to 21,879 away at Bristol Rovers. It was in this fixture against Bristol Rovers that Reg sustained a knee injury which ended his career. A collection was made for Reg during his home against Newport County. Reg was subsequently awarded £500 from the players union (now the PFA). Upon leaving Brighton & Hove Albion, Reg became Littlehampton Town's player coach in the Sussex County League and later worked as an engineer in Gillingham. During his time in the professional game, pro's were paid £7-12 and in the close season £5-10. Reg is believed to have received an amount in the middle of the ranges.

John Arlott related a story concerning Southampton at about this time when players were told whether or not they would be retained for the forthcoming season and, if so, on what terms. The high figure was pay per week for the season and the lower amount the retainer during the off season. So player one would be told £12 and £10 and player two £10 and £6. Player three £9 and £5. "Now just a minute", says player three, "how come I'm getting less than the last two?" "They're better players", says the manager. "Not in the summer they aint", responded the inquisitor.

Season 1947-48 was not a happy one for the Seagulls who finished at the bottom of the table on 34 points from 42 games with Norwich City one place above with a better goal average but also with 34 points. Both clubs were subsequently re-elected to Division 3 South.

I asked Peter if Reg had ever turned out for the village. "There was an occasion when he appeared and it was a special game to mark a particular occasion. I was just a kid but it was plain his play was of a much higher standing than those around him".

Having had his career interrupted by the war and then curtailed by an injury, Reg was extremely unlucky. With all those setbacks without which who knows what he may have achieved.

I am much indebted to Tim Carder, the chairman of Brighton & Hove Albion's historical society who helped considerably with the invaluable information.

Ken Edge
September 2013

Book Review - 'Murder on the Home Front' by Molly Lefebure

The author was invited by Dr Keith Simpson, the Home Office Pathologist to be his secretary. She turned him down. Upon discussing her decision with her friends, most thought she had acted precipitately in turning down an opportunity not given to many. She returned to Dr Simpson and asked if the job was still open. It was and for the next five years she accompanied Dr Simpson and took notes at his post mortems and scenes of crime investigations. This brought her into the world of coroners, medical experts including the famous pathologist Dr Bernard Spilsbury, mortuary keepers and some of Scotland Yards foremost detectives such as Robert Fabian and Ted Greeno. This is a fascinating account of dark deeds in the bleak wartime years when forensic medicine and painstaking detective work plays its part in securing justice.