

'The Syderstonian'

April 2018

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St. Mary's Church

28th April - 7pm Himstanton Community Choir at St. Mary's, South Creake. £6 on the door.

10th June - 4pm All Saints, Barmer. Annual service with refreshments after.

30th June - 2.30pm - 4pm Amy Robsart Hall, cream teas.

21st July - Wed. 25th July. 10am - 5pm Flower Festival - No open garden this year!

Amy Robsart Hall

Sheila pointed out that the present reunion will be the 25th meeting since April, 2006. Since that time the hall committee have overseen many improvements to this elderly building making it comfortable and appropriate resource for the 21st century while retaining many original features. There are projects to replace some decaying brickwork and to iron out some minor imperfections in the heating system.

Obituaries

Mildred Nobbs (Mickey Langley) passed away at the end of 2017.

Ethel 'Babs' Hewilt of Tarrersett Rd, died whilst in care at Ingoldisthorpe aged 93 years.

Barry Wells of Syderstone in March. Barry was church warden at St. Mary's, Syderstone for a member of years and also a committee member of Amy Robsart Hall. He organised churchyard working parties, fund raising, and was an indefatigable worker with a 'hands on' attitude. Barry will be missed and we wish St. Mary's success in securing his worthy successor.

To the families and friends of those departed we offer our condolences.

Caister men never turn back

There have been lifeboats at Caister since 1794. Firstly, with the Caister Beach Company who provided the crews that formed the foundation of the lifeboat service in 1845. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution took over the station in 1857 and ran it until 1969 when they pulled out having decided that the Caister lifeboat was superfluous. Feelings in the town ran high and the townsfolk decided that they would have a lifeboat come what may.

The following year, Caister Volunteer Rescue Service was formed later to become Caister Volunteer Lifeboat service, an independent organisation who run the station to this very day.

For more than 200 years generations of Caister men have braved the elements and risked their lives in the very harshest of conditions in the pursuit of saving their fellow seafarers. It is a story of courage, determination, triumph and tragedy. In the town cemetery is a white marble monument bearing the names of nine crew members of the lifeboat 'Beauchamp'. During the night of 13/14th of November, 1901 James Haylett Jnr. the lifeboat coxswain was on watch in the lookout with crew member Robert Green. Just before 11pm they sighted a distress signal from the cockle lightship in the direction of Barber Sands.

They rang the bell and the crew assembled on the beach. In a howling North Westerly gale, blinding rain and pitch dark, the crew tried in vain to launch the boat. It took almost three hours to get the 'Beauchamp' afloat and through the heavy breakers. While struggling with the sails a heavy sea knocked the boat back on to the beach. As the crew struggled to get her round again a large wave struck the starboard quarter capsizing the boat trapping the crew underneath. Men on the beach ran forward and found the lifeboat with both masts gone lying bottom upwards with large waves breaking over her.

Haylett despite being 78 years old ran into the raging seas pulling Charles Knights free from ropes entangling his legs. His grandson Frederick who had followed him into the surf pulled John Hubbard clear of the wreck before returning to rescue James' other grandson, Walter Haylett. In spite of their courageous efforts there were only three survivors. Eight bodies were later recovered at the scene and one other Charles 'Bonney' George was recovered in April the following year at Kessingland having been washed away. He was only identified by the darning in his socks and a label in his shirt.

The crewmen lost that night were Aaron Walter Haylett, James Haylett Jnr., William Brown, Charles Brown, William Wilson, John Smith, George King, Charles George, and Harry Knights. This single disaster had left 43 children without fathers. At the inquest into their deaths the coroner asked James Haylett Snr., 'I suppose they had given up the job and were returning', He replied 'They would never give up the ship. If they had to keep at it 'til now, they would have sailed about until daylight to help her going back in against the rules when we see distress signals like that.'

The response was paraphrased by journalists to become the famous phrase, 'Caister men never turn back.' For their courage James Haylett Snr. was awarded the RNLi gold medal and Frederick Haylett received the RNLi Life Saving Diploma. Ironically, it became clear afterwards that there was no need for the 'Beauchamp' to have been launched at all that night. The flares which had been sighted from the lookout had been set off by the skipper of a yawl to replace an extinguished navigation light, The yawl had safely anchored and ridden out the storm and had resumed their journey in daylight unaware of the tragic events taking place on shore.

The effect on the families who had lost their breadwinners was catastrophic. The mayor, Colonel Diver, convened a meeting tasked with raising a relief fund to support the widows and children of the lifeboat men. By mid December 1902 more than £10,000 had been raised it was decided to close the fund. Cash widow received twelve shillings a week. The eldest daughter of James Henry Haylett, the mother of George King, the parents of Harry Knights, and the mother of Charles and William Brown would each receive ten shillings per week. Each child was given half a crown a week up to the age of sixteen and each survivor received a one off payment of twenty pounds. The last of these payments finished in 1985 when Alice Brown, Charles Brown's daughter, died at the age of 93.

From the balance of the fund two memorials were raised to the lost men. The stained glass window in the village church reads 'To the glory of God and in memory of nine brave men. November 14th, 1901. The other is of Carrara marble in the village graveyard. Around the broken mast are nine stones bearing the names of the lost men, which are placed in the positions they occupied in the boat.

The 'Beauchamp' was launched in 1892 and built at a cost of £266.35 by J.H Critten of Great Yarmouth and was considered a fine boat and could easily have been returned to service. The tragedy, however, was still fresh in the minds of the survivors. She was sold by the RNLI and spent the rest of her working years as a houseboat on the Broads before being broken up in 1966.

In 1964 the 'Royal Thames' a brand new Oakley class lifeboat was named by Lord Ailwyn, Vice Chairman of the RNLI, he said that no station in the country had a finer record. In spite of this the RNLI made a decision to close Caister lifeboat station in 1969. 'Skipper' Jack Woodhouse a crew member and lifeboat mechanic for 37 years answered his door to a newspaper reporter who asked him for his comments on the closure of Caister lifeboat station. He said, 'I can't believe that it's happening. There will be people drowned if we don't have a boat at Caister.' That weekend two rescues were carried out by the lifeboat.

In spite of protests the decision was final and planning began to maintain a lifeboat service independent of the RNLI. When Admiral Wilfred Woods, Chairman of the RNLI management committee visited Caister he commented to Jack Woodhouse that it costs a lot of money to run a station. 'How do you expect to raise that sort of money?' Quick as a flash Jack replied, 'Tell a good tale like you admiral.' For 112 years the RNLI had operated the Caister lifeboat station saving 1,814 people, a British record. On 17th of October 1969 the Royal Thames left the station in calm seas and left to become a part of the RNLI reserve fleet.

Determined that the service should continue the crew placed one of 'Skipper' Jack Woodhouse's boats on standby to answer any emergency. By 1971 an inshore lifeboat was in service thanks largely through money raised by students of the High School whose head teacher, Harry Pascoe, was himself a crew member. The committee knew that an off-shore lifeboat was needed and a concentrated effort was made to raise the money. An ex-RNLI lifeboat, which had been in service at St.Abbs Head, Berwick, was purchased and following refurbishment and the acquisition of a tractor the new boat was named 'Shirley Jean Adye' on the 5th of August, 1973.

In 1987 it was decided that a new lifeboat was needed and an appeal was launched. £400,000 was needed over the next four years 'to keep the boat afloat.' By the following week more than £12,000 had been received. Fund raising activities continued with the support of the media throughout that summer but by October the appeal was losing momentum. In December Bernard Matthews visited the station and met 'Skipper' Jack Woodhouse. He took to Jack and pledged his support. The Prince of Wales visited in 1988 to boost the appeal.

Fired up by the support the appeal committee bought a fibre glass hull and deck cabin from the Lochin Marine boatyard in Rye. Offers of equipment and services came in from many companies and donations continued. The comedian Jim Davidson gave support to such an extent that he was elected an honorary member of the crew.

Alan Goodchild's boatyard in Great Yarmouth fitted out and tested the boat. The finished boat was named 'Bernard Matthews' by HRH Princess Alexandra on the 18th of June 1991. The 'Bernard Matthews' was involved in a number of rescues two of which were especially noteworthy. Jack Woodhouse died in October 1999 and the lifeboat men were devastated. On the 18th of October the crew met to discuss his funeral when a call to launch came to assist a Lithuanian yacht.

'Barracuda' which ran aground on Scroby Sands in a force 8 gale. The yacht was pummelled unmercifully but a tow was established and the yacht taken into Yarmouth. Arrangements were made for the six people on board to be fed and housed at the Seamens Mission. On the following day all six had disappeared never to be seen again. The second rescue began on the 15th of February, 2001 at 2.30am. The 'Kilgas Cenurion' with 1,026 tonnes of liquid gas on board was beached at Honey Gap. Tugs arrived to salvage the carrier. After 24 hours at sea the lifeboat returned to harbour to refuel and then returned to the casualty.

At 11.45am the following day a tow commenced and at 2.43pm the ship was pulled free. The lifeboat had been constantly working with the tugs and eventually arrived back at Caister thirty eight a half hours after launching. The longest service record for the Caister Station. From 2001 a search began to find a new lifeboat to meet the needs of the 21st century. The committee thought that a jet powered boat might be the answer. Coxswain Dick Thurlow and Chairman Harry Barker visited RNLI HQ at Poole to see what researched had been done. At Poole they met at retired RNLI inspector, David Stogdon who had designed a jet boat which was in Service at Holland.

Early in 2002 crew member John Cannell was in hospital. In the next bed was Major John Buxton who was a friend of David Stogdon. This chance meeting caused David Stogdon to visit Caister where he met John Cannell and second Coxswain, Paul Williams and spoke of a new design that he thought would be perfect for Caister. He admitted that when he had been an RNLI inspector it had been his job to close the station Caister in 1969. Although now in his 80's David was keen to be involved in the new project and introduced Caister to the Dutch Rescue Service KNRM.

Visits were made to Holland and the Katwijk's Valentijn 2000 lifeboat came to Caister to exercise with the 'Bernard Matthews'. This was successful to the extent that Caister decided to adopt the design of the Valentijn 2000 for it's new lifeboat and an appeal was launched to raise £900,000 on 12th March, 2003. Harry Barker introduced Jon Davidson to Bernard Matthews - the first time the two men had met. For eighteen months work was carried out at a frantic pace. A new carriage was designed by Roodberg of Holland. A new lifeboat house was designed and named 'Skipper' Jack Woodhouse.

The new vessel came on service in October, 2004, and performed its first rescue on the 12th of October. On the 26th of July, 2005, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall named the first jet powered lifeboat in this country - 'Bernard Matthews 2'. With a speed of 37 knots and fantastic manoeuvrability the new boat has become the flagship of modern lifeboat design and the first 'Bernard Matthews' continues its life saving at Blyth, Northumberland.

Ken Edge.

Royal Air Force History at Bircham Newton

The Heritage Centre at Bircham Newton has a unique collection of memorabilia from the former Royal Air Force station's past service, which spanned more than 44 years, including two world wars and the Cold War. On display are photographs and personal memories of servicemen who served there and other related items from its fascinating history. The Centre is manned and run entirely by volunteers, many of whom are ex-servicemen or children of service personnel. Close by there are two stone memorials to remember those who served at Bircham Newton and its main satellite airfield near Docking. This year's schedule of Heritage Centre openings is included below:

Easter: Sunday, 1st of April and Monday, 2nd of April.

Early May Bank Holiday Weekend: Sunday, 6th and Monday, 7th of May.

Veterans' Day: Saturday, 19th of May starting at 1 p.m.

Spring Bank Holiday Weekend: Sunday, 27th and Monday, 28th of May.

Last Sunday in June: 24th of June.

Last Sunday in July: 29th of July.

Summer Bank Holiday Weekend: Sunday, 26th and Monday, 27th of August.

Last Sunday in September: 30th of September.

Opening times are from 10am to 4pm

Entrance is **FREE**

Disabled access and toilet facilities are also provided. More details can be obtained from the Heritage Centre website www.rafbnmp.org.uk

Venue:- The National Construction College

Bircham Newton NW Norfolk PE31 6RB

NCC is signposted off the A148 and B1454 Contact David Jacklin Tel. 01379 741884 e-mail: david.jacklin@outlook.com Avril MacArthur Tel. 01362 860139 e-mail: avril.macarthur1@btinternet.com

Royal Air Force Bircham Newton Veterans' Day on 19th May, 2018

Hawker Hinds at Bircham Newton mid 1930s.jpg

Hawker Hinds flying over Royal Air Force Bircham Newton

Saturday, 19th of May 2018 starting at 1 p.m.

In addition to being the centenary of the birth of the Royal Air Force, 2018 will also be the 100th anniversary of the birth of the former RAF station at Bircham Newton. The first unit to fly from its airfield, No. 3 Fighting School, arrived in May 1918, just one month after the birth of the Royal Air Force. The Fighting School was soon joined by a second unit flying giant Handley Page bombers, designed to bomb Germany from this Norfolk airfield. Flying continued beyond the Armistice and throughout the inter-war years, increasing dramatically during the second World War. The station was finally closed in the early 1960s, during the height of the Cold War, but flying briefly returned in the mid-1960s, when trials of the Kestrel jump jet were conducted on the airfield.

The event will be open to all former servicemen, who served or were trained at Bircham Newton, and their close families. The largest group of visitors is expected to be former RAF administrative apprentices, who trained at Bircham Newton in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but many other veterans are also expected to attend, such as former national servicemen, former members of the Women's Royal Air Force and officers who were trained at the Officers' Advanced Training School (OATS) or its successor the Junior Command and Staff School (JCSS).

There will be many attractions for the veterans and their families to enjoy: the RAF Heritage Centre will be open for guided tours; an illustrated talk will be given on the role of Bircham Newton during the Great War; local history groups and service associations have been invited along to exhibit their material; military vehicles and large-scale model aircraft should be on display; local ATC squadrons and the Royal British Legion have also been invited to participate in a brief end-of-day ceremony, when the RAF ensign will be lowered to the sound of the Last Post. Tea, coffee and other refreshments will be available throughout the afternoon. It is also hoped to organise a short flypast, if possible.

Entrance will be free and free car parking will be provided. Disabled access and toilets will also be available, and help will be given to those with mobility problems. Further details on our website:- www.rafbnmp.org Our postcode is PE31 6R

A Half Crown Well Saved

It is more than 20 years ago since our Haynes Road neighbour Roy Neale passed away. Roy and his brother lived with their parents in their bungalow from the time it was new in 1928. They had settled in after a few weeks when a man from the council called one evening to enquire if they would be willing to contribute to the cost of a tree being planted on the pavement outside.

'How much?' asked Roy's father. 'Half a crown (13p) would pay for the tree and planting', said the council officer, 'Half a crown!', 'Half a bloody crown!' expostulated Mr. Neale Senior, 'No chance!' In due course a lime tree was planted in front of the house next door at their neighbours at number 5. It blew down in the hurricane in October 1987 falling into the front garden crushing the front of one car whilst its upper branches engulfed a second vehicle.

Roy reflected that perhaps his dad had been wise not to spend the half crown after all. 'You see in those days three pounds a week was a good wage,' said Roy.

On that we close another edition of The Syderstonian, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all previous and current contributors and would welcome any further contributions to the newsletter, please contact via telephone 01708 440063, or Email: Kenneth636@hotmail.com. Thanks for reading!

Ken Edge, 3 Haynes Rd, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2HS.