

Society News

The Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society
Newsletter

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Editors:- Ron and Irene Ashman



Remembrance Day.

by Ron Ashman



In November every year we remember those military personnel who lost their lives in wars over the last century and a quarter. The date chosen relates to the event that happened at 11am on 11 November 1918 when the guns of the First World War ceased firing. There must have been universal relief that the war had finally ended. Except it had not ended, the cessation of hostilities was an Armistice that was signed on that date. The armistice was actually agreed at 5.10am on 11 November to come into effect at 11am that same morning, this was to allow for the news to reach the combatants. Fighting continued in several places with a reported nearly 11,000 casualties, dead, injured or missing. (apparently these exceeded those on D-Day in 1944).

The original armistice was for a period of 36 days, after which it had to be renewed, which was done four times before the Treaty of Versailles was finally signed, which was on 28 June 1919.

In the book, *The Carlton Colville Chronicles* of Canon Reginald Augustus Bignold, (which are the edited diaries of the Canon by J.R.Goffin), in the entry for 11 November 1918 it is recorded as follows, "Thanks be to God the terrible shedding of English blood will now cease. Everybody, however, is taking it very quietly – with vacant chairs in every home. In this village seventy-four lads have died for their country and some thirty - five fishermen have been killed by mines in the pursuit of their calling". However, on 27 November the Canon recorded that additional men of the village had died of their wounds, bringing the total to seventy-eight. He did not record how many men from the village returned with injuries.

Sunday 17 November 1918 had been designated the Official Day of National Thanksgiving. In the evening the bells of St Peter's rang out. However, there had been a problem as the Carlton bell ringers were still away with the armed forces. But help was at hand as the bells were rung by three ringers from Pakefield and two soldiers from the Bedfordshire regiment.

Bomb shelter in Pakefield.

by Ron Ashman

In 2007 the residents of a property in Pakefield had a surprise when work started on an extension. For six inches below the surface they found the top of a 14 inch thick reinforced concrete roof of a World War 2 bomb shelter which was 12 feet wide. This shelter also extended into a neighbouring property.

The properties were built in what had previously been the grounds of a large house called Fernside, which was located opposite the Pakefield Green on London Road. Fernside was owned by a retired builder in 1901, then in the 1911 and 1921 Census it is recorded that a Walter Wood Greaves, a trawler and drifter owner, who was also a fish merchant, resided there. I could not find an occupant in the 1939 Register.

In about 1965 the house became The Pakefield Hotel and Restaurant, which was demolished and it is where today you will find the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which had its foundation stone laid on 7 June 1974.



Fernside, with various buildings on the left, when it was the Pakefield Hotel.



Map of Fernside and gardens c1927, the blue cross indicates the site of the bomb shelter.

In his book "War Boy", author Michael Foreman records "Opposite the Green was the Fire Station. Exhausted fire crews, sitting on the gleaming red engines, watched the games on the green. Some London fireman were sent to Lowestoft for a rest from the Blitz. They found the frequent unpredictable hit-and-run raids on the east coast were even more exhausting".

The property owner with the shelter tried to find information about it but had little luck, so through the Lowestoft Journal, asked if anyone could help. Following are some of the replies.

One gentleman who lived in Fernside from 1955 until 1963 with his parents said he had learnt that it had been a wartime fire station, saying the house and grounds had the rooms, garages and parking space, and a hand operated petrol pump. He also remembered the bomb shelter, complete with water and frogs.

The house was described as a 7 bedroom house and during the time he lived there that 'paying guests' were taken in to help with the maintenance of the property.

(see advert right from the Croydon Times 7.4.1959)

LOWESTOFT, Suffolk.—Flat. 3 rooms. sleep 4. Sea. broads. car space. Linen. 8 gns. week.—"Fernside", London Road, Pakefield.

Two former neighbourhood residents in the area in the 1970's stated that there were two shelters, a large one and a small one. They also remember playing in the shelters and finding old fireman items left behind when the war ended. One stated that their grandfather remembered the shelters being built before the first World War.

No doubt after the Second World War the builder who purchased and developed the land thought it cheaper to cover the shelter than to try to demolish it.

In the March 2023 edition of this Newsletter we reported that a home owner in Yarmouth Road had discovered a shelter in his front garden. This made us wonder how many bomb shelters are there in the town awaiting to be discovered. Do you know of any?, Or if you have any further information on this shelter we would be pleased to see it. You can talk to me at a meeting or send it to the email address at the bottom of the last page.

This article is based on information printed in the Lowestoft Journal, the book War Boy, the LALHS Annual Report volume 21 and from the local history researched by Janis Kirby.

The Lound Anti-Aircraft battery

by Ron Ashman

A few months ago my friend arranged for us to visit the Lound Village Archive housed in the Village Hall. One of the items that attracted my attention was the photographs of the second world war gun battery that was situated on high ground to the north of the village. This battery was quite close to the cottage where my grandparents lived, and where I was born. I had seen the site in the 1950's, when I was about 10 years old, but did not take much interest in it at the time.

After the war some of the buildings were used by the farm on whose land it had been built to house cattle. Today very little is to be seen there.

The Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) battery consisted of four 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns with GL Mark II radar in 1942. Although situated between Lowestoft and Gt Yarmouth this battery was not built to protect either town. The reason it was there was to defend the amphibious tank training site at Fritton Lake, which was close by.

The amphibious tanks, called DD or Duplex Drive tanks, (nicknamed Donald Duck tanks), were a type of swimming tank developed in this country that were used by the Western Allies during and after the Normandy Landings in June 1944.

By the end of March 1944 tank crews from Britain, Canada and the USA had been trained there.

For the Normandy landings the tanks were taken to be launched from Landing Craft Tanks, or LCT's.



The canvas flotation screen was inflated prior to entering the water. The engine powered two propellers when in the water, then when on land the flotation screen was dropped and the tank became fully operational, with the engine now driving the tank tracks. The idea was that this would allow for a quick build-up of armour to support the invading infantry.

There is also a connection closer in Oulton Broad, as the crews for the LCT's were trained at a site at the end of School Road at the Royal Navy land base H.M.S Mylodon. This site is probably better known to Society members as the site of the Pye factory which was the largest single employer in the town in the 1960's and 1970's. (I appreciate that the last occupier was Sanyo, but Pye occupied the site for a longer period and I worked at Pye for 20 years, so I could be biased.)

The first factory to be constructed on the site in 1928 was the Alliance Artificial Silks works. In 1929 the company built the 80 ft water tower that stood in School Road until 1967 when it was demolished.

By the late 1930's the Artificial Silks ceased production and during the war was taken over by the Royal Navy. At the end of the war the base served as a demobilisation centre until February 1949.

The Royal Train

by Ron Ashman

The recent news that the Royal Train is to be de-commissioned made me think back to the time a few years ago when Irene and I visited the National Railway Museum during one of our visits to York, where we saw Queen Victoria's Royal Saloon Carriage. Having entered service in 1869 it was withdrawn from service in 1902. This had originally been two carriages which were linked by a corridor connection, but was combined onto a single underframe in 1895.

This lavishly decorated carriage was finished in Teak with precious silks, satin wood and bird's eye maple, it also included 23 carat gold paint. Originally costing £1,800, with the Queen contributing £800 towards the costs. (I am not sure what that is in terms of today's costs).

One feature that amused both of us was in the bathroom the bath had a red line painted on the inside on both sides. This was to mark the highest level of the bathwater for the Queen to take a bath whilst the train was on the move. Also, the engine driver would have been instructed to reduce the speed of the train to prevent the spillage of the bathwater whilst the Queen was bathing.

Over the years the carriage was upgraded with the latest technology such as electric lighting and an onboard toilet. However, the Queen refused to use this onboard toilet, she preferred to use the facilities at stations along the route, which may explain why many of the railway stations along the route had grand facilities, just in case the Queen stopped there.

Another feature of the carriage was the installation of attendant buttons, one of which the Queen would use to stop the train, sometimes so she could admire the view, or when she would have a meal, as she refused to eat whilst the train was on the move. All of these unscheduled stops caused havoc with the timetable.



Third Garden Dig,

The third Garden Test Pit Dig took place on the 4th & 5th of October in a garden in Kirkley.



There were not many finds, but the team battled the strong winds and rain and all had a lovely weekend together.

Special thanks to our Society Member for letting the Society use her property and cooking the team such wonderful lunches each day.



If you have any articles that you would like published in this Newsletter, please contact the editors at a meeting or send your piece to email address lahs@btinternet.com