

## The Syderstonian

April, 2017

### Village News and events:

#### Amy Robsart Hall

Applications have been submitted to aid funding for the second phase of the hall heating system. This will entail placing radiators at each end of the hall. Funding has already been promised from one source, fingers crossed that the remaining applications are similarly successful.

#### World War I Project

Sheila is collaborating with Jean Kimber of the Imperial War Museum and details the twelve Syderstone men who were killed have been completed for inclusion on [www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org). Details of the eighty plus survivors will be completed over several weeks and submitted in due course.

#### Local History Fair

On the 30th of April and 1st of May the 1st Docking Heritage Group celebrates its 10th anniversary by holding a Local History Fair at the Ripper Hall, Docking between 10am and 5pm each day. This will include data from surrounding villages - Syderstone included.

#### RAF Bircham Newton Heritage Centre - Open days

*16th and 17th April.*

*30th of April and 1st May.*

*28th and 29th May.*

*25th of June.*

*30th of July.*

*27th and 28th of August.*

*24th of September.*

Opening times between 10am - 4pm. Entry free. Further details on [www.rafbnmp.org.uk](http://www.rafbnmp.org.uk) or contact Avril from 01326 860139 / [avril.macarthur1@btinternet.com](mailto:avril.macarthur1@btinternet.com) or alternatively contact David Jacklin from 01379 741884 / [david.jacklin@outlook.com](mailto:david.jacklin@outlook.com)

## **St. Mary's Church**

Good Friday 10am (14th April) Student cross Pilgrimage from Ely to Walsingham with refreshments at Amy Robsart Hall until 11.30am all welcome.

1st May Archdeacons charge. A race over 2-3 miles in the grounds of Wolferton Hall the archdeacon the venerable John Ash and the rector of Syderstone, Rev. Clive Wylie are taking part among many others - sponsors welcomed.

12th May 7pm Bangers and Mash Supper at Amy Robsart Hall.

4th June 4pm Evensong at All saints, Barmer.

25th June Open Gardens 1.30 pm - 5.30 pm.

5th - 9th August - Flower festival.

6th August Evensong, St Mary's with bring and share supper.

3rd Sept. Following 11am service a bring and share lunch.

20th October Harvest Festival and Harvest Supper in the AR. Hall.

## **Obituary**

17th March at Westfields Care Home - May Allen, my dear old cousin, aged 95. May has been my companion to so many O.S reunions. In spite of failing mobility, sight and hearing, she remained alert with memory intact till the last. I shall miss her more than I can say and will pay a full tribute in the next issue. (Ken Edge)

## **Celebrations at 'The Limit'**

At our last meeting in October Walter Havers was telling me about a celebration he attended at 'The Limit', when he was a lad of ten. The central figures were none other than George V and Queen Mary. They had come to Syderstone to plant a tree on the grass verge outside 'The Limit' to commemorate their Silver Jubilee. I remember that tree which was protected by metal railings around its trunk although I do not think that there was any plaque attached to mark the occasion.

'Were you given time off school to attend this', I asked Walter, 'Must have been, I was there!' 'I saw it all, George V dug the hole.' The planting in all probability consisted of shovelling a few spade full's of soil around its roots leaving somebody better qualified to finish the job. 'The Limit' was the name given to the railway carriage which adapted as a home and marked the western extent of the village.

'Was the railway carriage there at the time?' 'Oh, yes and the blacksmith's shop next door.' In my time in the village the blacksmith's shop did duty as a garage. It had a pantiled roof and the walls were of a wooden creosoted clap board construction. There were no working blacksmiths based in Syderstone then. The first occupier of 'The Limit' that I knew was a lady called Miss or probably Mrs. Bowles.

I cannot remember if she lived there alone or with another lady. In the early 1950's the Green family moved there from Dersingham. Jim, Doris their daughter June and son George. June and George were cousins of David and John Greeves who lived next door to me. Overtime I became friendly with George and received an invitation to his birthday at 'The Limit'. Inside it seemed like a normal home with an extension to the rear which served as a kitchen.

Amongst the delicacies served at the party were some lovely little confections made from cornflakes and chocolate which all held together to form a bite sized mouthful or two mouthfuls for the daintily inclined. It was here on this occasion that I first tasted crab apple jelly. On the tree the crab apple is an attractive enough fruit and at t time it could be found in the hedgerows and the edge of Coxford wood.

In the mouth it was as sour as any lemon and would make your mouth pucker and shrink with an absolutely juddering sourness. When formed into a jelly it took on a warm rosy pink colour but that hedgerow sourness was an unforgettable experience. 'Do try it, Kenny', said Mrs. Green. 'When it's been cooked with lots of sugar it's nothing like a raw crab apple.' I was tempted. Mrs. Green was right, it was lovely. Mrs. Green had wrought a marvellous transformation on that sour fruit.

Jim Green ran a taxi service in the village and changed his cars regularly. I remember a pre-war Wolseley 12 (EUW 435), a Hillman limousine with partition and speaking tube, a post war Austin 16, a large Jaguar and a Humber Hawk. My dad bought the Wolseley 12 and later the Humber Hawk which both gave us good service. All these cars were black and all were immaculate. George learned how to handle a chamois leather at an early age and must take much credit for the good appearance of the cars.

It was probably in the early 1960s that Jim and Doris had a bungalow built down the Tattersett Road and left 'The Limit.' It is only in recent times that 'The Limit', has been removed and the surrounding land has been built on and new houses have sprung up. It would be interesting to know when 'The Limit', first became a home and who has lived there over what must have been a long period of time. Can anybody help with that?

Since this was originally drafted Sheila (Riches) has told me that the railway carriage was bought by Mr. Edgar Couzens from the railway company at Melton Constable in 1926 and was brought to Syderstone on a steam driven lorry. It was removed from the site to make room for housing in recent years. The old carriage still survives at Whitwell and Reepham Railway museum. The tree, a line still exists and thrives although the railings a long time gone.

In the October newsletter I mentioned that my cousin, Vic Todd and I were putting together the story of his brother, Eric.

*Ken Edge.*

## **Adventure Of An Old Norfolk Boy**

Eric William John Todd was born at Barmer in 1924. The elder son of Bill and Bessie Todd (Nee Havers) His father was based at RAF Bircham Ilewton, The family lived at Barn cottages, Syderstone until about 1934 which meant that Eric attended the village school, being taught by Miss Lena Parrot.

When Eric was about nine years old his father was posted to RAF Martlesham in Suffolk and later to the experimental station in Felixstowe which meant that the family moved there, Eric, his sister Cissie and young Vic who was then two years old. At the age of fourteen Eric left school and was employed as a "bell boy" in the Felix Hotel. But he was unable to settle into hotel life. For a while he had experienced the 'Call of the Sea!' He then obtained a job as deck hand on the pleasure boats that operated from the beach of Felixstowe.

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939 all small craft were taken by the admiralty to be used as ship tenders or service vessels. Eric stayed with a vessel for a while working in the Orwell River and operating out of Harwich. Eventually he got a job as cook on board the steam tug-stronghold but one day the captain called him to his cabin and asked if he worked for the Germans!

The time had come for Eric to move on so he joined the merchant navy and became a fully fledged seaman during the rest of the war years, he was on over twenty of the North Atlantic convoys and travelled all over the world.

After the war, he left the merchant navy and joined the Post Office eventually becoming a telegraphist working in London, where he met his first wife, Sheila, marrying in 1947. After a while, Eric who was basically a country boy found city life too much it was then that he decided to return to Norfolk, and work on a farm. Many of his Havers cousins thought he was barmy!

Unable to settle, Eric and Sheila made the decision to become "ten pound poms", and emigrate to Australia. They sailed from London in 1956 on board the Orcades, which was bound for Melbourne; about 104 years before they sailed one of his mother Bessie distant great uncles, Isaac Havers, sailed with his family, It was in 1852 that they left England. On board the vessel 'Shackamason', the voyage took 3 months, the family settled and multiplied and today there are many Havers families in Australia.

Eric and Sheila settled in the Melbourne area and eventually had two daughters. After a try at nut farming, he enlisted in the Victoria State Police, where he served for 35 years until a heart problem forced him into early retirement. He then became a private detective, sadly about this time Eric and Sheila parted.

However, he did find happiness again with his second marriage. During his time in Australia he had joined the merchant navy association and after went on trips to the states and on these he met a lady named Queenie, who had been ex - G.I. bride from England. He moved there and married her, after settling in Florida and later to Philadelphia to be near her family.

Sadly, Queenie passed away last spring, she was in her 90s. Eric missed his family in Australia and last November moved back there to be cared for by his daughter, he will be 93 this year. Vic is able to keep in touch with him via Skype. Eric still remembers his Syderstone schooldays. He is still an 'Old Norfolk Boy' at heart!

*Carole Gilham with details supplied by Vic Todd.*

## **The Mildenhall Treasure**

In January, 1942, the war raged in Europe and the allies were getting the worst of it. The tide would not begin to turn for many months yet. Gordon Butcher drew back his bedroom curtains and peeked out on to a gloomy windswept scene. The wind was gathering strength and would reach gale force before long. Gordon put on his heavy working clothes and boots and got on his bike and pedalled into the teeth of the burgeoning north Easter which was said to bring snow before the days end.

He had been hired to plough a field known as Thistley Green in the village of West Row adjoining Mildenhall. He had been hired by Syd Ford, a local agricultural engineer and contractor to plough this field for sugar beet on behalf of the farmer Mr. Rolfe. The previous crop had been for barley and the rotting, grey coloured barley stubble covered the field at present. Ploughing for sugar beet meant setting the plough to a depth of one foot.

For barley just a four inch depth was enough. Gordon Butcher was in the habit of hitching his plough to his tractor with a wooden peg so if it struck a heavy flint or old tree root the peg would snap and separate the tractor without costly damage to the ploughshare. Gordon set to work in the teeth of the gale well wrapped in his heavy overcoat, scarf and gloves turning the old barley stubble under. At midday he sought the shelter of the largest tractor wheel on the lee side to eat his bread and cheese. The slices of bread were quite large and the portions of cheese rather small. To wash it down he had a bottle of cold water. He had dropped his flash a fortnight earlier and being wartime he could not get a replacement for love or money,

Times were hard. He resumed his ploughing while blowing for all it was worth. At about 3pm the plough gave a slight jolt and parted company from the tractor. Gordon got down to see what had caused the problem. He scooped the earth from the ploughshare with his gloved hands and found the circular rim of a large object about the size of a bicycle wheel. To make further headway he would need a spade. He decided to call on Syd Ford at Grove Villa. Syd Ford was a bit higher in the local pecking order than Gordon being an agricultural contractor and a repairer of implements and mechanical equipment. He was a bachelor and lived alone in the large house and over a long period of time had become a collector of Roman artefacts which he had found by working the land in the locality.

He had amassed a collection of flint arrowheads, fragments of Roman pottery, a few coins some of which he sold to various keen collectors in the area. He had the reputation of a keen amateur collector and was always interested to see any local 'finds'. As Gordon Butcher approached Ford's house the first snowflakes began to fall. 'Are you about Mr. Ford', called out Gordon. 'What's up Gordon?', shouted Ford from his workshop. Gordon explained how the plough had struck something large and that a spade was needed. Syd Ford was well aware that ancient artefacts were not uncommonly found in this area and that in 1932 an archaeological dig had uncovered the foundations of a Roman Villa nearby. Gordon butcher did not know this.

His interests were confined to the well being of his family, his livestock and his small business. His knowledge of ancient people, their coinage and their utensils and weapons was scant. It was snowing with a vengeance when the two men set out for Thisley Green. 'Just what we need, a bloody blizzard' muttered Ford. Steady work with spade gradually uncovered more of the concealed 'wheel'. 'This don't look a mutcher Gordon. Just some old rusty metal.' 'What's the green deposit on it?'. 'Oh that'll be green rust.' By dint of some hard work and digging with hands and spade a large plate was disinterred heedless of the snow and stinging wind further plates, bowls, spoons, drinking

vessels came to the surface. A fabulous total of thirty four pieces all exquisitely crafted. Such craftsmanship would hardly be wasted on base metal, these were in all probability silver - Roman silver, and worth a King's ransom. Thousands, millions even! Ford was in a state of excitement which he did his best to play down. 'Got anything I can cart these back in, Gordon?' 'Just an old sack.' Between them they filled the sack. In the darkening light the objects appeared a greenish grey all having a liberal coating of soil.

'Don't suppose you want of this old stuff, Gordon?' said Syd Ford, who shouldering the sack and carrying the largest plate in his free hand set off for his house without waiting for his companions reply. It is important to realise how the law related to treasure trove. The law states that if a person digs up out of the ground, even out of his own garden, a piece of metal that is either gold or silver, it automatically becomes Treasure Trove and the property of the Crown. '

Crown' does not actually mean the Queen or King it means the country of government. The law also states that it is a criminal offence to conceal such a find. You are simply not allowed to hide it or keep it for yourself. You must report it to the police at once and if you do report it at once, you as the finder will be entitled to receive from the government in money the full market value of the article. You are not required to report digging up of any other metals. You allowed to find as much pewter, bronze, copper or even platinum as you wish and you can keep it all, but not gold or silver.

The other curious part of this law is that the person who discovers the treasure in the first place gets the reward from the government. The owner of the land gets nothing unless the finder is trespassing on the land when he makes the discovery. However, if the finder of the treasure has been hired by the owner to do a job on his land, then he the finder, gets all the reward. In this case Gordon Butcher would have been eligible for the reward in its entirety. He and nobody else. He would receive from the government one hundred percent of its value, possibly as much as a million pounds.

All this left Ford out in the cold and Ford knew it. In law he had no claim to any reward whatever. Just as surely Butcher did not know this and would have gone along with any suggestion that Sydney Ford would have made concerning the find, trusting soul that he was. Gordon Butcher reached home frozen to the marrow where his wife had to help him out of his clothes and told him what a fool he had been to spend so much time out in the cold recovering this old junk from the field. Following a mild character assassination of Sydney Ford the matter of the discovery was barely mentioned by the two of them again. Not at least for another four years.

During these four years Syd Ford spent much time cleaning, polishing and burnishing these magnificent objects to dazzling perfection. He kept them in a back room away from the gaze of any visitor and no doubt took much private enjoyment and pleasure from them,. Who knows whether or not he ate his porridge from the bowls or his kippers from the plates or drank his beer from the handsome goblets. All this private and selfish indulgence ended in 1946 with a visit from Dr. Fawcett. Dr Hugh Alderson Fawcett was a learned archaeologist who had visited Ford before the war and bought various items from him such as arrowheads.

'Do you have anything of interest for me Mr. Ford?' Ford produced a box of flint arrowheads and Fawcett selected the best ones and a deal was struck. 'Do you have anything else?' 'No, I don't think so.' Just then to his horror and chagrin Ford noticed that he had left two silver spoons on the

mantelpiece from the treasure horde. He tried to block Fawcett's view by placing himself in the way, but Fawcett's sharp eyes alighted upon them. 'Good heavens alive! What are these?' 'Pewter', said Ford, 'Just a couple of pewter spoons.' 'Never,' said Fawcett. 'Do you know what these really are?' 'They're Pewter,' said Ford 'Not bad either.' 'Not bad, not bad, they're magnificent. The names on them, 'Papittedo' and 'Pascentia'. These are Roman names. This is solid Roman silver. These are treasure trove. 'Where did you get them from? This is vitally important. Are there any other pieces?'. The questions came thick and fast.

Ford buckled. 'The British museum will want these for certain. How long have you had them?' 'A little while,' Ford answered lamely. Ford realising the game was up produced the other pieces from the sideboard. 'You must report this finding to the police at once, promise me you will do this without any delay.' 'Well...' Ford hesitated. 'If you don't then I must, it is my duty. 'I really thought this was Pewter,' Ford explained. Fawcett was speechless at the sight of the whole hoard.

He held the pieces in shaking hands thoroughly overwhelmed by the discovery. Ford made his report to the police at Mildenhall who collected all thirty four pieces which were sent under guard to the British Museum for examination. The museum declared it by far and away the finest Roman silver ever found in the British isles. It was of enormous value, following the inquest Ford and Butcher were declared joint finders in due course were awarded £1,000 each.

These notes are compiled from Roald Dahl's 'The Mildenhall Treasure'. Dahl felt strongly that Gordon Butcher had been cheated out of his due reward and told Butcher that when he sold his story to his American Publisher he would share the proceeds with Butcher fifty - fifty. He was as good as his word. Within a week he received a letter from the grateful Gordon Butcher written on paper that had probably been torn from a child's exercise book. 'I was staggered to receive your cheque. I just had to write to thank you. Gordon Butcher.' The townsfolk of Mildenhall, in due course raised sufficient funds to have copies made of the treasure which bears the town's name and is proudly displayed in the local museum. The original which lay buried in West Row for hundreds of years is on exhibition at the British Museum.

*Ken Edge.*

*Thanks to present and past contributors. Any items for inclusion to Ken Edge (01708 440063), Email Kenneth636@hotmail.com.*