

THE SYDERSTONIAN

April 2014

Village News

Post Office – owing to contractual difficulties there has been no progress in reinstating a satellite post office service at Amy Robsart Hall.

St Mary's Church

Friday 18th April, 10.15am Good Friday service with Student Cross pilgrims from Ely followed by hot cross buns at the Amy Robsart Hall.

5th May, 11.00am – Archdeacons Charge - Father Clive will again take part in this 10km run and would appreciate any support. Sponsor forms available from the church.

Open Gardens

Sunday 22 June.

Flower Festival

Saturday 2nd – Wednesday 6th August

World War I Centenary 2014 - Family History Day

Saturday 2nd August at Amy Robsart Hall 10am-5pm. This concentrates on men from Syderstone who fought and died in World War I. We have a collection of photos of local WWI soldiers and sailors which have been digitised and restored but which are mainly unidentified together with a list of names of local soldiers and sailors who served their country. We would love to put names to faces. Did any of your Syderstone or Barmer family serve in WWI? Have you any photos or documents? Can you identify any of the photographs? We would love to hear from you and perhaps we can name some people before August. We also hope to prepare a brief history of the men who served. Our list is sometimes just a surname and initial so we need to establish their identity first – can you help with this?

Entry free – refreshments available.

Any information to Sheila Riches 01485 578171 / Avril MacArthur 01485 578588

RAF Bircham Newton Heritage Centre – Open Days

Sunday 20th April, Monday 21st April, Sunday 4th May, Monday 5th May, Sunday 25th May, Monday 26th May. 11am-5pm – National Construction College, Bircham Newton, PE31 6RB

Village Screen Cinema

Saturday 26th April – 7.30pm

'Philomena' starring Dame Judi Dench.

Highly recommended £3.50 advance booking. £4.00 at the door.

Obituaries

Jack Negus

Jack moved to Whitehall as a young boy with his family from Chatteris, Cambs. He took a full part in village activities. He attended the village school which was then staffed by Mr Tommy Hand, Miss Ivy Clamp (later to become Mrs Baxter) and the formidable Miss Lena Parrot. He sang in the church choir when Rev. Basil Reed was rector and took part in the activities of a local scout group. At 18 Jack joined the Royal Navy and volunteered for service in submarines. With the help of his daughter,

Heather, he compiled a fascinating account of his early life in Syderstone and the book continues his story up to his demob from the Royal Navy. He told me afterwards that there was probably another chapter or two inside him but he struggled to recall much of his past life by then. It is nevertheless an interesting and worthwhile read and a valuable acquisition for the Syderstonian archive. Jack died in December 2013 aged 92 and will be much missed by Old Syderstonians who pass on their sympathy to Jack's family.

K.E.

Wally Humphrey

When I was growing up in Syderstone during the late 1940's and 1950's Wally Humphrey was the mainstay of Syderstone cricket. He captained the side, opened the bowling and was a middle order batsman to be reckoned with. For many years he was our best player but was modest about this distinction. He was always well turned out and looked the part. His action was a smooth approach to the wicket of about eight strides, a classical sideways on delivery with the left arm high in the manner of Basil D'Oliveria, over came the blowing arm at a pace of fast medium – and the wickets! They tumbled. He never sought to gain an unfair advantage and was widely respected within the confines of the Sandringham District League. He was a sportsman in the very truest sense. Wally passed away last autumn in his eighties.

Joan Havers of West Winch

Joan sadly passed away in March. Together with her husband Walter ('Cosh') she was a regular attendee at Old Syderstonian reunions and she and Cosh were socially active in the village of West Winch. We shall miss her at Syderstone and send our condolences to Cosh and his family.

Lilian Adcock

Many of us will remember Lilian from childhood and schooldays. Lilian died in March having been a lifelong resident of Syderstone. We send our condolences to her daughter, Debbie, and family.

RESCUE!

I have written before about the work of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution whose voluntary members and the organisation itself, funded entirely by voluntary subscriptions, has my undying admiration. Their work is often carried out in the teeth of the worst weather imaginable when most of us would turn up the heating a notch and draw the curtains against the howling gale and pelting rain. For the lifeboat man such comforts end when the maroons sound and he heads pell mell for the lifeboat station to man the rescue craft. For his family this heralds an anxious time. The service may last many hours or less than one hour and unless he has the responsibilities of the coxswain, second coxswain or lifeboat mechanic he receives expenses only.

The rescue that I shall describe did not take place in the teeth of a gale nor in harsh conditions but it did bring considerable relief to those involved. I know because I was there.

It began with an invitation by my friend Dave to go on a sea fishing trip from Eastbourne with his pal John. My experience of sea fishing was zero. I had accompanied more experienced friends and fished from the bank of the Grand Union Canal and the trickling stream at Imber Court, Thames Ditton with borrowed tackle. I had landed a few perch and roach and enjoyed the open air but I was not hooked by the pastime. This limited experience was the sum total of my fishing knowledge. Eastbourne, though, is an agreeable place, albeit conservative and the trip tempted me.

It took place in February sometime in the mid sixties and on arrival Eastbourne was not at its best, not yet emerging from winter hibernation. The weather was overcast and chilly but no adverse change in the weather was expected and the boatman at the angling club was happy to hire Dave the boat. "Do me a favour mate will you? This bloke has been pestering me for a boat and I can't hire one to him because he's not a club member. Is there any chance you can take him with you? Dave said that as long as he was willing to pay his share of the expenses he would be welcome. The proposition was put to the bloke – Bert by name – who readily agreed to the arrangement. Bert was a good deal older than us and had no difficulty in the role of experienced fisherman. From the capacious boot of his

silver Ford Zephyr he unloaded some quality tackle taking pains to explain the advantages of his rods and reels. "Rolls Royce of reels this is, the best money can buy".

Most of his high falutin talk was over the head of a greenhorn like me. My own gear was borrowed from Dave and my fishermans outfit comprised my car washing wellingtons and police issue waterproof leggings added to a scruffy anorak and tweed cap, completed my ensemble. Bert was resplendent in navy waterproofs with a bobble hat adorned with many badges – doubtless earned in fierce competition with fellow anglers.

We launched in pleasant anticipation of a day in the open air and a hefty catch into the bargain. The boat was a small rowing boat supplemented with an outboard motor and Dave guided the puttering craft to a likely spot and instructed me to drop anchor. This duly done we baited our hooks with lugworms and awaited a bite. Time went by amid rebaiting that recasting and I was asked to check the anchor as it seemed that we were drifting. "Pull on that anchor rope, Ken" said Dave. I pulled. I pulled some more until several feet of rope lay at my feet and it all ended in a frayed end. No anchor. "We'll have to go back to the club for a replacement", Dave announced. The tide was coming in and Dave told Bert to stay in the stern of the boat with me thus enabling the boat to ride nicely up onto the pebbly beach. Whether he misheard or misunderstood or plain cussedly decided on his own initiative to remain at the bow I don't know. The weight of two people at the bow with the impetus of an incoming tide behind had the effect of the bow hitting the beach hard stopping the boat in its tracks. At the same time a vigorous wave hit the stern washing over the boat and sending me sprawling on to my back and giving my backside a good coating of English Channel seawater. All very refreshing in July perhaps, but in February not to be recommended. I was not happy.

We warmed ourselves by the boatmans cheery stove and he made a reviving cup of coffee for each and added a measure of rum. Complete with anchor we relaunched and set about the business of catching fish. One of the party, Dave I think, landed a huss. Not my favourite fish but at least it showed there was life beneath the grey expanse. The boat began to see-saw in a steady up and down motion. John was the first to succumb. Leaning over the side he deposited his breakfast into the briny. I felt really queer and swiftly followed suit and briefly felt better but that was short lived and another bout followed. I had caught nothing and was past caring. I just wanted terra firma under my feet and some warmth in my bones and a quiet place to die. Our only success was that floundering huss and after what seemed an eternity Dave was prepared to call it a day. Thank God!

The outboard motor was started by attaching a knotted rope to the engine, winding it round and giving a vigorous pull whereupon it burst into an energetic roar and pattered away. But not this time. Nor the next, nor the next, and not for several times after that. There was a good deal of head scratching before Dave decided to take out the spark plug and give it a clean. He released it with a box spanner and passed it to Bert who promptly dropped it and it landed submerged under 2 inches of water in the bottom of the boat. We dried it as best we could and it was reinserted and the starting mechanism was tried again but still the engine refused to fire up. Dave said, "Our only option is to row back, we've two oars and I'm prepared to take one. Any volunteers to take the other?" John was poleaxed with seasickness. Bert ruled himself out on the grounds of strained stomach muscles. I didn't feel too lively but agreed to try in harness with Dave. The sum total of my experience was gained on the Abrahams Bosom boating lake at Wells and a couple of stints on the Serpentine. If I was any one of the others I would be seriously worried.

Oars were placed in the rowlocks and we pulled away. Keeping time was a problem, we weren't doing too well in that respect and it soon became clear we were not going to reach the shore by this means. The shore looked about half a mile away although my judgement of nautical distances is unreliable. Certainly it was far enough away to cause some concern. Dave tried the oars on his own but the conditions were too adverse. "What now?" I asked. Dave groped under the seat and produced something resembling a large firework from a drawer. "We light this and hope to Christ the coastguard sees it". He duly lit it and it produced an incredibly bright white light which burned for several minutes. "Provided this is seen, we shall hear the maroons and they'll launch the lifeboat to pick us up" explained Dave. We did hear the maroons, the coastguard had seen us, thank God. We strained our eyes towards the shore and after a short time the Eastbourne lifeboat 'Beryl Tollemache' came plunging out towards us. The coxswain, Mr Basset, brought the lifeboat alongside and one of the crew asked what the matter was. Dave shouted that the outboard motor was kaput and we were not able to row back. A line was thrown us which Dave made fast to the bow. The choppy sea was causing the little boat to buck and plunge like a rodeo bronco and threw us against the lifeboat. The small boat

cracked like a walnut shell and water began trickling in steadily. We were taken under tow but began shipping water fast. We called out to the lifeboat crew that we were taking on water through the cracked hull at an alarming rate. The lifeboat slowed and we were brought alongside again and one by one were taken aboard the 'Beryl Tollemache' and a crew member was left in the rowing boat to haul it onto the beach as we approached the shore.

We were taken below where the wireless operator, a young man of similar age to ourselves, was being chaffed by an older crew member about his poor choice of seagoing footwear. He was wearing boots with Cuban heels and no doubt put aside whatever work he was engaged upon when the alarm sounded and made haste to the lifeboat station. We were glad to see them whatever they were wearing.

We were duly landed ashore and immediately the feeling of nausea and seasickness cleared entirely. Quite a reception party had assembled on the beach to see what all the fuss was about, prominent amongst them was a reporter from the 'Eastbourne Argus'. He was eager to hear and record details of our misadventure and asked each of us in turn for an account and for our names and addresses. Bert was unusually reticent about his personal details and refused point blank to disclose them. "That bloke with you?", asked the reporter, "is he a friend?" "A friend? No. None of us have seen him before today. He simply turned up at the angling club for a day's fishing and we agreed to take him out with us and that is about all any of us knows of him". Dave suggested we have a whip round for the lifeboat crew and we dug deep. Bert was reluctant, he seemed of the view that this was their work and they would not be out of pocket. We eventually shamed him into making a contribution to the whip which raised enough for a couple of rounds of drinks for the crew. Dave's dad declared Bert 'a proper Jonah' when we told him the tale later that evening. I think that was the least that could be said of him.

On the homeward journey my two companions were rehearsing a watered down account of the day's doings which they would tell their wives and children so as not to cause them unnecessary worry, they said. Very laudable. No doubt it served the additional purpose of diluting any opposition on the domestic front to any future trip. I decided when I came to Eastbourne the next time it would be on a warm day and that I would eschew the 'pleasures' of sea angling and confine my pleasures to the shore. I enjoy eating fish but I am perfectly happy for somebody else to catch them.

Aftermath

For several weeks following this rescue any coppers who turned up at Eastbourne Angling Club for a days fishing ran the gamut of local fishermen's wit and were chaffed unmercifully. It took a considerable time to live down.

The outboard motor which failed us at the critical time proved just as stubborn at the boathouse. It defied attempts to start it and only did so after an overhaul.

The grapevine had it that Bert was playing truant from work on the day of the rescue and while his bosses were expecting him to be industriously turning the wheels of commerce along the south coast John, Dave and I knew otherwise, hence his reticence in the presence of the gentleman from the 'Eastbourne Argus'.

I have tried to discover some information about Beryl Tollemache the person, with limited success. The Tollemache family lived at Broomhill, Eastbourne and were a prominent family in that town. Beryl was the eldest child who was unmarried and died prematurely in the summer of 1944. She had a sister and two brothers. One of the brothers was a lieutenant who was killed in the First World War aged just 24. The youngest brother became a Major General. No doubt the family commissioned the lifeboat in memory of Beryl. The lifeboat 'Beryl Tollemache' served the community of Eastbourne for close on thirty years, being withdrawn from service in 1977. A worthy successor to the 'Jane Holland' lifeboat which took part in the Dunkirk evacuation.

'Well done thou good and faithful servant'.

Ken Edge, November '13.

A RARE PLACE FOR OLD LADIES

During the course of recording 'Rescue', I was at a local antiques fair and was sorting through a tray of unmarked postcards. At my elbow a gent was likewise seeking something of interest in another tray. "What are you looking for?" he asked. "Dogs, preferably artist drawn, vintage transport, North Norfolk or anything comic with a police content". "Okay, I'll look out for you, see if you can find anything in your tray about Eastbourne". "Do you come from that neck of the woods?" "Used to, grew up there and my family had roots there and I'm doing a project and need some period cards". We both continued our rummaging. "Do you know anything about the Tollemache family?" "I don't think so, what is your interest in them?" "Many years ago I was picked up by the Eastbourne lifeboat, the 'Beryl Tollemache' and I would like to know more about the family who commissioned the lifeboat. I believe they lived in a house or area known as Broomhill. Does that ring a bell?" "Ah, you mean the Tollymash or Tollymarsh family. You don't pronounce it Tollymack! I'm afraid I know nothing of the family other than the lifeboat was named after Beryl Tollemache and the boat was in Eastbourne for many years. It succeeded 'Jane Holland' which took part in the Dunkirk evacuation".

"Did you live in Eastbourne at the time of the Dr John Bodkin Adams scandal?" "Good gracious, yes. Mind you the rumours were rife in the town long before he came to trial. You know, of course, that he was suspected of persuading rich old ladies to remember him in their wills. Remember him they did. Money, Rolls Royces, silverware, exquisite china, clocks and antiques all came his way and when he felt the time was ripe he sped them on their way with a hefty dose of morphine". "I remember the papers were full of reports of the trial when I was still at school, about 1957, I think". "That's about right but as I say the rumours abounded years before. My first job was at the gas board in Eastbourne. In those days you came in and paid your bill over the counter and one of those clerks was a strict Baptist and one day Dr John Bodkin Adams came in to settle his bill and she flatly refused to handle his money". "What happened then?" "Well, he had to pay the other cashier when she became free". "Were there any repercussions over this?" "As far as I remember there weren't". "He must have had one hell of a thick skin?" "Seemingly, he did for he faced down these rumours over many years. He couldn't fail to be aware of them". "He seems to have been lucky with his defence counsel, Geoffrey Lawrence, who got him acquitted at his trial". "Well, yes he was acquitted. The GMC got him for failing to keep proper records and he was struck off but blow me he was back in practice in a year or two. Eastbourne was a rare place for old ladies in those days, you know. I remember as a lad seeing a chauffeur waiting by this Rolls Royce outside 'Bobby's', the big department store. Eventually this old lady came out and he opened the door and ushered her inside with a tap on her bottom. I could hardly believe it, Still, perhaps it was part of his duties. As I say Eastbourne was a rare place for old ladies back then". He shuffled through the remaining cards in the tray. "Sorry, nothing for you, I'm afraid". "Never mind, Beachy Head any good?" "Yes, lovely thanks. Nice talking to you".

Ken Edge, November '13

TRIBUTE TO A FINE LADY ON THE CENTENARY OF HER BIRTH

My aunt, Rhona Wallace, nee Waller was born in Syderstone on August 13 1914, a few days after the outbreak of World War One. She grew up in the village, but only the very older ones of you will remember her (apart from family) but most of you will recall her mother – my grandmother – Mrs Susan Edge, who lived at the Barn Cottages – "up the Barn" as it was called.

Rhona was one of the younger children of a large family, my mother being one of them, was a very diligent and studious pupil at school. She was taught, among others, by Mr Hand. She also enjoyed fun pursuits such as dancing and cinema.

As she grew up she knew she wanted to be a nurse and that staying on in the village was not for her. As soon as she was able she moved to London and began her nursing training. She loved the city but, of course, at that time it was a completely different place. She learned all aspects of nursing, including midwifery, and psychiatric care. After she qualified, she fulfilled another wish, which was to travel and joined the W.R.A.C where she could continue her nursing career. She travelled to India, where she stayed for several years after leaving the W.R.A.C.

She lived in Northern Rhodesia (which later became Zambia), where she met her husband. They absolutely loved living in Africa, but because of continued unrest in the continent, they were forced to leave. They came back to Britain and eventually settled in Bishops Stortford, making many friends.

Aunt Rhona was widowed in 2005 and continued living on her own, coping very well. She passed away in April 2012 at the great age of 97. She had enjoyed a wonderful life but she never forgot Syderstone.

Carole Gilham (nee Havers)