

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD BETWEEN THE WARS

J B Harris



Front cover: South End, now called Constitution Hill, photographed before WW1. Summer House is the tall bay-windowed house in the centre of the picture. Southwold Museum P2541

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD
BETWEEN THE WARS

J B Harris

Edited by Mary Harris
with asides by Barry Tolfree

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INTRODUCTION

I first made Mary Harris' acquaintance eight years ago when she handed me a copy of her edited typescript of her late husband's candid memoir of his boyhood in Southwold. She hoped it would help me fill out some detail in my online history of the town's businesses (southwoldandson.co.uk).

Over the years I have gratefully quarried this text for its many little gems of first-hand memory of people, shops and social institutions during the inter-war years— memories which are now becoming tantalisingly out of reach.

One day, I promised myself that, when I had the time, I would publish the whole text in book form. Thanks to the limitless leisure afforded by the Covid-19 lockdown and the generous collaboration of Mary Harris, that time has come.

John wrote his memoir from the vantage point of old age after an eventful life which included the horror of war and of Japanese prison camps. It is remarkable that his recall of the comical, trivial and human texture of his life more than 70 years before, remained so undimmed. My aim has been to publish John's text exactly as written but to interpolate my own 'asides' with archive photos wherever I think they will illuminate John's memories.

Barry Tolfree 2020

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SUMMER HOUSE MEMORIES

I first came to Southwold as a babe in arms, in September 1920. My parents had bought a house named 'Summer House' on Constitution Hill just before the 1914 War, and had built out what was almost another house at the back of it. It had a brick-paved garden with a raised terrace from which there was a splendid view over Skilman's Hill and the common to Walberswick Church and, on a clear day, Blythburgh. They used always to let the house in July and August and the whole family would go there in September. This continued for about ten years when we moved to live there.

My father was a solicitor in London, comfortably off but far from wealthy. He was in a small

private practice with one partner, doing only conveyancing and probate: no litigation. He also had an appointment as secretary for the Shipping Federation which



brought him into occasional contact with Ernest Bevin, something he treasured. We were a family of four children, two born before the war, and two at and

after the end. My younger sister and I looked upon the other two as grown-ups. Although my father was not wealthy, we nevertheless had six living-in servants, a cook and a kitchen maid, a house maid, a parlour maid, a nurse and an under-nurse. I think that only some of these came to the annual holiday with the family.

The first indication of the impending holiday was the arrival in the nursery of a huge leather trunk, capable I would guess of containing the contents of four large suitcases today. Our nurse, or nanny, spent several days piling up clothes, putting some in, taking some out until she had got it right, and it would be closed with a catch flap, reinforced by two hefty

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straps. On the great day, we were all collected by a motor bus, which, with the trunks somehow piled on top, took us to Liverpool Street, a station of stygian gloom and suffocating smoke. My parents travelled first class and the rest of

the party, third. We had a picnic lunch on the train. At first, I used to be given Brand's Essence of Chicken but graduated along with everyone else to hardboiled eggs. The only excitement on the journey was going through Ipswich

tunnel. We all guessed the time it would take to go through and, although no money passed, the winner got great satisfaction. We ended up at Halesworth where we transferred to the Southwold Railway.



Edward Albert Self, station delivery driver for Walter James Doy, Goods and Parcel Agent for Southwold Railway. Photo 1927. Southwold Museum P2400

Although the Railway is mostly depicted as a giggle on funny postcards, it was in fact the normal way for a great many people to travel to Southwold. Not many had cars (we got one in 1927) and buses were few and far between. There were two small locomotives, the Blyth and Halesworth, which had been bought in 1879 and numbered 2 and 3. The Southwold number 1, had been delivered late and was slightly larger. No 4, Wenhaston, was much larger and was ordered against hopes for freight from the harbour which never materialised. Numbers 1, 2

and 3 were black: 4 was dark green with light green lining. The carriages were open, that is they were not compartmented except for the first class at one end. In July 1923 there were six trains per day in each direction on weekdays, but only one on Sundays. The time, Southwold to Halesworth, was forty-one minutes. The carriages had open platforms at each end. They were coupled by a 'chopper' coupling and the guard, at the rear, had a wheel-driven hand brake. There was no Vacuum or Westinghouse system.

When we arrived at Southwold all our luggage was taken up to Summer House on a flat horse-and-cart driven by Mr Self. I forget how we made our way there but we arrived to have tea. Those were the days of obsessive bowel mania and before going to bed we were

given a dose of Milk of Magnesia.

Next morning, each day and for nearly all the holiday we walked to the beach, always to Sam May's, just beyond Gun Hill, which was seen as socially superior. There had been an old Sam May who died in the early 1920s, whose

epitaph in the churchyard caused a rumpus. It read:

*His anchor was his Holy Word,
His rudder blooming hope.
His love of God his main topsail,
And faith his sailing rope.*

It doesn't seem very offensive today.

The beach was now run by three

SAM MAY—LOCAL HERO

Sam May was one of Southwold's most celebrated local heroes. Born in 1860 into a long-established Southwold seafaring family, he was a fisherman and, for 30 years, a lifeboat man, serving on the famous Alfred Corry for the whole of its service life.

As coxswain he never failed to get the lifeboat launched and the lifeboat was never afloat without him. He died in 1923 and a model of the Alfred Corry still hangs in St Edmund's Church above his habitual seat. The original boat, lovingly restored, has its own museum at the harbour mouth.

*Sam May in his shed on the beach.
Southwold Museum P630*



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THE MAY BEACH DYNASTY

Among other things Sam May had founded a bathing machine and boat-hire business on the beach below Gun Hill and, on his death, this was inherited by his younger brother, Robert John who continued to trade as 'Sam May'. Robert and his wife, Maria (née Brabben), had four sons: Robert John Brabben May, Samuel Charles Brabben May, Edward May and Richard

Stephen May. All became involved in the business, although Robert John Brabben later left to become a deep-sea fisherman. In John Harris's account 'Old John' with the sea boots and flatulence is Robert John, the business owner, Sam May's brother. 'Sam' who sat in a boat is Samuel Charles Brabben. 'Jack' who took the money is Robert John (jnr) and silent 'Dick' is Richard Steven who was profoundly deaf. Image kindly provided by Colin Crews.



Left to right: Robert John, Robert John Jnr (Jack), Samuel Charles, Edward, Richard Steven. Photo taken on the eve of WW1 beaching the diving raft for the duration.

brothers, Sam who sat in a boat keeping an eye on bathers, Jack who looked after the bathing huts and took the money, 6d (sixpence) per bathe, and Dick, very silent, who kept things clean and tidy. There was also an old John May, heavily clothed and wearing sea boots. He used to stomp around, gently farting.

The attraction of Sam May's was the diving raft, a flat pontoon, twenty feet square, with two sets of steps for divers. It was on a cable leading out to a buoy with a pulley so that the raft could be pulled in or out to suit the state of the tide. There was a pill-box on the beach which was demolished around 1926 and I think there was one on the common near Skilman's Hill. There was one beside the road to Westleton out of Blythburgh, the Four Cross Roads, and there is

still one beside the road just past Might's Bridge.

I had a serious attack of colitis while at Southwold when I was about four years old and so I was not allowed to bathe for two or three years. Dr Hart-Smith* was looking after us and he used to come day after day and order what he called 'an injection' meaning a soap and water enema. It was a horrible performance made worse by my elder sister's coming to watch. When I was able to bathe, I found that the seabed sloped very sharply down behind the breakers so that I was out of my depth after three yards. Every so often it was low tide and it was possible to walk out waist-

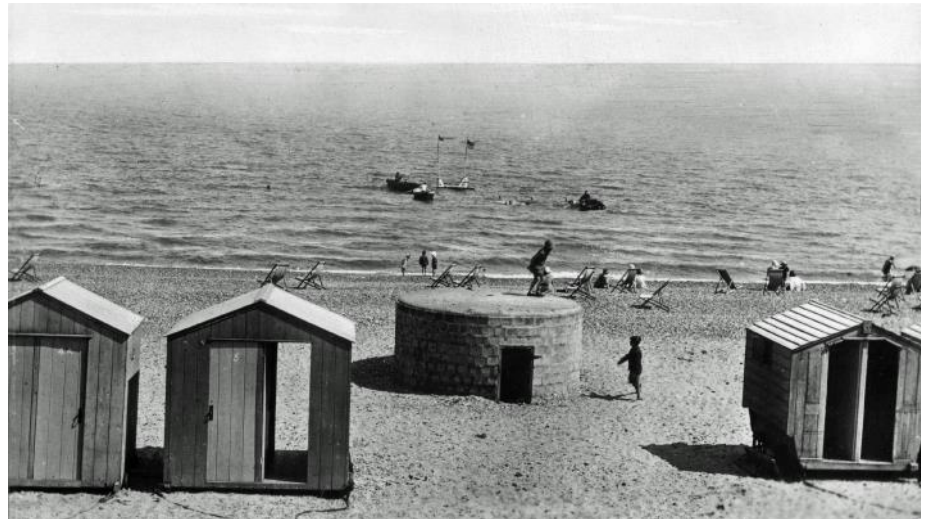
***Dr Humphry Morshead Hart-Smith -**

Physician , lived and practised at Acton Lodge, the large, distinctive house across the Green from Summer House. He and his wife, Fannie Esther with their three daughters, occupied only part of the building, letting out the rest as a holiday home.

deep for fifteen or twenty yards, treading on lovely soft sand. There were two types of bathing machine, small ones like a garden shed with small wheels and two compartments and old-fashioned ones, up on cartwheels, designed for use, with

one end in the sea. Each compartment had an advertisement for Virol, a malted hot drink.

An attraction during the mornings was to see the Belle Steamer, a



Part of the Sam May beach area in the early 1920s before the WWI pill box was demolished. The popular diving raft with its twin flags may be seen in the middle of the picture. Postcard image from Southwold Museum P3099.

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paddle ship, which called for passengers at the pier end at about 11 am. It went on to Clacton, Southend and London. A counter-flow vessel called at Southwold at about 6 pm.

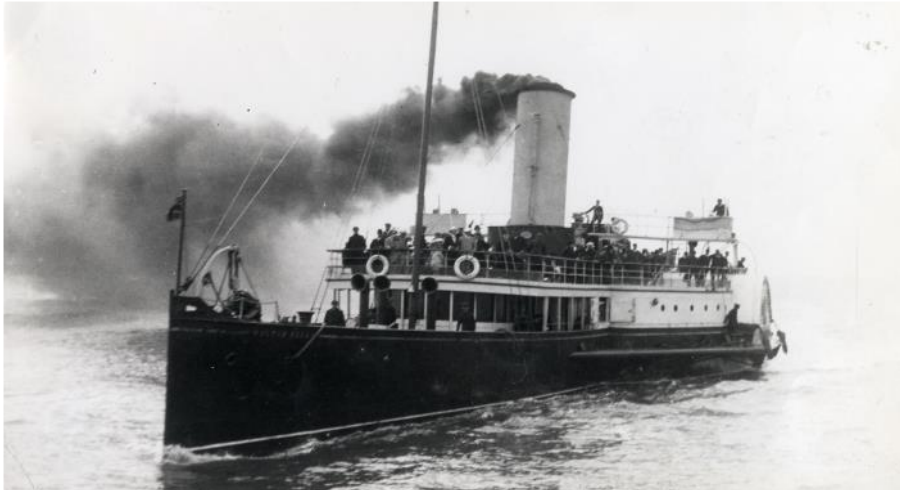
Much of our time on the beach was

spent digging holes and building sandcastles. My sister and I were aggrieved that we were only allowed wooden spades whilst most children had far more effective iron ones.

In the afternoons we did various

things. One was to have a picnic on Walberswick Common: we might pick blackberries while we were there. I forget whether we went by train or more likely, walked using the ferry. The ferry was a flat pontoon big enough to take two cars at 1/- (a shilling) per trip each, and numerous passengers at 1d (a penny) each. It pulled itself across the river by means of a donkey engine driving a hefty pinion, which engaged a chain cable stretched across the river. The ferry had an endearing habit of letting off its steam at the day's end in two long blasts announcing the last trip in each direction at 8.50 and 9.00 pm.

We sometimes went to Southwold Common with old tennis racquets and balls and we had some cut-down golf clubs. We were told never to go near the Golf Course



Belle Steamers began service in June 1900 between London and Great Yarmouth via Clacton Southend, Walton, Felixstowe, Southwold and Lowestoft. The steamer left London Bridge at 8:55am daily until the middle of September. The fare to Southwold in 1919 was 5/6d Fore Cabin and 7/6d Saloon. During heavy weather passengers would continue to Lowestoft and return to Southwold by road.

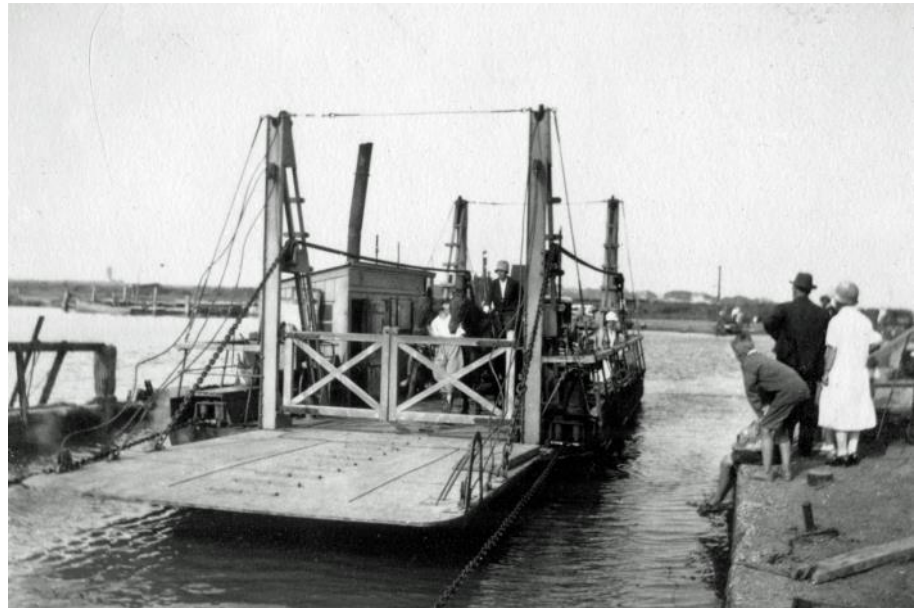
Southwold Museum P1778

proper. I think this was mainly to avoid annoying the members with some consideration of our safety thrown in. During the holidays we went once or twice to the New Pier at the end of North Parade. The pier was about 300 yards long with a T piece at the end. There were always a few people fishing with rod and line who propped the rod against the rail and sat watching and hoping they would see the jerk of their rod indicating a bite. At the shore end there was a hall which contained a lot of penny-in-the slot machines. Some of these were simple gambling: you could win your money back. Some were tableaux: there was one in which a fireman climbed a sloping ladder and rescued a damsel from a window with flames surrounding her. Part of the hall was a concert hall and there were variety performances, matinee and

evening in the summer. Elsie and Doris Waters, later to become national stars made their first

public appearance there.

On the other side of the road inland from the pier were the



The pontoon Ferry operated between Southwold and Walberswick across the River Blyth from 1885. It replaced the previous row-boat service. Originally hand-cranked, the ferry was fitted with a steam engine in 1889. A larger, more powerful steam-driven pontoon was introduced in 1927 and this is the one featured in the photograph. Southwold Museum P3664

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Bertie the Bantam, one of Frederick Hill's performing creatures at his workshop, a former Non-Conformist chapel in Mill Lane. (Southwold Museum P1986)

Fred's menagerie also included monkeys, cockatoos, guinea-pigs, rabbits and a jackdaw. The grand finale of his show would involve the jackdaw hoisting a flag up a mast and then firing a pop-gun. Many of his shows were for charity, supporting Southwold Cottage Hospital and St Edmund's Church.

He was a verger at the Church for 20 years. As well as being an undertaker and coffin maker, Fred was a skilled carpenter. He made the desks for Saint Felix School when it moved to Reydon. Fred died in 1951.

Model Yacht ponds. There were two, about 30 yards square, one of which was for people wanting to sail model yachts. The other was for tiny hand-operated paddle boats which could be hired by the half-hour. Further inland was a shallow lake on which simple single dinghies were for hire. The problem here was that, although the dinghies went splendidly with or across the wind, they could not tack. If the wind was off the land

things were not too bad but when it blew the other way, most people ended up stumbling along the bank dragging the boat homewards. There was another model yacht pond along the Ferry Road, a simple rectangle of shallow water 30 x 15 yards.

During the holidays we would spend at least one period visiting old Mr Hill in Mill Lane. He was the undertaker but also had a



Model yacht regattas have been held throughout the summer season from the early 1900s to the present day. The date of this photo is probably in the 1920s. Southwold Museum P435

menagerie of small animals and birds which he had taught to do tricks. He had a parrot which would pull up a little chain to get at a pot of food on the end of it.

He always seemed to be covered in very fine sawdust. He made an imposing sight when, with flowing white moustache, top hat and morning dress, he was ready for a funeral.

I cannot remember why, but we used sometimes to walk past the station to what we called the Reydon Road Bridge*. Buss Creek then was a small river fifteen yards wide at high water, but at low water, two shiny mud banks with a stream two yards wide in the middle. Our delight was to collect large stones and to fling them down into the mud where they

*Mights Bridge

made a satisfying plop and left a black glistening hole.

For one afternoon in two holidays, when I was about six, I went down to the Railway engine shed where I was allowed to clean an engine. I used to put on my overalls and take a large handful of rag with another piece of rag acting as a cap. I scrambled up on to the engine and rubbed and polished the funnel and steam dome. Mr Stannard, one of the drivers**, used to call out: 'You've a fly on your nose John!' and I would brush it away leaving a black smear across my face.

As I got older I was allowed to join the Lighthouse party, a regular holiday attraction. We rang the bell and were admitted to the keeper's house, then into the lighthouse

** William Stannard was not a driver but a member of Southwold Station staff.



William Stannard, photographed in 1928, a year before the railway closed. Southwold Museum P2406

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*Stradbroke Road and the Lighthouse in 1930s. It was built in 1887 and the light is 37 m above mean high water. It was automated and electrified in 1938.
Southwold Museum P1723*

itself, a huge empty tower with stairs around the wall, 80 or more. At the top was first the storage room below the lantern room itself. Here was the burner surrounded by glass prisms focusing the light horizontally, mostly clear glass but some red so that, viewed from the sandbanks to the south, the light was wholly red, for alarm. The lamp burned oil. Occultation was achieved by what looked like a large shell case being lowered over the burner. The timing was two seconds dark, two light, two dark, fourteen light. In those pre-radar days, a lighthouse signature was an important feature of navigation.

Throughout the twenty years, various relatives and friends used to come to Southwold. One of my mother's sisters, who lived in Cheshire with her husband and

family, used to come in August and, in the 1920s we only saw them when our holidays overlapped at the beginning of September. They used to rent a house and for several years took Seaview and would bathe below at Centre Cliff. We sometimes hired a car (they had one) and went for great picnics on Bythburgh Common. One of her other two sisters, Jemima, was a keen photographer and took snaps of these occasions. One day, I was told that Jemima had dropped her camera off the Belle Steamer: I don't think it was as deliberate as it sounds.

On my father's side, an older brother came to recuperate after a prostate operation. Gibson was a friendly character but was the ultimate know-all, which was why his family disowned him. I teased

him. One day a decanter of sherry had a small foreign body in it. Gibson went into overdrive, explaining how in Jerez they had problems with infestations of small black flies and, despite every effort, the odd one got through. I let him exhaust himself, with my family listening in awe, but I had to tell him that his 'foreign body' was a joke thing from a Christmas cracker. Gibson was nursed by Mrs Sage, wife of the builder partner in Taylor and Sage.

I think we came to Southwold for Christmas in 1928 and for Easter in 1929 and continued this until we moved house to live there permanently in the autumn of 1930. After we moved there, my mother used to drive my father to get the 9.25 - 11.36 from Saxmundham to Liverpool Street on Monday morning and meet him

off the 4.54 -7 .11 on Friday evening. Trains were punctual and my father's office was 10 minutes' walk from Liverpool Street. He lived in digs, later converted to a small flat near Barons Court. Sometimes he needed to get the 8.11 and on one sorry occasion we did so as a family. I had been given a ticket for the 1934 Oval Test Match by a Southwold resident, Plunkett Burke. Ponsford and Bradman were established on the Saturday in one of their massive partnerships, but we were overtaken by events on the Monday, when the locomotive on our train suffered a broken big end near Witham. The con rod had bumped along smashing sleepers. I got to the Oval after Bradman was out for 244. Ponsford went on to 266 and the total to 701.

My grandparents on my mother's

side also moved from London at the same time as we did, to a house on the Common, Langford Lodge. It was hideous to look at and awkward inside with different floor levels. My grandmother died in 1931 and the old man in 1933. This boosted our family finances and we had a major 'doing up' of Summer House. Included in this was a smartening up of a back extension which became known as 'John's shed'. There was a gash in one of the walls which looked as if it might have been caused by someone with an axe. In fact it had been done by a shell fragment when, in January 1917, a German U-boat fired some sixty shells, most of which landed on the marshes but one hit Iona Cottage which nestles alongside Summer House. A legend grew that the Germans justified the attack by claiming that the guns on Gun Hill made Southwold a fortified town.

NAVAL ATTACK ON SOUTHWOLD

From 23.05 to 23.13 on January 25 1917 Gun Hill was subjected to a fusillade of some 68 shells from the sea. There is uncertainty about the source. Some reports said it was a German U-boat. Others claimed two German destroyers, others still, a small unidentified vessel. The Germans themselves credited an unspecified number of torpedo boats which were on a mission to intercept hostile English patrol vessels and, finding none, elected to unload their arsenal instead on what they termed the 'fortified place' of Southwold. In the event, their aim was woeful: of the 68 shells only four hit Southwold. Many dropped into the sea, a few ended up in the countryside behind Southwold, one made it to Uggeshall 5 miles away. Two shells did indeed succeed in hitting something. One passed through the roof of Summer House and exploded on Skilman's Hill behind; the other damaged Iona Cottage next door. The total damage incurred by the attack amounted to about £100. Nevertheless, the German reference to Southwold as a 'fortified place' rattled Eastern Defence chiefs enough to order the Engineers to bury the Gun Hill cannons for the duration.

My shed was done up and given a shelf all round, four feet up with a hinged flap across the door on which I planned to set up a model railway. I bought the components from Mills Bros; rail, chairs and sleepers with spikes (small nails) to be assembled. Included in the pack was an '0' gauge. Trouble arose because the gauge of my two Hornby locomotives turned out to be about one tenth of an inch wider than the one-and-a-quarter-inch standard. I had to break up what I had done and relay it by eye. At that time, I had not the dexterity needed for this sort of job and no means of laying out the curves. My father gave me a superb Basset-Lowke model of a Southern Railway 'Schools' class 4-4-0 which, of course had its wheels set at the standard one and a quarter inch gauge. I lost heart and, sad to say, gave up

trying. My father gave all the model railway to a school of which he was a governor.

Every now and then, the lifeboat would be called out to answer a distress call, the crew being summoned by the firing of maroons on the Gun Hill. I recall one evening when it happened at about 8 o'clock and we joined the crew and other spectators on the way to the Harbour. The lifeboat duly appeared from where it was moored above the ferry. We stood on the Old Pier. There was a dreadful moment when the boat went aground in the narrow harbour mouth. There was a furious ebb tide and, with their heavy sea clothes, the crew would have had no chance if it had capsized. Luckily, although the tide was going out, waves were still coming in and one large one lifted the boat. Upcraft, the cox, put the

engine full ahead and drove over and into deep water. The boat went off to the South and quite a lot of us waited around. It was a wonderful moment when, in the darkness, a great green flare was seen somewhere near Dunwich indicating the rescue was successful.

Going from Station Road to the Common, one passed the cinema where there is more recently, a medical centre.* The programme changed each week and consisted of a cartoon, Popeye or Mickey Mouse, followed by National News, Gaumont or Pathé, then the main film. We used to go as a family in the 1/ 9d seats.

Sepp Harisson was always in the

* The Medical Centre has since moved to Reydon and the building converted into flats for the Fox Trust, a housing charity.

THE CINEMA

Southwold's cinema was launched by RS Ransome in 1911 in what had been the Assembly Rooms. He called it the 'Electric Picture Palace'. It was sold in 1921 to Lily Crick, wife of engineer George Crick who ran the Southwold Gas Light Company. Together they rebuilt the cinema to seat 400 people and introduced some impressive innovations such as central heating and asbestos insulation. They scrapped the 'Picture Palace' brand, preferring the no-nonsense 'The Cinema'. Lily appointed her son by her previous



Cinema team 1920s: Back row, l to r: Freddie Neal (organist), James Blythe (Manager), Unknown, Reginald lfe (projectionist), Charlie Crick (Son of George). Front Row, l to r: Believed to be Mrs Bennett (Cinema pianist) , George Crick, Lily Elizabeth Crick (owner), Believed to be Lily's younger sister, Emaline. With thanks to Jim Blythe for allowing us to reproduce this photo from his family collection.

marriage, James Blythe as manager. The first talkie was screened in 1930 and, in 1937, a state-of-the-art Mirrophone sound system was installed. The cinema was sold in 1960 and renamed 'The Ritz' but couldn't survive more than a year or two and, for the next two decades, was used as a storage depot. It was demolished in 1983 to make way for the new GP surgery and adjacent Orwell Court flats. The surgery itself relocated to much larger premises in Reydon in 2014.

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2/3ds and sat smoking a huge cigar.* At the end of each performance, they played God Save the King and the audience stood to attention while, on the screen, there was a battleship firing its main armament. Just past the cinema, the gate to the Common, which had to be kept closed against wandering cattle, was manned by street boys. Custom demanded that anyone driving through the gate threw a penny out, and the boys would scrabble for it. Once, I remember, my mother took pity on a very small boy who normally had no chance and stopped and handed him the penny. Whether he was able to hang on to it is anyone's guess.

** Lenny Septimus Harrison was a larger-than-life character, a solicitor, Secretary of Southwold's Water Company and man of influence. His name crops up several times in John Harris's memoir, not always favourably.*

At the end of 1933 my elder sister Rosemary married Jos Braithwaite, a Flight Lieutenant whose family were Southwold people. His father had been killed in the First World War and his mother had brought up three boys and a daughter in the house 'Kingsley' on the common. We had the Summer House garden covered by a marquee and one of the staff of the Ironmongers' Company in London, Harding, came to supervise the drinks. Harding had supper in our kitchen. When peace had descended my father took a decanter of port and gave it to our cook. It was an article of faith for him that, with wine, everyone should enjoy the same quality. He told Sarah what it was, and that she should ask Harding what he thought about it. Harding pronounced: "This is Sandeman 1908."

Jos and Rosemary were booked to go on honeymoon by air to Paris – incredibly daring! A number of Harris relatives came, many staying at The Swan. One of these pulled a remarkably dirty trick on my father, who had seen what looked like a first edition of Kipling's *Wee Willie Winkie* in an antiques shop in Queen Street.* He asked this relative who was knowledgeable about such matters whether it would have collector's value. Hearing that it would, he went next morning to buy it, only to be told that another gentleman had been in earlier and bought it. The relative, for it was he, explained to my father that he had never actually read *Wee Willie Winkie*.

I had been at boarding school since

**Probably William H Tooke, antique dealer, who at that time was trading from No 4 Queen Street. His son, John Tooke later took over the business.*

1929 and continued thus until the end of July 1938. I went back late in the Summer Term of 1934 so as to be at home for my parents' silver wedding, simply by making a fuss. I was also late back in September 1936 on the insistence of Dr Borham* that I became cleared first of a chest infection. We had a long weekend for the Coronation in 1937.

During the winter holidays, once the dust of Christmas had settled, I spent time mostly either fishing or playing solo golf. My father and brother often joined in fishing. We caught dabs and whiting and the occasional codling. Sometimes we went on the pier (6d all day, 4d afternoon). It was interesting that, whereas in the mid-1920s almost

every catch included a dog fish, there were none of them, but another nuisance, the flounder, had appeared. These looked like dabs although slightly larger but tasted only of mud. There was an irrational belief that the further you got from Southwold the better, which meant going off the beach, so we used to tramp past Easton to fish by the 'Whale's back'. At first I did not like the idea of fishing off the beach because I could not cast far enough. In fact it turned out that any fish to be had were just behind the breakers.

Back on the pier there was a little coterie, of which the oracle was a son of Alderton, the grocer. Harry had learning difficulties and spent all daylight hours fishing with three huge 12 ft bamboo rods made up by himself. He could and did cast farther than anyone else. Once, to bait him, my brother called out

“You're falling short today” to be put neatly in his place by “I'm landing where the mussel beds are.”

In the Easter holidays, golf became my number-one interest. I was physically a very late developer and until the end of 1937, when I was 17, I could get nowhere near the greens in the statutory number of shots for bogey. Suddenly it all changed and, no doubt partly due to my father's early coaching, I became a long hitter. I would even be looking for that extra twenty yards to be on the first green in one.

Easter time was the high point in the golf club's season. The Easter Cup was the most enjoyable of all the competitions, being knock-out match-play with handicaps, so that in a way, everyone had a chance, unlike the scratch, medal competition at Whitsun, which was really the local championship.

**Dr John D Borham had practised and lived at Wymering House, No 47 High Street, since 1933. He was married to Edith.*

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For the Easter Cup I think they got the field down to 16 on the Friday afternoon, to 8 on the Saturday morning, to 4 on Saturday afternoon, no play on Easter Day, and the final on Easter Monday morning. They were all 18-hole

games. I remember Tommy Whitaker winning in about 1934 and my brother Pat in 1936 or 7.

When I became a full member in May 1938, I was allocated a handicap of 24. At a medal

competition soon afterwards, I returned a nett of 61 which paid for a couple of new clubs and got me a revised handicap of 18, but even so my sister and I won a mixed foursome's medal handsomely in August '38.

Almost my last visit to Southwold was to spend a weekend there with my brother. Father Harris was having one of his 'goes' and my mother wanted us out of the way. We played a fourball with two competent players at £1 corners, which was a lot in those days. I had a four-foot putt on the 18th to square the match: I did it!

In the summer holidays, it was mostly bathing: one got used to the horribly cold water. In the early 1930s there was a lot of schoolboy cricket. The first game I played in was really for very small boys. You had to be under 11 and I was on

SOUTHWOLD GOLF CLUB

The Club was founded in 1884, only the second golf club in Suffolk. (The first was at Felixstowe). It was originally known as the 'Southwold Golf and Quoits Club' but Quoits seems to have been abandoned early on. The annual subscription was 5/- and there was an entry fee also of 5/-. A permanent clubhouse was built ten years later. The original course had just nine-holes but was extended to 18 in 1901 under the guidance of the renowned Scottish professional golfer and course architect, James Braid. Golfers now had to cross the railway line via a new footbridge. During the Great War much of the land was needed for grazing and the course was first reduced back to 9 holes and then closed altogether. The full 18 hole course was reopened in 1919 and remained that

way until the 1953 floods left the lower-lying holes under several feet of water which did irreparable damage. The course has been 9 holes ever since though laid out differently from the original 19th century design. We are grateful for the permission of Club Secretary, Roger Sweet, to use material from the Club's website.



The club house in 1905

the maximum. It was played on two tennis courts and I caused a stir by driving a ball for a six which just cleared a greenhouse. In later years, several families including my own, got up XIs aged 12 - 15, and took on others. It could not be denied that many of these games were social as much as, or almost more than cricketing occasions. Most came from around Aldeburgh and we often played on the ground of the prep school, Aldeburgh Lodge. Our side played on Southwold Common: rough, very rough! The family Hickling, who lived at Wrentham, managed to get the use of Benacre Park on the Lowestoft Road, a genuine 'Country House' in the cricketing sense and a really lovely place for cricket. It was owned by the family Gooch. Schoolboy cricket lasted only for people up to 15. After that, there were occasional games got

up by or for Southwold visitors, and once or twice I played for the Town side. There is a scoring book in the bar of The Cricketers* in Reydon, Southwold vs PLA, in August 1936. Number 11 is Harris J.

In late August 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, I persuaded the son of our old London family doctor who was on holiday in Southwold, to come with me to volunteer to dig air-raid trenches. The Office of Works at the Town Council were bewildered but eventually issued us with spades and forks to dig in Bartholomew Green, just off Victoria Street. Some regular employees were taken aback; one of them I knew well as a golf caddie. We dug until about 5.30 pm, and went to Carter's the pub, officially The

Royal, where we stood pints of Carter's Cream (mild) to all the diggers. Next day, after supper, my brother and I set out for our usual evening stroll and he wanted to have a look at my trenches. It was nearly dark when we got to the place when, suddenly, my feet gave way and I found myself face down at the bottom of a trench. Someone had dug another line of trenches beside those I had dug, and it was into one of these that I had stepped.

** Now reverted to its original name: 'The Randolph'.*

LOCAL POLITICS

It was not long after moving to Southwold that we encountered a political upheaval when the Council proposed building housing on the common. The trades people favoured the plan: it would bring business their way. Older residents and holiday visitors opposed it as destroying a treasured amenity. My father, a solicitor, took up the anti-building cause and spent a lot of time searching records locally and in Somerset House beside consulting many residents who might recall their forebears having had rights of grazing on the common. I cannot remember in which tribunal it was finally decided but the ruling was for no building on the common. Houses were built

beyond Pier Avenue. Less controversial but causing a lot of discussion was a scheme to develop the harbour*. The idea was to attract large trawlers and general freight. A wall was to be built on the Walberswick side and four- or five-foot depth to be maintained right across at all tides. Masses of piles were driven, some refusing to go more than a few feet down, and it stumbled on right up to the war.

**In his book: 'Will they ever learn? A history of Southwold Harbour', Published 2013, John Winter writes:
"1936 September 25th—The first pile of these new harbour works was driven. Much has been said about the quality of the work that followed: concrete piles that*

The Duke of York's camp caused a flurry before it arrived in 1931. There had always been a number of small camps in the summer; the Boys' Brigade, Boy Scouts and so on. These were well liked, not least for their bugle calls, but the Duke of York's was on a much larger scale and would occupy about 200 yards on either side of the road from the town to the water tower. The tradespeople wanted it: it would bring business. The visitors objected that it would deprive their kiddies of playing space. In the event, it turned out that all the supplies, including fags, were sent from Harrods and the enclosed

were so green that they wouldn't drive and people coming back under cover of darkness to cut the tops off, the filling of the North Pier was done in such a way that the next tide which came along washed it out. The whole episode appears to have been nothing but a disgrace."

space was not normally in great demand.

The big moment was the arrival of the Duke himself. He took part in a singsong in which figured 'The Spreading Chestnut Tree'. On at least two occasions he was made to bathe. One felt desperately sorry for this harmless man being marched to between Sam May's and the harbour where he had to undress in the open on the beach and walk into the cold North Sea. In all, the camp gave little offence and it was a praiseworthy attempt to break class barriers. Maybe, if the war had not come, more of the same might have developed but the war achieved the same purpose, though infinitely faster.

There was a general fury when the new water tower was built, a structure out of all proportion to its surroundings. Apparently, there

THE DUKE OF YORK CAMPS

The Duke of York camps were held on Southwold Common over the Bank Holiday week from 1931 until 1938 when he inherited the crown and became King George VI.

These annual camps ran from 1921 until 1939 and had been held at New Romney and Southport (Lancs) before coming to Southwold. The final camp was near Balmoral in 1939. But Southwold boasted one camp at which the guest of honour was the newly crowned King George VI. He arrived aboard the Royal Yacht, the 'Victoria & Albert' and was rowed ashore by two proud Southwold fishermen, 'Prim' Deal and 'Dykes' Stannard. The Boys' Camp



initiative was said to be the Duke's own and was a deliberate exercise in promoting fitness and social cohesion among the Nation's young males. About half the boys came from Public Schools whilst the other half were from the industrial towns. The key movers were the Industrial Welfare Society whose organiser was a Church of England clergyman, the Revd. R.H.

Hyde (later Sir Robert).

The photo is from the 1932 camp when one of the public school contingent was Dennis Thatcher who later became a member of camp "staff" for 3 years. Captain J.G. Paterson (in white with moustache) was the Camp Commandant. (Photo: Southwold Museum P1615)

'SEPP' HARRISSON & THE SECOND SOUTHWOLD WATER TOWER

The original water tower was opened in 1886 and had a wind turbine on top to pump the ground water up to the tank. By the turn of the century it couldn't meet the growing demand for piped water and the quality of the ground water now fell below acceptable potable levels. Drinking water had to be piped in from wells in Reydon. Water supply, like other utilities was the responsibility of Limited local companies with Southwold Corporation representation on the boards. Southwold Water Works Company Ltd had its headquarters at No 1



The two water towers today with the new William Godell Sports Pavilion in front.

Market Place where Lenny Septimus Harrisson ran his solicitor's practice. He had been appointed Secretary of the Water Company. The company's plan was to demolish the old water tower and replace it on the same site with a much larger but arguably less picturesque, concrete tower. There were vociferous objections to both the ugliness of the proposed new tower and to the destruction of an historic landmark. In a memorable demonstration a group of citizens joined hands and marched in a circle round the old tower singing the century old protest song 'Woodman, spare that tree'. In an act of compromise, the Water Company agreed to spare the old tower and build the new one adjacent to it. It was opened in 1937.

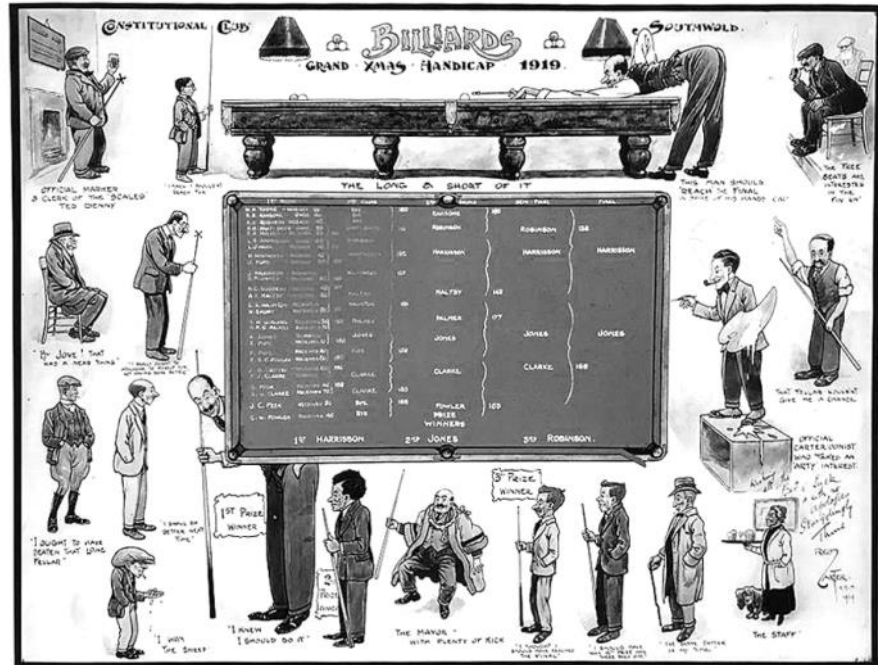
It is evident from John Harris's account that he both grudgingly admired and was irritated by Sepp Harrison. The two seem to have run in to each other rather a lot although Sepp was John's senior by 38 years. In addition to his influential position in the Water Company. He was Secretary of the Blyth Ferry Company, the local branch of the National Lifeboat Institute and the Town Farm Syndicate as well as being Clerk to the Borough Magistrates and Solicitor to Southwold Corporation.

was nothing to stop Sepp Harrisson, a local solicitor who owned the waterworks, doing what he liked, and he did. My brother hit a number seven iron shot from near the fifteenth green, which landed nicely on top.

Although I did not really get to know Sepp until after the war, it is worth saying a word about him. He was hideous of visage, a bald head above bushy eyebrows with a long raking snout above some ill-kempt grey whiskers. But he was a superb and beautiful athlete, his golf swing was a joy and he looked perfectly placed at a snooker table. He was also a very good bridge player. Everything he had or had done was bigger or better than anyone else's. He claimed to have stood in the slips with Johnny Douglas bowling and taken a seemingly endless series of

catches. His bat weighed nearer five pounds than four, extreme even in the Botham age. On VE day, so he told my brother, "We had a couple of gold necks" and went on to explain that most people's glasses go six to a bottle but "mine go FOUR." Sepp had one less endearing foible which I discovered after joining the Blyth Club*, where he held sway. If one left the bridge or snooker table to have a pee, he would follow and stand beside you saying something about crossing swords. It was entirely harmless except that his opening burst was not always as accurate as one would wish. An even worse one was his delight in describing in lurid detail his latest alimentary bout, softened only by his occasional interjection "I'm not being beastly, you know."

*See page 31 for note on gentlemen's clubs.



Southwold's mischievous cartoonist, Reg Carter produced this half-commemorative, half-satirical piece for the Southwold Constitutional Club to mark their 'Grand Christmas Billiards Handicap 1919 at which Septimus Harrison was predictably the outright winner. His height and 'reach' are made much of with the implication that they give him an unfair advantage. He is caricatured peering round the scoreboard and at the table where the caption reads: 'This man should REACH the final in spite of his handy cap'.

Image courtesy of Sepp Harrison's granddaughter, Judith Chestnutt

PEOPLE AND SHOPS

There was rather a sad character who used to roam around always in a light brown mackintosh and a chauffeur's cap. I believe his real name was Partridge. He was known as 'Mad Charlie' and was believed to be a relative of Lord Huntingfield. He went around muttering but had two favourite activities, one of which was to clean cars. In those days there were few cars even on open spaces. Charlie, armed with a rag, would go over the windscreen and windows and occasionally pick up 6d from a friendly owner. The other activity was less welcome. He would keep the pavements and grass verges on North Parade clean of dogs' mess.

He would scoop up a large handful in his bare hands, walk across to the rail and fling seawards. The problem was the path halfway down to the beach where there were seats and people sitting on them.

There were several fêtes on South Green in aid of local charities. They were not on the scale of Trinity Fair for which I was away at school. There was a piece of legend about the latter. It was said that its owners stayed at The Swan and that there was an electric cable down to the Fair, glowing red hot. My mother and sister ran a stall and I remember one awkward moment when a potential customer picked up a jar of Harris

marmalade asking, "Is this the stuff we had last year?" and on being told it was, announced "We had to put it down the lav."

One winter there was a sharp frost and it was possible to go skating on Reydon Smear. Sepp Harrison was a superb skater but chose to demonstrate this to me by whisking me about a mile, leaving me to learn to skate by making my way back unaided.

There was a variety of shops of all sorts and my parents usually had strong views as to which were or were not alright. Sometimes it was based on obvious quality of goods and service. Otherwise, there might be two or more of equal worth but, for some reason, one was alright and the other two were not. There were three good butchers, but only Denny in the High Street opposite the Crown



ALDERTON & SON

The premises had been built by the Debney family as a 'downtown' branch of their department store on South Green. Herbert Corbin Alderton took it over as a large

grocery shop in the 1900s. It was on the corner of Stradbroke Road and Chester Road, the latter pictured here with contemporary goat-powered shopping trolley. Apart from groceries, they also served the seaside tourism market with rentable essentials such

Telegrams : Alderton, Southwold. Telephone : No. 7.

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FOR HIRE :

Beach Bungalows, Bathing Huts and Tents,
Bath Chairs, Prams, Cots, &c.

as 'Beach Bungalows' (beach huts), tents, prams cots and bathchairs. The Alderton family continued trading here until WW2. After the war, in 1946, George Bumstead took over with his acclaimed high-quality grocery.

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

was ever patronised. The assistant in Denny's was Mr May*, the local Scout Master. There was only one grocer of quality, Alderton's on the corner of Chester Road, which later on became Bumstead. When we were little, old man Alderton with a cloth cap and a pencil behind his ear would always give us a biscuit, and at the end of our holiday a slab of Bournville. The preferred greengrocer was Aldred on the Queen Street corner of the Market Place, which also became Bumstead**, a brother of the grocer, Of the two chemists, we went to Mr F N Webb in Queen Street, a solemn, serious man who had a very charming assistant. The fishmonger situation became complicated. Two brothers were in partnership in Trinity Street. One

* Lancelot (Lancie) Christopher May

** Jack Bumstead, the elder brother of George

was known as the Red Denny, the other as the Long Denny. They fell out over whose son would come into the business. Long Denny opened a shop in East Street backing on to Centre Cliff. I think that for once my parents had no

strong view but it became noticeable that Long Denny junior was much more polite than his Red counterpart and I think it swung things his way.

DENNY THE FISH

This little shop, now demolished occupied part of the entrance to what is now Trinity Close where its smokery was located. The shop was originally the fish department of John King's grocery store next door. James Denney (with a second 'e') bought it in about 1908 but called it 'J Denny & Son' (without the second 'e', perhaps hoping to associate it with other well respected Denny businesses in town).



The fish shop, on the right, when it was part of the John King business.

James was a fisherman and never actually ran the shop but installed his third child, Edward as the manager. His oldest son, James, was just an employed fishmonger. This obviously fraught relationship boiled over after WW1 when Edward walked out and set up his rival business under exactly the same name, just yards away. As it happened the inheritance issue never arose; Edward's son, Noel showed no interest in running a fish shop and became a printer instead.

Note: the author mistakenly assumes that the rebel brother, James, was the younger.

There were two ironmongers' shops in the High Street, Manby's which became Bevan's opposite The Crown, and Mumford's on the other side, a little further along. If anything, Bevan was of slightly higher quality than Mumford, but more important was that Reg Mumford was a relaxed and genial person: the young man in Bevan's was an eager beaver. A shopper came in asking for a cream making machine (not uncommon then: they emulsified saltless butter and milk). 'I have not got one of those but I have got an electric orange and lemon squeezer'!

Below Summer House, at the foot of Constitution Hill was Spence, the boot and shoemaker and repairer. His shop was off the path, just a single workshop with a low bench along the back wall, facing the entrance. On this sat father and son, surrounded by a sea of



Reg Belcher's garage in Station Road. The decorations are probably to celebrate the silver jubilee of King George V in 1935. Reg's son, Michael, who inherited the business, is mounted on a Raleigh Bicycle. He held the agency for Raleigh. Photo courtesy of Michael's daughter, Mimi Shea.

footwear, each of them cutting, sewing and nailing. I used to sit just inside the door and watch. They carried on conversations between themselves, with me and any of the several droppers-in. What fascinated me was that this all

happened through lips bristling with brads and nails. Most of the talk was way above my head.

Although there was a motor garage (Belcher's) in the town, we always took our car, a 1927 Austin 12 with

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

a coach-built body, to the Swan Yard for minor servicing, and fuel which came in 2-gallon cans. Mr Buckingham ran the car service at the Swan. I liked him because, when the rubber tyre on my Malcolm Campbell Bluebird split, I took it to him and he gravely



The confectionery shop and adjacent family house built by James Winter after demolishing a row of cottages on Barnaby Green. Photo dates from 1900s, soon after completion. The premises are now occupied by architect John Bennett. Photo courtesy of Shirley L Fulcher, granddaughter of James Charles Winter

assured me that “We'll soon solution that up.” A similar family situation to that of the Dennys showed itself in the other garage, Belcher's, opposite Pier Avenue Hotel.* Here, I think it was the son, who decided to go it alone and opened up beyond Might's Bridge where the Lowestoft Road branches away.

When we were small, the only sweet shop we were allowed to go to was Winter's on the corner of Spinner's Lane and Station Road. He sold

* This establishment was called 'Station Hotel' when it opened at the turn of the century. It became 'Avenue Hotel' in the early 1920s, then Pier Avenue Hotel in the 1930s. It was renamed 'The Blyth' in 2005.

healthy boiled sweets. Toffee, nougat and, worse still, sherbet dabs and fountains were strictly forbidden. There was Buckler's just beyond the Post Office who sold all holiday things and also was the local, under-cover, bookmaker's collector. I discovered this when my mother was taking an elderly couple somewhere in our car. Mr Smith needed to stop at Buckler's for some cigarettes. After rather a long time he came back to the car but, when asked about the cigarettes, realised he had not got any. There were two newsagents in the town centre, Watt's in East Street and Rush which became Chapman near the Market Place. My mother liked the former and my father the latter. He had a soft spot for old Mrs Rush. Miss Watts ran a small lending library. I liked old Mr Watts who used to pull my leg over his failure once to win a

GENTLEMEN'S CLUBS

Southwold's long-established gentlemen's club was the Constitutional Club on Gun Hill. It had been uncompromisingly exclusive, admitting only gentlemen and professionals until, in the early 1930s there emerged a growing egalitarian faction eager to accept selected trades people like Jack (Tailor) Denny. Eventually the modernisers prevailed. Whereupon the die-hards announced they would relinquish their membership and form their own club, the Blyth, in a rented suite of rooms upstairs in the Old Vicarage). The Blyth continued unchallenged until, in 1971, William Denny, the leading builder in Southwold, insolently applied for membership. As he expected, he was instantly rejected. Whereupon William purchased the building complete with the Blyth Club—now at his mercy as his tenants.



The ground floor of The Old Vicarage had been converted into shops during the 1930s. The Blyth Club occupied the first floor. William Denny had the ground floor façade restored to its original Georgian state and renamed the building 'Buckenham House'



example of the strict gentlemen and players attitude which showed up particularly over membership of the Blyth Club. He was 'trade', so he could not join, nor could his son Jack. Things looked rather odd when my brother joined up in the

prize in some raffle. It was a 6d ticket and he used to say "With interest John, that's ten bob you owe me." Denny the Tailor was a very up-market affair. In truth, he

did go to Saville Row to get quality work done. He had an imperious assistant, Mr White, who once sold me a semi-pork pie. "That's a damn good hat, Mr John." Denny was an

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

7th Suffolks, a Second Lieutenant reporting to Captain Jack Denny.

There was Newson the bakers, on the corner of Park Lane and South Green who sold the most delicious ices, 1d cornets and 2d wafers. The son, Ginger, used to do the



Ginger Newson in old age in the mid 1980s preparing to deliver newspapers for Chapman's on what appears to be the same bike he used as a boy to deliver bread for his father. In his youth he was considered a bit of a jack-the-lad and a dandy with a way with the girls. But he never married and, in old age assumed an eccentric tramp-like persona. He continued to live in the family house until his death. ©Stephen Wolfenden, from his first volume of Southwold characters 'To the Town'

deliveries on a bicycle with a small front wheel with a large basket above it. Besides speed, he was noted for his ginger hair and the shrillest of whistles. Later on Ginger became a loved character but sadly he lost interest in life. The shop became a private house but with the problem that it had an old-fashioned bread oven in the back room which was deemed a National Monument.

My favourite shop when I was young was E W Bridge, Bridge's in the High Street. It was a toy shop and sold a very wide range from fully soft toys to rattles, cheap tin Hornby trains and Meccano and quality model railways by Basset-Lowke. One counter was devoted to knitting wool.

Across the road from Bridge's was Jenkins'. His main line was photography with things such as

holiday artist's materials and pictures. There were two very pleasant young women assistants* one of whom teased me by telling me that a sheet of talc would cost me £1. Late in life Jenkins published many books of old photographs. I once gave him a large bundle taken by my family and the grandparents. He expressed his gratitude by selling me a copy of his latest book at the full £5 price.

During the inter-war period there were six doctors in practice at one time or another. Dr Mullock died in 1927 but his widow, a cheerful, big Irish woman lived on for many years. She always had a friendly word for friends. Next was Harte-

**Frederick Jenkins' daughters, Alicia Maud (known as Peggie) and Marjorie Beryl. They took over the shop on Jenkins' death in 1954 and ran it as an up-market stationery store, retaining the F Jenkins name.*

Smith who attended my colitis. He had a stentorian voice which I was told he had acquired by being in the Navy. I remember him booming round the golf course with "That's a beauty." Dr John Borham, a small, serious man was dismissed by my grandmother as "A boy!". He cared for me through a long and persistent spell of 'chest'. His daughter was a musician*, good enough to become a professional pianist, and more recently teaching.

Dr Harry Ferguson was a tremendous personality. He was a good cricketer and a natural entertainer as an amateur conjuror. He had spent a lot of his life in Argentina coming to England to qualify via Cambridge, where he also got a half blue for throwing the hammer. Sad to say, his wife

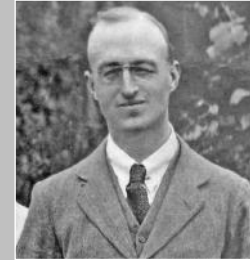
*Lucy Buncombe, piano teacher

who also had an Argentinean background could not come to terms with the east wind and the almost non-existent social life of Southwold. Her mother, Mrs Stuart, did me a particularly good turn. She went to London to stay at the Langham hotel in Portland Place where the 1934 Australian cricket team were also staying. She took my autograph book and came back with all sixteen signatures on one page in ink.

Dr Collings was on North Parade. I once was fishing on the pier and my tackle slipped and a hook stuck in my finger which I could not get out because of the barb. My father told me to go to Dr Collings who gave my finger a shot of cocaine and cut the hook out. This was when I learned what a powerful drug cocaine is. I ran full tilt back to the pier, on top of the world. Half

DR MULLOCK

Dr Richard Wilson Mullock was held in great affection by Southwold people. As Medical Officer during WW1, he was responsible for the temporary Red Cross hospital at near-by Henham Hall where his wife, Kathleen was matron.



He was devoted to Southwold Hospital where he introduced surgical operations for the first time. After his death a fully equipped operating theatre was established as his memorial.



Photo Southwold Museum P2430

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

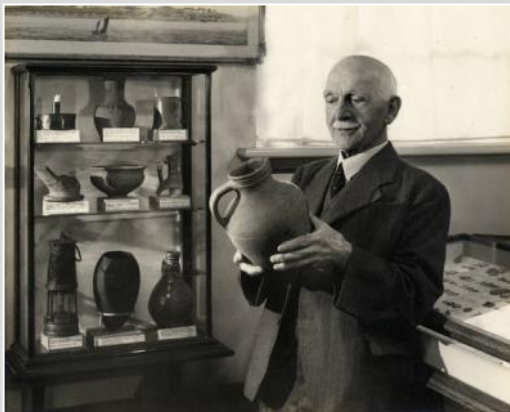
DR COLLINGS

Dr Dudley Collings was a GP of the old school, both a physician and a surgeon. He and his family

moved to Southwold from a practice in Ascot before the First War. He bought a substantial property overlooking the sea called 'The Mount' at No 14 North Parade. He set up his practice at No 3 Queen Street and was appointed Medical Officer of Health to Southwold Corporation during the War. In the

early 1920s he relocated his surgery into part of The Mount. Soon afterwards the Queen Street property was occupied by the Blair family, good friends of the Collings who were 'up-sizing' from a small house in Stradbroke Road. The Blairs' son, Eric (better known as George Orwell these days) had become particularly close pals with the Collings son, Dennis. The friendship endured

despite the fact that Eric had a passionate love affair with Eleanor Jaques with whom Dennis was also in love and whom he was later to marry.



Dudley Collings at the opening of Southwold Museum in 1933

The Collings family were fascinated by archaeology. In 1933 Dr Dudley became the founder and first curator of Southwold Museum, contributing to it his own fine collection of local artefacts. Dennis Collings became assistant curator of the Raffles

Museum in Singapore and a well-respected traveller, archaeologist and an eccentric and eclectic collector.

Although John Harris doesn't mention it explicitly in this memoir, he and Dennis encountered each other when both found themselves incarcerated in the same Japanese prison camp.

an hour later I was feeling utterly miserable. Dr Collings' son Dennis became Curator of Raffles Museum in Singapore. When the Japanese invaded Malaya he joined the army and found his way to Java. As a prisoner of war, he became an interpreter. The Nips had arrived in Java prepared to encounter Netherlands and Bazaar Malay but not the mass of British who were there. For them, interpreting was done by a Nip speaking his language to an interpreter who spelled it out in Malay. Dennis then took it on into English. There was something comical about it all and it became a piece at prison camp concert parties later.

Dr Cordeaux came just before the war but I had no dealings with him. Dr Mullock's two sons kept contact with Southwold. The elder one, Dennis, went to work for Shell in India but came back after the war

to live on South Green. He had risen to top man in personnel in Shell. The younger son, John, was debonair and friendly. All the women fell for him. John was kind to me, four years younger, which was quite unusual at the time. He was a remarkably capable man. Although in Intelligence in the Army, he had won a DFC. He was a brilliant shot with a 12- bore and could hold his own in the top-level room at Crockfords (bridge). John burned himself out and died around 1960.

The hospital, always referred to as The Cottage Hospital, was sited beyond the church where the new council houses had been built. It seemed to provide all that was wanted of it. I was never in it myself, but my younger sister was taken in with acute appendicitis. Mr Noon, the surgeon from

Norwich came and operated and all was well.

There were two horse riding establishments. One of them, Pat

May's was little more than glorified pony rides. He used to wait with four docile animals on the road behind Sam May's beach. When he had four customers, he would set



Postcard image of Southwold Cottage Hospital probably during the First World War. Thanks to Ian Goffin

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

'MAJOR CRANE' & THE WENHASTON MILLIONS

In summer 1933 a dashing young Londoner checked into the fashionable Marlborough Hotel, Southwold. He signed himself as Major Leonard T Crane, CBE, King's Messenger (1st Class). In the following few weeks he made quite an impression on some of the town's movers and shakers and became the centre of attention at many a bar-room gathering. He was also a definite hit with Muriel, the married-but-separated daughter of the hotel's proprietor, Mary Waldorf. Soon the Major was invited to shooting parties and house weekends where one of his biggest fans was Edward Percy Rawlins (late Scots Greys) of Hawthorn Farm, Blythburgh. It so happened that Rawlins employed the lovelorn Muriel as housekeeper so, on Major Crane's many visits to Hawthorn Farm, romance blossomed.

It was as a conversationalist that the Major excelled. Over a drink he would have the undivided attention of his new friends. He would quietly take them into his confidence. His rank, he explained was conferred by his former regiment, the Second King's Horseguards but his real role was with



(whisper it) the Secret Service. A few years before, he had found himself the victim of a mistake by his bank, the National Provincial and, as a non-disclosure incentive, they had offered him compensation which Crane had contemptuously dismissed before setting about suing the bank. So unprecedented was

this that King George V got wind of it and saw it as a way of humiliating a bank which had refused to sell War Bonds. The upshot was that Crane and the Crown were to become co-litigants in a claim of £850 million with Crane pocketing £10 million of it. The case was heard in camera before the Lord Chancellor. Crane and the King won. Unfortunately, through a bureaucratic error, Crane's share got paid into the Chancery Court and he would now need to go through an expensive legal process to get it out. He couldn't afford it. Mind you, if he could

only persuade a few friends to contribute to a fighting fund, he'd be only too happy to cut them in. "How much? How much?" clamoured the great and good of Southwold. "Oh," said Crane. "Let's say £50K for an investment of £650." Edward Rawlins was one

of the first off the mark to help with most of his life savings. Others were quick to follow.

Then came the engagement of the Major and Muriel. It was to be the grandest wedding that Southwold had ever seen. Never mind that Muriel was married, he produced an affidavit signed by the President of the Divorce Division, Lord Merrivale himself, which guaranteed a fast-track divorce absolute. Off they went to see the vicar at St Edmund's, the Revd Pyke, and that's where it all unravelled. The canny rev immediately spotted anomalies in the documents and called the police. The town soon found itself besieged by tabloid journalists. The wedding day dawned with no groom and a heartbroken Muriel. It was five months before the Major was found, selling vegetables off a stall in London. He wasn't a major, of course. Nor was he Crane. He was David Caplice, a timber salesman with a genius for forgery and impersonation. He was sentenced to four years hard labour and, in summing up. The judge professed himself bewildered at the collective gullibility of otherwise intelligent and responsible pillars of Southwold society.

Note: The case acquired the name 'The Wenhaston Millions' because two of Crane's first victims were brothers Oswald and William Spindler of nearby Wenhaston.

off at the walk along the road below Skilman's Hill, on to the common at the end of Lorne Road and trot across to the water tower, then walk to Blackshore, turning left along the river. By the ferry he turned half left and galloped to the model yacht pond, then walked back to base. Later on, a relative of mine, Aunt Jemima, took an interest and they jacked things up to become the Field Stile Riding Academy, based near the power station, known in those days as 'The Electric Light Works'.

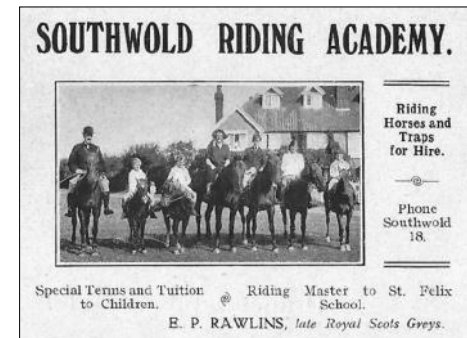
The other stables run by Major Rawlins* was a superior affair with 'Hunters and Hacks for Hire'. Sad to say, Rawlings was the victim of a confidence trickster. He was approached by a man who

*I can find no evidence that Edward Rawlins was ever promoted beyond the rank of Sergeant by the Scots Greys.

explained that he was the rightful heir to a vast fortune, the 'Wenhaston Millions'. He just needed a few thousand pounds to establish his claim. One can only assume that he had convincing looking documents to support his story, and Rawlings parted with his life savings. Neither the man nor the money were seen again.

I did not often go up the river towards Blythburgh. It was rather uninteresting except for the occasional flash of brilliant blue of a kingfisher. Once I went with the family of a schoolmaster and I was at the tiller when the fisherman owner indicated to go about. We were in the middle of Blythburgh Broad and as we turned, we went aground. The tide was ebbing fast and there was no hope of floating the boat, so we took off shoes and socks and paddled about 1/4 of a

mile to the Henham road. Another time, my father got the idea that one of the 'old salt' fishermen, Ernie Stannard, would know the best place to catch eels and persuaded him to take us up the river for an afternoon's fishing. The day before we were due to go, my father mentioned to another fisherman what we were planning. He was horrified. He explained that once over open water, Ernie would get it into his head that The Lord was calling him into the water, and



Advertising card for Southwold Riding Academy.

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

GENERAL BRAMWELL BOOTH

In the Summer of 1928, General William Bramwell Booth (72), leader of the Salvation Army, became seriously ill and retired to his holiday home in Southwold to recover. The house was a substantial villa at the sea end of North Road then known as 'Branksome', now usually referred to as 'The Turrets'. The illness seemed to have been non-specific: a combination of physical and mental symptoms. With the General was his wife Florence who was fiercely protective of him. By January the following year, the High Council of the Salvation Army was becoming restless. They had had no significant leadership for eight months. A meeting of the 64 members of the Council was convened at



The deputation arriving at Branksome to be turned away. With thanks to Prof Michael Rowan-Robinson.

the Sunbury-on-Thames HQ to decide whether General Booth was fit to continue as their General. The meeting decided to despatch a deputation of eight members to visit the General, form an opinion on his capacity to continue and, if appropriate, to ask him to resign.

On arrival, the deputation were unable to get beyond the front door (See photo) being told that the General was not well enough to receive them. The group did return two hours later and were ushered into the sick room where they were received calmly and courteously but were shocked and saddened by their General's deterioration. The suggestion of resignation was put to him and he promised to respond by Monday. Predictably the response was an emphatic "No", delivered to the Council in person by Mrs Booth after an early-morning dash from Southwold in a blinding snowstorm. Nonetheless, the Council voted 52 to 5 that General Booth's term as leader should end and that Chief of Staff, Edward Higgins, would succeed. In his anger, Bramwell Booth took the High Council to court but lost. A final humiliation for a man who, most agreed, had served the Army well. King George V offered some consolation by appointing him a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour in April 1929. He died two months later.

act accordingly My father decided to see it through without telling me. We caught no eels, and Ernie remained on board.

Only being at Southwold during school holidays meant that I saw little of St Felix, Centre Cliff or Eversley. I remember, at the end of one holiday, seeing a dancing class in full swing on the ground floor of Centre Cliff, which itself had three storeys. Two of the masters at Eversley, S A Tebbutt and G B Benson were regulars in the Southwold cricket XI in August. Benson moved to Beccles Grammar School in about 1937. He took up golf and discovered the brand of ball that suited his performance and his pocket was the Dunlop 'Blue Flash'. He made such a point of telling everyone about this that he eventually became known as Blue Flash.

It was not long before various sorts of minstrels made a regular habit of calling at Summer House at Christmas. My father enjoyed having them and offered them unlimited beer. We had a 9-gallon firkin instead of our usual 4 1/2-gallon pin. The problem was that you could not have the handbells performing when a group of singers were in voice and a trio (violin and wind) waiting their turn. One year, we took the Trio around the town, banging on doors of the wealthier people, getting a splendid Christmas bonus for the trio whilst incurring some acid comments for ourselves.

There were a few well known people who used to be seen at Southwold between the wars. The most noteworthy was G K Chesterton, the author and philosopher. He died in 1936. I

remember seeing him sitting on a seat on North Parade. He had shaggy hair under a black floppy cap and was wearing a cape. The most striking thing about him was his enormous pot belly. He must have been about six or seven feet in circumference.

General Booth, the son of the founder of the Salvation Army, had a place there. He did a great deal to develop the army including winning a case in the High Court which enabled them to hold open-air meetings which the local authorities were trying to ban. He died in 1929.

Captain P A O Whitaker, who lived in Stone House on the Gun Hill, 'had ridden The Lawyer III, to third in the 1908 Grand National. In 1935 as a trainer he got Priok owned by Barnard Hankey, living at the other end of the Gun Hill, to

win the Royal Hunt Cup at 66 - 1. There was little work done in Southwold for several days thereafter. Whitaker's son, Tommy, achieved something unusual in those days too, a blue for golf and a second-class honours degree (in law).

Sir John Wilson, philatelist to George V, had a house on Skilman's Hill. General Mackesey on South Green became well known in the war as Commander Land Forces Narvik, and afterwards became Mayor. Keith Falkiner, the Baritone soloist came in August and played cricket for the town.

HAPPENINGS

Every year the Coastguard staged a practice training demonstration of their rocket lifeline and breeches buoy rescue apparatus. This took place on the south end of the common using



Edward Octavius Debney (left) of Debney's South Green store, stepping off the last train to Southwold in 1929, He had also been on the first train in 1879. Next to him is Harry Ward, Secretary of the Railway Company. Southwold Museum P1293

the stepped post there as the ship in distress. A huge rocket was fired from a massive holder and flew about two hundred yards pulling a light line. The receiver then pulled a much heavier line and made it fast to the top of the

post. This would support the breeches buoy, like a vast pair of seagoing underpants under a lifebuoy, which could be pulled to and fro. The weight of the rescuee usually meant that the occupant, one year my sister,

had to run along or be dragged to 'safety'.

In the early '30s there was a suspected murder in the Grand Hotel. A woman had been found dead in one of the rooms and the man with whom she was staying was arrested. I remember seeing him looking very composed being led from the Police Station to the Magistrate's Court. For a few days there was much speculation whether it was a suicide pact and, if so, was he guilty of murder. The matter dropped out of interest.

The Gun Hill, beside the six naval cannon, used to have two guns, one of which looked like a French 75 and the other a naval 3". I believe they were German. They were cut up for scrap around 1928.

The Southwold Railway shut down in April 1929, the last passenger train arriving at Southwold in the early evening of the 11th. It was

DEATH AT THE GRAND

This poignant human tragedy became a national tabloid drama and a local scandal for a few weeks in the Spring of 1933 but was soon forgotten.

Percy Smith (24) and Dorothy (Dolly) Talbot (28), both from Lowestoft, had met the previous summer when working at the just-opened Pakefield Holiday camp, and had started dating. Both were surviving on casual jobs and both had 'histories': Dolly was a single mum with two small children, emotionally fragile and often depressed. Percy was separated and also had a child to support.

The relationship started up again at Christmas when the two were back at the camp. They started having regular sex and Dolly began pressing for a more permanent arrangement. Percy said he'd love to but he



“couldn't see his way clear” at present. He loved her but was bewildered by her mood swings. Easter came and Dolly was so unhappy one day that, they skipped the evening shift and instead sat in the dark on Pakefield beach. “We could just walk into the sea and be together always,” suggested Dolly. Percy was horrified. “Well if you won't come with me I'll go by myself.”

Eventually Percy talked her down and took her back home. Next day she was much more cheerful but Percy's relief was short lived. “I've got it all worked out,” she said. “We'll go by gas. It's just

like going to sleep and never waking up.” She'd found out that the only hotel in the area with gas fires in the rooms was the Grand in Southwold. She made Percy book a room for Friday then took him to Woolworths and got him to buy a length of rubber hose. On Friday evening they took the bus to Southwold and checked in to the town's most luxurious hotel. Percy had a

plan and had phoned ahead to ask for a gas fire to be lit in advance, figuring that, by the time they went to bed, the shillings-worth of gas would have nearly run out.

They got into bed, had sex and a cuddle and Dolly told Percy to connect up the pipe and feed it up through the bedclothes. Percy was pleased to see that the hose didn't quite fit and had to be secured with a piece of string. When he got back into bed he felt pretty confident that the amount of gas exiting the pipe would not be a lethal dose. But, for Dolly, it was. She had evidently placed the tube directly into her mouth. She would have died in less than 3 minutes, said the pathologist. Percy woke feeling ill and beside himself with the loss of his lover.

He was charged with Wilful Murder. At that time, a suicide pact where one party survived was considered a capital offence.

But the jury decided that Percy had honestly believed that there was insufficient gas entering the bed to kill Dolly. He was a free man. The public was on his side and the court erupted in applause and cheering, prompting the judge to threaten to send all of them to gaol for contempt.

A BOYHOOD IN SOUTHWOLD

drawn by No 4, Wenhaston, and had a wreath round its funnel. The railway had been making a loss since 1926 due to competition from

buses and private cars. I was ill in bed on the day but my brother told me there was a speech and some cheers but all rather *sotto voce*.

Various schemes for reviving the railway came and went including building it at a 4' 8" gauge. Some years later, a schoolfriend and I



The River Blyth presented the major civil engineering challenge for the Railway. The bridge featured a pivoting span to allow boats to pass. This photo shows the bridge after it had been adapted in 1907 to make it compatible with standard-gauge rolling stock in anticipation of compulsory standardisation which never actually took place. Photo by Ronald Shepherd. Copyright West Sussex County Council Record Office. Southwold Museum P2416

found a way into the shed in which Blyth and Halesworth were laid up. We found that the whistle of one was attached by a huge hexagon nut. We had a large adjustable spanner back in Summer House and the next evening brought home a fine trophy. Sad to say my parents saw it and we were made to put it back. Everything, including most of the rails went for scrap in 1939-40.

The bridge over the river remained. I recall my excitement when my mother took me, aged about 5, over the cow walk, and we came upon the bridge looking huge compared with how it appeared, seen from home. It had a swing portion which I believe was never used. There was a single plank laid between the rails and a few well-balanced walkers could, and did, go across. There is now a Bailey bridge.

A minor picturesque feature was the Town Crier. In some sort of dress

uniform, topped by a three-cornered hat, and equipped with a heavy bell, he used to take post at strategic points, ring his bell and make



*Jack Button, Southwold Bellman in about 1936.
Southwold Museum P1072*

announcements about local affairs, forthcoming entertainments and so on. He began by booming “Notice” and ended up with a chanted “Hey ho, it’s lovely on the pier” followed by a monotone “God Save the King”. Shortly before the war, Button, for it was he, married our cook, Sarah.

SPORT

The Golf Course was 18 holes but fell into two distinct halves. The first half was laid on reclaimed marsh land which meant soft, smooth fairways and little in the way of hazards except for the wide ditches, or dykes, running across many fairways and covered with chicken wire, costing a one-shot penalty to pick off. There were grassy banks which sometimes made it impossible to even see the top of the flag on the green. The other half were mostly on the Common with hard, rather rough fairways, and there was a lot of gorse, from which a pick out cost one shot, assuming you could find your ball. A shortcoming was that there were six short holes (most

courses have three) but there was one hole, the 17th, which would have been highly rated anywhere.

Off the tee there were two choices. One was to drive straight over a mass of gorse. It needed a very long carry but if successful left a 75 - 100 yard shot to the green. Failure meant a lost ball, a penalty shot and a very awkward second. The soft option was to play wide out to the right, leaving two comfortable-length shots. However, there was a catch in this: the first of those two shots had to land in a narrow bit of fairway. And one could still get a rush of blood and have a bang with a Brassie which might just reach the green, but there was dire trouble on both

sides. Until he retired in about 1936 the Professional was Charlie Elmes. His shop was in one corner of the Club compound. Here he looked after everyone's clubs. The bags were stacked together and it sometimes took a while for him to find them. "Those are the ones". In those pre steel-shaft times, he could be seen making up clubs, never, of course, in matched sets. He called a caddy for anyone wanting one from a group of half a dozen men, glad in those days of high unemployment, to earn half a crown. His ability was probably about scratch, and he was regarded as a good if somewhat untutored instructor. Peggy Sandercock, daughter of the Chairman of Glaxo, needed to "Get them harms out over them 'ummicks." One evening he encountered a young couple making love in a bunker. "You can't

do that there 'ere!" he called. "Why the f... not?" " 'Cos you're not bloody members!"

My mother was secretary of the Ladies' Section and suffered under the dictatorial LGU*. Everyone, they ruled, must put in three marked up cards per year. Letters would arrive regularly pointing out some enormity we were committing. One winter's day I went with her, armed with a surveyor's chain to determine the exact length of three or four of the holes on the course.

There was often an affinity between a golfer and a particular caddy. My mother liked one called Dedman, a bit older than most, who had a slight speech defect. He used to mumble and slur his words. One day he told my mother

*Ladies Golf Union

CHARLIE ELMES—GOLF PROFESSIONAL 1903 TO 1938

by his grandson, Jim Elmes

Charlie came to Southwold Golf Club during the first week of July 1901, as Caddy Master, employed through Mr W J Hanner, golf enthusiast of Market Place Southwold.

In July 1902 The Club charged members to play a round with Charlie for the sum of 1/4d for 9 holes and 2/6d for 18 holes, of which Charlie retained the 4d or the 6d to pay for his own balls. In September Charlie was allowed to give golf lessons, the summer season being over.

He was made Golf Professional and was directly employed by the Southwold Golf Club in 1903 at 15/- a week. Activities continued with Charlie slowly being given more responsibility for the fairways and greens, as well as controlling the caddies, giving golf lessons, making and selling clubs and running the Pro shop.



Charlie Elmes in 1905

1914: War broke out and in August 1915 the Golf Course was reduced to 9 holes allowing the marshes to be let for grazing, and in 1916 the course was closed. Charlie joined The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and fought on the Somme.

In February 1919 the Club reopened 9 holes and re-appointed Charlie as Club Professional at £1 a week from 5th May 1919 with his other emoluments as before, hiring out caddies, giving Golf lessons, making and repairing golf clubs and profit from the shop.

In 1936 the management of the Pro Shop was taken over by the Golf Club with Charlie as Professional at a wage of £2.00 per week plus 25% of profits, including lessons and repairs to clubs. (This was to enable a better stock of golfing equipment to be available.)

On 7th March 1938 Charlie Elmes was retired on ill health grounds with a pension of 15/- a week, paid until his death on the 19th September 1952.

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that he had caddied for a horrible lady a day or two before. My mother went after this both as Secretary but also from kindness. Eventually she got the answer. Dedman had caddied for one of a group of ladies who had come from Aldeburgh for a day's golf at Southwold.

The club ran into trouble when they engaged a full-time secretary to take over from old man Girling*, the retired Manager of one of the banks. Captain Mackay made a great hit. He was a breezy character and would always make up a foursome. His wife went down well too. Trouble started when my father, newly on the committee, asked to see the books. Mackay had

forgotten to bring them. This did not worry the local members: he would bring them next time. Next time came, again no books, so my father got Charlie Hickling to drive them to Blackshore where Captain Mackay lived. They waited in the front room: Mackay had gone out the back door and was not seen again. It was found that he had had a duplicate receipt book printed with which he acknowledged all payments. He had also told Gladys Edwards the stewardess that the committee had agreed to his having free drinks. The police refused to prosecute because of some technicality in facing him. My father issued debentures and the club slowly recovered. One year, Diana Fishwick who had won the Ladies Championship came with two friends to play with Derek Robinson making up a foursome.

The cricket club played on the Common, across the road from the water tower. A 'square', about 40 x20 yards was mown and rolled and had a removable fence around it. Beyond was straight common but the fence had the effect of making tufts along it. The pitches were poor, the 'covers' impossible and the outfield awful. In August we used the Eversley School ground at Reydon which was first class. Most of the matches were played against other towns in East Suffolk but there was one at least against the PLA [Port of London Authority]. Southwold had a few players who played the occasional or trail game for the County, but no one regular. There was a lively soccer side playing every week. One of the stars was 'Pimple' Thompson who got trials in a higher class as well as being a valued member of the cricket club,

**Alexander W Girling was manager of Lloyds Bank in the Market Place from 1924 until his retirement in 1933. He was also Treasurer to the Borough of Southwold.*

being an outstanding fieldsman.

In the summer holidays, the town cricket club would sometimes ask schoolboys, such as I was, to play to make up the numbers depleted by people being away on holiday. There was also one Harry Davy, a year or two older, who was an excellent wicket keeper being in the Winchester XI for his second year. The Town positively wanted him to play. However, Harry's parents would only agree to his playing if my brother Pat played too. They believed that Pat would ensure decorum both on the field and in the bar afterwards. Nothing could have been wider of the mark. If there was any mayhem, it was certain that Pat would be in the lead in it.

I remember one game of rugger. I have no idea what was the home side but the visitors were a

Leicester XV. The only other bit of rugger interest was that B C Gadney, the England Captain, used to come as a visitor.

SPIRITUAL REFRESHMENT

The outstanding feature of the Southwold scene in the 1930s was Adnams' Brewery, and its ownership of the main hotels. The brewery was famous for the quality of its beer, confirmed by the award of the gold Medal at the Brewers' Exhibition in the early 1930s. Two characters spring to mind as contributing most to this set-up. The chief brewer was Bill Coveney. The Chairman was Piers Loftus. He took an interest in 1902 after several years in South Africa where he studied brewing. In 1914 he went to France with the 5th Suffolks. He became MP for Lowestoft. It was said that he held the record for speed of clearing the chamber when he rose to speak on his favourite subject, the decline of the herring industry.



Piers Loftus, Chairman of Adnams from 1912 until his death in 1956. He was elected MP for Lowestoft in 1934 which was when this photo was taken.

PIERSE LOFTUS

His grandson, Simon Loftus writes:

The disparaging remark about my grandfather boring the House when he spoke on the herring industry does him a disservice.

My grandfather was MP for Lowestoft at a time when the fishing industry was suffering badly from lack of demand and low prices. My grandfather persuaded Madame Prunier, the most renowned fish restaurateur in Paris, to open her Restaurant in St James's, Piccadilly - and to sponsor an annual prize, the Prunier Trophy, for the best catch of herring landed by a trawler in Lowestoft or Great Yarmouth. A surviving example of the winner's pennant can be found in the Time & Tide Museum in Yarmouth. Hotly competed for, the award generated considerable publicity and boosted the herring industry at a time of dire need. No slouch he!

There was nothing special about the pubs in Southwold. The Swan was the top-class hotel with a bar. There was something roué about the Crown. My parents disapproved of my brother going there. All the pubs except two were Adnams-tied. There were no tourists, except possibly at the Harbour Inn, and each pub catered for its surrounding population plus some holiday makers. There was a Bullards pub in East Street and, according to legend the Royal in Victoria Street was a free house. It was always known as Carter's and was entered by going round the back of the building. The argument was that Carter could refuse Adnams if it was not up to scratch, so his beer was always good. The beer, that is mild, that he sold was known as Carter's Cream. Customers would order "Two pints of cream".

The other side of Adnams trade was represented by the one small off-licence shop, still there, on the



It was in 1928 that the figure of Southwold Jack was taken down from his place at the west end of St. Edmund's Church to be cleaned. The photograph shows Cliff Aytoe, unknown, and 'Straw' Upcraft with the refurbished Jack before reinstatement.

Southwold Museum P1084

corner of Pinkney's Lane and South Green. It is remarkable from this small beginning, that Simon Loftus built up a nationally respected, full-sized and top-class wine merchants. The shop used to be run by a rather fierce old man, Mr Baker. My sister having been sent to the shop, came back in tears. It turned out that she had asked Mr B to "Teach me whisky"* which he had refused to do.

We used to regularly go to church, first to the Children's services, during the holidays and continued at the adult services when we came to live in Southwold, but after a few years we tended only to go at Christmas. The church had a face lift around 1932 and the Jack was polished up. The windows

**Presumably a mis-hearing of Teachers Whisky*

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were all stained glass and it was rather gloomy, until clear glass replaced it after the war. There was an attractive feature in the procedure that, before the service, when the Jack rang, the choir, concealed behind the curtain below the tower, sang a short introductory anthem before proceeding up the church to the chancel. At the end of the service, they paraded back behind the curtain and sang a short and sweet valediction. I would like to be able to do the same, now.

EDITOR'S NOTE

John died at the end of 2000. He had become a Prisoner of War of the Japanese and when I began to go through his papers after his death, the priority at that time was to get his war memoirs between two covers and archive them in the Imperial War Museum. Ex-Prisoners of War of the Japanese are well known for not talking about their terrible experiences, so it was a large job of piecing together memories that I had previously recorded and his own, sometimes conflicting written accounts of incidents and episodes. John also left a recording of prison camp songs, also now archived in the IWM. Piecing together the history of the circumstances of the

fall of Singapore in February 1942 and what happened to people caught up in it, is now a major exercise of two charities. COFEPOW, Children and Families of Far East Prisoners of War, was started by the daughter of a young man in the Royal Norfolk Regiment who died on the Burma Siam Railway. She is the force behind the FEPOW Museum at the National Memorial Arboretum. www.cofepow.org.uk But already fighting in Malaya were the Volunteers, local men of all races. Their history is also the subject of ongoing research by the Malayan Volunteers Group. www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk.

John and I met at a New Years' party at The Swan, Southwold, in 1960/61. My family had also been caught up in the war in the Far East. My father, Professor, later Sir Norman Alexander, a New Zealander, was interned in Singapore and my mother with her three small children got away to New Zealand where we spent the war, where she worked as a radar scientist. From 1947 to 1957 my home was with my guardians Dr John and Dr Mary Leedham Green, at 18 South Green. Dr Mary was my mother's sister.

*Mary Harris 15 Treadgold Street,
London W11 4BL*

