

## **The Syderstonian - April 2016**

The month marks the tenth anniversary of the old Syderstonian meetings. The idea was conceived by the committee by the Amy Robsart Hall and nobody knew how it would work out. The fact it is so successful is due to the efforts of the committee and the enthusiasm of the Old Syderstonian themselves to support the committee in its efforts. Some time ago my cousin May said 'Do you think when its old diddies fall off the perch that this get together will peter out?' I said I thought that the Old Syderstonians would continue as long as there remained people in charge of the Amy Robsart Hall willing to stage the function. Long may it remain so.

### **Avril and Malcolm MacArthur**

Avril and Malcolm have stepped down from their roles as secretary and treasurer of the hall committee respectively. They will be shortly be moving to Old Beetley near Dereham. They are not giving up the Old Syderstonians and will maintain their links with us. We wish them well in their new home and thank them for their hard work which has ensured the smooth running of the hall and facilitated the success of our meetings. Avril and Malcolm are succeeded by Wendy and Chris Little to whom we wish every success.

### **Amy Robsart Hall**

Plans to upgrade the heating using power from the solar panels are in hand and applications have been made for grants to assist with this.

Saturday 6th August - Family History Day

St Mary's Church - Sunday 5th June - 4pm Evensong at All Saints, Barmer.

Sunday 26th June between 1 and 6pm Open Gardens

6th - 10th August - Flower festival with a Thanksgiving service at 6pm on Sunday 7th August.

Sunday 4th september 10.30am - Patronal Festival with 'bring and share' food.

Friday 21st October 6pm - Harvest Festival Service followed by Harvest Supper at 7pm at Amy Robsart Hall.

### **Village Archives**

Space has been made in the Amy Robsart Hall to accommodate this burgeoning collection. The archives may be accessed by prior arrangement with Sheila Riches (01485 578181).

### **Obituaries**

David Newton passed away in February. David contributed greatly to the Syderstone archive with his writings about Syderstone and Bagthorpe where his grandparents lived. The stories about Horace and the mawkin and strange happenings at Syderstone Rectory are well worth reading.

Re. Mollie and Peter Edge of Somerleyton, Lowestoft. Mollie has been in touch with Avril to say that Peter died on October 15th 2015, aged 89. Their son Michael died suddenly on New Year's Eve, 2013 aged 61. Peter was a friend of Wally Musset of Somerleyton. Mollie now lives at 2, Favillea, The Street, Somerleyton, Lowestoft NR32 5PS.

Since our last meeting Sid Crisp of Harpley has passed away.

To the relatives and friends of those that have passed we extend our deepest sympathies and condolences.

## **'The Go Between'**

I am not an especially avid TV watcher but a week or so back I noted that 'The Go Between' was being shown. I duly tuned in and noticed that the lead was played by Tim Broadbent and not Michael Redgrave. What's this then?

It turned out to be a remake of the seventies film and not at all what I wanted to see. The seventies film was mainly shot in Norfolk with Melton Hall as the big house, a cricket match was staged at Thornage, Tombland in Norwich was featured and village shots were done at Heydon including a Wedding scene at Heydon Church. The star studded cast comprised Julie Christie, Alan Bates, Michael Redgrave, Michael Gough, Edward Fox and Dominic Guard the last named a child actor of whom I have heard nothing since. Oh, and Billy West and Charlie Winn. Billy West? Charlie Winn?

I should explain that Billy West was my uncle and Charlie Winn ran a nursery at Cley Road, Holt for many years. Uncle Billy got a part in the film as a result of his knowledge and interest in bell ringing. Charlie had a past as the gardener at the big house who had to say, 'Yes Madam' to Margaret Leighton, the lady of the house. Many other locals had parts as extras and in the seventies they were far more real Norfolk accents about which would have been in tune with the time that the film was set - the post Boer war years of the early 1900s.

I won't go into the story based on L.P Hartley's novel of the same title but it is a good tale although not a happy one. Uncle Billy's part is brief as one of the team of ringers at Heydon church who rang at the Wedding service. Things in films are not always as they seem. There are no bells at Heydon Church. Uncle explained that bell ropes were attached to elasticated cords in a mock up of a ringing chamber and the ringers had to pull down on these ropes as though they were handling a bell. It didn't convince everybody and some critical letters were written to the 'Ringing World'.

Uncle Billy's pal Nolan Golden was obliged to write a letter in their defence and I suppose that the critics were mollified. 'After All', explained Uncle, 'The bells that you heard on the film were rung by us ringers but they came from Wiveton Church some fifteen miles away. We gave them some good ringing just the same.' Uncle Billy was paid ten pounds a day for his attendance although there were a number of days when he was not required. 'Waste of time my man, waste of time.' I imagine that his conscience did not jib at pocketing his tenner just the same.

As far as I know he did not mingle with the stars but no doubt enjoyed a muddle with the other extras. I remember talking to my cousin Don (May's Brother) about this film, his response was typically irreverent. 'Oh yeah, Billy West and Charlie Winn are stars now. Charlie actually had a speaking part you know. Not exactly Hamlet's soliloquy but they'll all be wanting bloody Oscars now.' I've seen this film a number of times and it does not pall. It conjures up Edwardian Norfolk very well and fake ringing if not it certainly is not the worst thing my uncle ever did.

I have indoctrinated myself into the role of go between lately. My cousin May now lives at Westfield Care Home - Swaffham. In happier times she and her friend Nan spoke on the phone every week, visited and enjoyed outings together but lately Nan's driver, her niece Jane, has had to restrict her driving until she has an operation on her shoulder. This circumstance allied to May's poor sight and general frailty which prevent her writing at all prompted me to volunteer to be a link between them and although May cannot read anything I write I am quite happy for any visitor or member of the care staff to undertake this task.

If it helps to keep these old pals in touch then it will not be the worst thing I've ever done. – Ken Edge

## The History of Royal Air Force Bircham Newton



Soon after the birth of the Royal Air Force in April 1918, Bircham Newton was one of the first stations to be opened by the newly-formed Air Ministry. In May of that year the first flying unit, No. 3 Fighting School, arrived for a stay of six months. In the meanwhile a bomber force called the Independent Force was formed to bomb targets in Germany. Two of its squadrons of Handley Page V/1500 aircraft began to form at Bircham Newton, but due to delays in production and other problems, the Armistice was signed before any bombing operations took place. Bircham Newton remained a bomber station until 1936. Many famous squadrons spent varying periods on the station, and its bumpy grass airfield became familiar to hundreds of RAF pilots.

In 1936 Bircham Newton was transferred to Coastal Command to begin the maritime operations on which it was employed throughout the Second World War. Bircham Newton's flying units, which included Canadian, Dutch and Fleet Air Arm squadrons, flew convoy escort, anti-shiping, air-sea rescue, and photographic and meteorological reconnaissance missions. Some of its aircraft were also used to swell Bomber Command's strength during early mass-bomber raids. Flying units from Bircham Newton were also used to support the Dunkirk evacuation and the subsequent D-Day landings. With peace in 1945, Bircham Newton's maritime role came to an end.



When operational flying ceased at the end of the Second World War Bircham Newton was initially transferred to Fighter Command and a period of inactivity ensued. However, flying started again when the station was transferred to Transport Command in late 1946. Initially a BABS Flight arrived with supporting radio aids training units, to provide aircrew training on the Beam Approach Beacon

System. This was followed by the Transport Command Initial Conversion Unit, which provided introductory aircrew training, although no aircraft were involved. These units were disbanded prior to the station's transfer to Technical Training Command in October 1948.

The Officers' Advanced Training School was transferred to Bircham Newton in late 1948 and was quickly joined by the Secretarial and Equipment Officers' schools in the spring of 1949. With effect from mid-1951 the whole training establishment became known as the RAF School of Administration, responsible for training thousands of RAF officers and students from foreign and Commonwealth countries. The Officers' Advanced Training School subsequently became known as the Junior Command and Staff School in 1958. From 1959 until 1962 Bircham Newton was also the home of the Administrative Apprentices' Training School. This school provided 20 months of intense training for young men to learn their RAF trades of Clerk Secretarial, Pay Accountant or Supplier.



The RAF station was officially closed in December 1962, when the last graduation parade of aircraft apprentices was held and a Beating Retreat ceremony was conducted by the Central Band of the Royal Air Force and the Queen's Colour Squadron. The ceremony was attended by about 300 people, including several senior officers and other dignitaries. Marshals of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder and Lord Portal, who had both commanded Bircham Newton squadrons in the 1920s, were guests of honour.

Flying briefly returned to Bircham Newton in 1965, when the Tripartite Evaluation Squadron, based at West Raynham, used the former airfield as a landing ground while evaluating the Hawker Siddeley Kestrel V/STOL aircraft. In 1966 the Construction Industry Training Board (now CITB-ConstructionSkills) opened a training school on the site, the forerunner of the present National Construction College (East).

**ROYAL AIR FORCE BIRCHAM NEWTON HERITAGE CENTRE**

**and Memorial to those who served here from**

**1918-1962**

**OPEN DAYS for 2016**

**11am - 5pm**

**MARCH**

**Easter Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> Easter Monday 28<sup>th</sup>**

**MAY**

**Bank Holiday Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May**

**Spring Bank Holiday Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> May Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May**

**JUNE**

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June**

**JULY**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July**

**AUGUST**

**Summer Bank Holiday Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> August Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August**

**SEPTEMBER**

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September**

**Venue:- The National Construction College**

**Bircham Newton NW Norfolk PE31 6RB**

**NCC is signposted off the A148 and B1454**

**Come and discover the fascinating history of this former**

**Royal Air Force station and its satellite airfields.**

**Admission & parking FREE and Disabled access**

***Our website [www.rafbnmp.org.uk](http://www.rafbnmp.org.uk)***

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## Holt Bells

I mentioned previously that Uncle Billy (West) gained a cameo role in the 'Go Between' through his prowess as a bell ringer. He started young. When his voice broke and he could no longer sing in the choir at Erpingham the vicar suggested he see his cousin Charlie Newland to be initiated as a ringer. This he did but later rang regularly at Marsham a six mile walk away but the tower had more bells and offered greater opportunities to further his ringing.

He gained his ringers certificate in 1911 and it was framed and hung in his house during a long life. All bell ringing activity ceased on the outbreak of World War I and did not resume until the Armistice was signed in 1918. At the outbreak of war Uncle was working the flour mill at Scarrow Beck near Erpingham - this was a reserved occupation and he could have seen the war out in this role.

He felt that it was not right to do this and enlisted in the Essex regiment against his parents wishes. In due course he transferred to the Machine Gun Corps and when the war ended he had risen to the rank of Sergeant. He was home on leave when the news came through that the Armistice was to be signed. 'Will you come and ring with us Billy?' After more than four years of silence bells everywhere were rung with enthusiasm.

At Erpingham, Marsham, and Aylsham Uncle was involved to the full. 'I had a rare skinful of ringing that day but the occasion of the Armistice made it worthwhile.' The mill at Scarrow Beck had been closed by now and he resumed his occupation as a miller at Fakenham (probably with Sherringham and Overman). He made himself known to the ringers at Fakenham amongst which were the Cooke family (Jessie, Ted and their father), Charlie Whybrow, a Mr. Baldwin and Billy Basin. The last named Uncle pronounced Billy Bairson.

The band were a formidable group and Uncle knew he would not be able to break into it. He said, "The Fakenham ringers were about the best group around in the area at that time and they needed no help from me." In due course his job took him to Sculthorpe Mill where he worked under Jack Grey. He badly wanted to be his own boss and the opportunity came when the mill at Glandford on the River Glaven became vacant.

He was loaned a sum of money from the British Legion and began operating the mill there. He also farmed a few acres in the village as a tenant of the Bayfield estate the small farm extending from the west bank of the Glaven along the downs road to Wiveton road. The mill was his principal interest and he and Aunt Mary occupied one half of Mill Cottages and his parents Robert and Rachel lived in the other half.

He was visited one day by the local vicar Rev. Charles Toft who had responsibility for Cley, Wiveton as well as Glandford. Rev. Toft saw his ringing certificate and said that he ought to come along to St. Mary's, Wiveton where he would be welcomed. It was clear on arrival that the local band had little idea of what proper ringing was all about and Uncle Billy set about a course of training.

A good deal of spade work was necessary. Amongst the ringers at Wiveton was a World War I veteran, Johnny Bone, who had a crippled hand and travelled about the locality with a donkey and cart doing odd jobs around the local farms and frequently walking alongside the donkey. 'That old fella had to hitch himself up the steps of the bell tower to the ringing chamber on his backside. He couldn't climb steps in the normal way and he had to adopt a method of holding the bell rope with this crippled hand of his whilst using the good hand to pull the rope. He coped really well and proved to be quite a decent ringer.'

Uncle encouraged some new blood into the band and after a while they gelled into a satisfactory group. Uncle was prone to various chest ailments and was advised by his doctor, Dr. Acheson of

Blakeney to move away from the damp atmosphere of the Glaven otherwise he would not make old bones.

He moved to Norwich Rd, Holt in the early fifties. He had lived there some time and had got into the routine of ringing at Aylsham each Sunday. He had a visit from the Vicar of Holt. 'Are you a churchgoer Mr. West?', 'Yes, certainly.' 'How is it I never see you in church then?' 'Oh I go to Aylsham for the ringing.' 'Is there no ringing at Holt? Why is that?' 'I can't answer that, perhaps Holt people aren't bell minded.' 'Well maybe we can change that.' In due course a change was wrought but a number of hurdles had to be got over before this could happen.

*To be continued in the next issue – Ken Edge*

## **The Ball of Kirriemuir**

Several weeks ago, I was on a charity shop browse and acquired a CD Greensleeves and other songs of the British Isles sung by Kenneth McKellar. Most of the repertoire was familiar but not all. 'The Ball of Kirriemuir' rang no bells at all but when the bouncy tune began it took me back to my youth when some very bawdy verses were sung to this tune. I cannot remember them all and those that I can remember are not appropriate to include here for the perusal of our genteel readership.

Suffice to say that Kenneth McKellar sings a far more sanitised version. I was reading the comments against each song and under the 'Ball of Kirriemuir' found the following observations. 'This version of the famous ball is perhaps not one you know best but under the circumstances I think it better not to let you hear the original - Where the town's salty reputation comes from I don't know but it is certainly sustained by the story of a man who, in announcing his betrothal to a local beauty was told by his best friend. 'But she's been with every man in Kirriemuir', with his unconcerned reply following as 'Och aye! But Kirrie's only a wee place!' – Ken Edge

## **DVLA Scam - Drivers beware!**

Beware all of you who licence your vehicle online. If you receive an E-mail purporting to be from the DVLA asking you to update your details as they have a database problem, DON'T! It will tell you that if you fail to do so, your license will become invalid. It will ask you for your name, address, vehicle make along with your credit card details including your 3 digit security number. It certainly looks genuine and even has a real link to the DVLA website. IT IS A SCAM TO ROB YOU! Please share this with as many as you can! - I attach this verbatim from my local residents association newsletter. Spread the word. – Ken Edge

## **Looking forward to Summer?**

How nice is it to relax in the garden on a Sunny Sunday afternoon in Summer. One can't actually see the sun because the bloke in the next garden but three is burning tractor tyres and black smoke is billowing across. The birds are singing but they are drowned by a transistor radio in the next street. God knows what it is like near to! Ah better! Next door is mowing the lawn with that turbo charged machine and perhaps those screaming kids in the swimming pool at the bottom will eventually succeed in drowning each other. And now comes the high pitched buzz of some vandal cutting down a preserved tree (I wonder if he knows there is a maximum fine of £4000 for doing that). Meanwhile of course, that burglar alarm has now been ringing for four hours. At least there aren't any bits dropping off passing air liners - LOOK OUT!

*There's a lot to be said for Winter! George Nelson.*

**Thanks to past contributors to this newsletter. Any items for inclusion in the future to Ken Edge, 3 Haynes Road, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2HS. Email: Kenneth636@hotmail.com**