

## 'The Syderstonian October 2018'

### St Mary's Church

**Friday 19th October** - Harvest service and supper from 6pm in St. Mary's Church and after in the Amy Robsart Hall. Tickets £6 per head from Dizzy Goff (01485 578527). Firm bookings taken and pre-booked tickets on sale at Coffee Morning in Amy Robsart Hall on Wednesday 17th October.

**Sunday 4th November** - 'Momentous Times' - 3pm at North Creake Church - What links the experience of a German schoolgirl, an American opera singer, a Scottish charity worker, a English Governess in Moscow and the third woman to climb Popocatepetl? Share the dramatised experiences of this diverse group of women living in Europe during the hazardous years of World War I.

Tickets £10 on the door to include Tea and Cake. Proceeds to be shared between the Benefice Church (including St. Marys, Syderstone) and the British Red Cross.

**Saturday 24th November** - Christmas Bazaar 10.30 am - 2pm in the Amy Robsart Hall. Coffee morning and light lunches. Festive stalls/Tombola/Christmas Hamper Raffle/Cakes and produce Free entrance to include a ticket to a special hamper raffle for all those supporting the event!

**Friday 21st December** - Carol Service 6pm at St. Mary's Church. 'Sing along' then stay for mulled wine and mince pies.

**Monday 24th December** - First Mass of Christmas - 10pm at St. Mary's Church.

### Amy Robsart Hall

Since these reunions began in 2006, and indeed even earlier, the Hall Committee have instituted and overseen an impressive number of improvements to the building and its facilities. This work never ends. The heating upgrade is now complete. A grant has been applied for to upgrade the Cine equipment. A decision should be known soon.

**Remembrance Day - Sunday 11th November** 10.50am A short act of remembrance will be held in the churchyard by the war memorial to commemorate the service of those who fought in both world wars. A survey of brickwork is taking place and any defective brickwork will be replaced!

### Entertainment at Downing Street

During my police service at Dagenham faces changed from time to time through transfers. These might be as a result of promotion or moving to an area where it would subsequently impractical to travel to the former police Station. Very occasionally somebody might transfer 'under a cloud'. John arrived from Cannon Row as a result of the second reason. Cannon Row covered many of the popular tourist attractions, the Palace of Westminster (Houses of parliament), Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace and Downing Street had dedicated police staff but occasionally, John said, during staff shortages through holidays PC's from Cannon Row would fill the gaps.

During such a situation John and a colleague found themselves posted to Downing Street on night duty. They were posted inside the building and up to midnight they oversaw the coming and going of a few civilian staff but during the small hours there was very little to do. Their boredom drove them to cast around to see how they could best amuse themselves and pass the time. Under a staircase amongst the raincoats and umbrellas they found a small bag of golf clubs. These were examined and a full complement of golfing paraphernalia emerged.

By laying a police helmet on its side on the plush carpet it was possible to putt the ball into the helmet with a satisfying rattle. Thus the nights entertainment evolved and the time passed most satisfactory. After some time footsteps were heard on the stairs and a voice boomed 'What's this?' Summing up the situation the voice said 'I say, what fun. Give us a go!' He was clearly an experienced player and took pains to show these two coppers how to adopt the correct stance and grip and a friendly competition ensued.

After some time movement on the floor above caused the gentleman golfer to examine his watch. 'I say chaps we must pack this stuff up. Sorry to be a party pooper and I have enjoyed our game but Margaret will be down in a moment and if she catches us there'll be hell to pay'. The putters and balls were tidied up, helmets placed on heads and the two coppers thanked Sir Denis Thatcher for his company and golfing tips. Sir Denis winked as he retreated upstairs. *Ken Edge*.

### **Time Team Dig On Reedham Marshes**

I have watched a number of 'Time Team' digs over the years but the one that made the deepest impression on me was the Reedham Marshes dig. In February 1944, some 300 American bombers were returning from a mission in Germany. Whilst only a short distance from their base a group of three flying in close formation were involved in a tragic collision involving two of the B17's. Both aircraft plummeted to the earth in Reedham Marshes. All twenty one crew were killed. What happened? It was the Time Team aim to excavate one of the aircraft in the hope this would yield clues and to further discover as much as possible about the two crews.

The dig was complicated by a number of factors. The precise location of the crash was identified late and this turned out to be a site of special scientific interest which meant gaining special permissions and more importantly specific surveys had to be completed before the dig could take place. It was worrying for the programme makers who were concerned that their budget might be swallowed up in satisfying all the conditions likely to be laid down. Should this happen the dig might have to be abandoned or else subsequent planned programmes would suffer. It became obvious at an early stage that local experienced drainage engineers would have to be used.

Any water displaced would be collected in holding pools to enable the scientists to test for contamination by oil, aircraft fuel and suchlike. It was anticipated, quite correctly, that a quantity of live ammunition would be recovered and the RAF provided an expert to deal with such an eventuality. In addition former Technical Sergeant Bernie Ford who was an expert on B-17's had flown in from America to lend his expertise to the investigation. There were the regular Time Team experts namely Professor Phil Harding, Professor Mike Aston and others too numerous to mention.

Boeing in Seattle, Washington was the main centre of production for B17's which along with B-24 liberators were the main bombers. The B-17 could carry a massive bomb load of 9000 pounds and was heavily armed with machine guns. The B-17's which had a chin turret beneath its nose was the main model. It arrived in Britain in September, 1943. The pilots loved it because it flew like a smaller aircraft and its strong structure meant that it could more easily survive damage. 'The Memphis Belle' star of the eponymous film was a B-17G. The original 'Memphis Belle' was one of the first planes to complete twenty five missions. Crews that completed this number was allowed to return to the USA.

By the end of World War II approximately 640,000 tons of bombs had been dropped by B-17's. Air crew losses were heavy in October, 1943 sixty bombers out of 229 failed to return from a raid. More than 50,000 American personnel were killed or listed as missing in action. It was not often that complete crews survived to complete twenty five missions and thus gain their tickets home. Most of the airmen were young men their average age just being twenty two years.

The logistics of this 'dig' were exacting. The terrain of the site was composed of a four feet (1-2m) layer of peat, a layer of clay of varying thickness and beneath this a material which mixed with water could turn into a chocolate mousse consistency and could run to a depth of fifteen feet (5 metres) potentially lethal to anybody falling into it. At the conclusion of the investigation any of these materials would have to be reinstated as found.

The programme makers were concerned about their budget and bills were coming in from drainage engineers, surveyors, and various scientific organisations to the tune of several thousand pounds. There was real concern that the programme would never be made. By the end of April some faint daylight was discernible at the end of the tunnel and geophysics were briefed to establish the main site of the dig. By the end of the morning of Day One geophysics had identified two spots - the dig was under way.

Health and Safety issues were taken very seriously and access to the trenches were limited. Finds would be recorded and their exact location mapped with a theodolite. This would indicate their distribution which might provide clues to how the plane was flying. By lunch time the first pieces of plane and quantities of machine gun rounds were being unearthed in Trench 2. The ammunition caused a reddish stain in the peat which made them easy to spot. The RAF bomb disposal team moved in to check its condition and make it safe.

Pieces of crumpled aircraft were coming to light and former Sergeant Bob Spangler who had been stationed as a Master Sergeant at a local Master USAF base during the war was on hand to identify the various pieces of squashed and distorted metal. "This is part of the lower wing assembly near the Tokyo tanks. We called them that because they were supposed to carry the extra fuel needed to bomb Japan." This kind of detail was critical. The crash investigator would soon be able to make his initial judgements but by the close of Day One none of the critical pieces of plane had been found. What was wanted was an engine or propeller.

Day Two was spent studying aerial photographs appeared to show wreckage and showed a location which could be roughly identified because the woods that had existed in 1944 were still there. This along with eyewitness reports and colour photographs from an earlier dig that had located a propeller. Taking account of all three Stewart Ainsworth and Mike Aston made their best guess as to the epicentre of the crash. However, when geophysics searched the area there was no response.

Day Three produced significant finds although the engines and main fuselage could not be found. From Trench 2, the main trench, fragments of cockpit glass, personal items, parachute harnesses, a piece of flying cap, a pilots boot, a glove and the armed back of the pilots seat were found. It was decided to use all the geophysics and metal detectors in unison getting each to crosscheck each response. The surface of both trenches were scanned and as the excavation got lower the RAF used their detecting gear to go over the same area. A significant response in Trench 2 led to first one and then another B-17 machine gun.

The fifty calibre Browning was a key weapon of defence. They could fire at 760 rounds per minute and were far more effective than the - 303 calibre machine guns of fighters such as the spitfire. The RAF bomb disposal team washed down the guns and in one found a live round in the breech. This was potentially deadly and care had to be taken to make it safe. Throughout the weekend hundreds of rounds of machine gun ammunition was found and by the final day a considerable pile was made. It was decided to dispose of them by means of controlled explosion. The area was cleared to a distance and detonated by Professor Mick Aston on the occasion of his birthday.

Throughout the dig and subsequent investigation everybody was conscious that this was a site where men had died and everything was treated with respect. Up to this time no memorial had been raised to the two B-17 crews. It was decided to use large pieces of the B-17 and one of the two machine guns to make one.

The casualties were as follows - 1st Lieutenant Warren J. Pease's crew (549th Bomb Squadron). First Lieutenant Warren J. Pease (Pilot). Second Lieutenant Edward B. Brown (co-pilot), Second Lieutenant Bernard Kaplan (navigator), Technical Sergeant William R. Clife (Top turret), Technical Sergeant William Gill Jnr. (radio operator), Staff Sergeant Franklin C. Owsley (ball turret), Staff Sergeant Junior M. Falls (tail gunner), Staff Sergeant Harold E. Dickason (left waist gunner) and Staff Sergeant Gail F. Bruner (right waist gunner).

Captain John N. Hutchinson's crew (550th Bomb Squadron) - Captain John N. Hutchinson (pilot), Second Lieutenant Charles G. Curtis (co-pilot), First Lieutenant John E. Epps (navigator), First Lieutenant Edmond J. Gamble (bombardier), Technical Sergeant Roy C. Kitner (top turret), Staff Sergeant Joseph J. Carpinetti (tail gunner), Technical Sergeant William J. Dukes (radio operator), Staff sergeant John H. Erhalt (ball turret), Staff Sergeant Emilio M. Corgnatti (left wing gunner), Staff Sergeant Peter Bobulsky Jnr. (right waist gunner), and Frank L. Geegan (photographer).

#### B-17 site Reedham Marshes, June/July 1998

The air crash investigator report - Bernie Ford the probable sequence of events was as follows. Three B-17s entered clouds in their descent. At some time the number two (Pease) left the formation. This may have been due to an engine failure because one propeller was found in the feathered 1 position I.E the condition that the pilot would have select following an engine failure. The distraction caused by this emergency may have led the pilot to become disorientated. The aircraft was seen by other members of the formation to come out of cloud in a steep dive at high speed. It passed below the other two aircraft and then executed a vigorous pullout, which lead it to fly in front of the leader. In the subsequent collision, at about 500 feet, the entire tail unit (aft of the waist gunner) was severed.

The aircraft continued to climb for a short period before falling back into the lead aircraft. The collision caused the lead aircraft to break in two, evidence for this is from eyewitnesses in the number three aircraft and also damage to the second propeller from the number two aircraft indicating that it had hit something round and very solid, probably a gun. The number two aircraft then fell at an angle close to the vertical and crashed into a drainage ditch at an estimated speed of about 200 mph. This estimate of speed is from extensive experience of the state of the wreckage where the impact speed was known!

Here are the cold unforgiving facts of the disaster. What it does not tell is that for many years American servicemen, both during and in several of the immediate post war years, were very much a part of the community of this country. Growing up in Syderstone in the 1950s, school kids would importune them for gum, candy (Hershey bars), and were often generously plied with them. They parked their Oldsmobiles, Chevrolets, and Buicks along the village street while they enjoyed a social evening at the 'Lyoin Arms', or 'The Buck'. Friendships were formed, marriages made, American children attended the village school and they played their part in the community in good times and in bad. No doubt we learned a good deal from each other.

#### On A Hat Trick

I have had many happy short holidays at my cousin May's at Little Snoring. It was always my custom to take a contribution to the household larder. Always teabags, often sardines, fresh fruit, sometimes kippers and on one occasion pushed the boat out and packed a tin of salmon. 'What do you mean bringing this? You should take it home, I shall never eat all this.' 'Just put it in the pantry in case unexpected visitors come calling.'

'I did used to keep a tin of salmon and one of peaches in the cupboard just in case but I haven't done that for years. I might run to tea and biscuits but my hospitality ends there these days.' Before being on the phone it was commonplace for many people to keep a stash of comestibles in the sideboard to refresh unexpected visitors, salmon and peaches were a common standby. I remember some newspaper correspondence a few years ago about unexpected visitors and this is how one lady dealt with the situation.

Following a knock at the door she put on her hat and picked up her handbag and if the visitor was unwelcome she would say 'I'm so sorry, you must excuse me I have an appointment and can't talk now.' She would lock the door and walk around the block, returning when the caller had disappeared. If, however, the caller was welcome she would say 'You are in luck, I've just come in. Come inside and I'll put the kettle on.' The hat would be removed and placed on its hook, not a bad wheeze and no offence given. *Ken Edge.*

To end on a quote, 'October is a funny month. It's when ardent cricket fans discover that their wives left them the previous May.' - Denis Norden.

*This is the 10th year of the newsletter. Many interesting and diverting contributions have been received. All are welcome. Please contact Ken Edge 01708 440063 or E-mail Kenneth636@hotmail.com or post at 3 Haynes Rd, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2HS.*