

Waldringfield Parish Council AGM: Tuesday 2nd April 2019

Report from Waldringfield History Group.

Waldringfield History Group has had a very interesting and productive year but before I tell you about that, I would like to start by reading a quote:

“I came to a reassuring conclusion when I was at Waldringfield. I’ve lost faith in most things I used to have as ideals or fancies. They’ve dulled and don’t fire me anymore. But one thing still retains its fascination, mystery if you like, and that is the Deben. To see it as I left it at eight o’clock last night with the sun setting low in the west lighting up the fresh spring green of trees over Stonner Point and the Tips, a single sailing ship beating down the Bowships on the last of the ebb. To hear the familiar sound of a tractor putting in some overtime across the estuary at Shottisham, the occasional call of a curlew or redstart on the saltings, then I know there is nothing I want more than to get back to this part of Suffolk.”

These were the words of young man called George Jones upon his return to Waldringfield after the end of World War Two.

Jones spent his teenage years in our village, coming to a beach hut near the sailing club steps and learning to sail with his brother Jack under the care of Jimmy Quantrill. After the war, George was later to live with Jack and his mother in “The Old Maltings” in Cliff Road, where he soon carved out a post war career for himself as a successful yacht agent starting up “The East Coast Yachting Agency”.

On 14th March, the history group was very fortunate to have his daughter Julia Jones, a successful local publisher and author, as a guest speaker. She gave a very well attended and imaginative talk about her father George and described his pre-war exploits using extracts from her book “The Cruise of Naromis”. We also gained an insight into her father’s experiences in Waldringfield after the war.

Julia’s was one of two talks that the History Group hosted this year to which non-members were also welcomed. Both attracted full houses in the Kennedy Room. The first talk was by Roger Stollery; it was entitled ‘Innovation, Design, Architecture and the Deben in Colour’. What a talk that was, taking listeners through an ‘art gallery’ of photographs of the Deben, which gave full credence to the observation that the river is never the same two days running! The beautiful pictures were interspersed with slides of innovative building techniques ranging from the sandless ‘no fines’ concrete used to build the ‘Cement Cottages’ in Cliff Road in the 19th century (Roger preferred to call them ‘Concrete cottages’ for that reason) to a uniquely designed village air raid shelter.

The History Group’s year started with a Remembrance display at the Village Hall monthly coffee morning on the 8th November, three days before the 100th anniversary of the armistice that drew a close to the First World War. History Group members John and Caroline Ogden organised a poignant display of First World War memorabilia and storyboards about those from Waldringfield, Newbourne and Hemley who served in the Great War. There were 75 in total, 10 of whom lost their lives. They ranged from a young 19 year old from Newbourne who was blown up with the rest of his crewmates in a Dreadnought battleship to a 25 year old Nobel Laureate who went on to be knighted and spent his retirement years in Waldringfield. Each fascinating story shines an interesting spotlight on the social history of a tightly knit rural community in the early years of the 20th century.

So it is perhaps fitting that the last of this year's events was the April Winter Talk, entitled, 'A Village in Crisis: Waldringfield from Closure to Conflict'. It dealt with that time in the history of the village when all must have seemed to be lost.

Within five to six years of the start of the 20th century the cement industry, upon which this village had thrived was under threat of closure. Within another few years international conflict first threatened and then broke out on an unimaginable scale. The History Group helped its audience to imagine what life in the village was like during these times and the entertaining and informative presentation which included extracts from newspaper articles of the time and a short silent movie, was the result of a tremendous collaborative effort on behalf of the whole group. However, my particular thanks go to Alyson Videlo for meeting with me on numerous occasions and helping to enable many changes to be made to slides and scripts as the presentation evolved.

One of the great things about being a member of Waldringfield History Group is access to our outstanding website where a wealth of documents, photographs, past and on-going projects, articles and interviews are stored. We are eternally grateful to Bob Crawley for his technical knowledge and tireless work as website manager. He constantly updates and improves the site ensuring that it remains an excellent and informative resource for generations to come.

We are also fortunate that group member Margaret Lake has continued to attend a Medieval Latin and Palaeography course this year. Over the years, she has photographed and is gradually making sense of the huge collection of medieval court rolls relating to the two manors of Waldringfield Hilton and Rivershall. This is a tremendous undertaking and Margaret makes new and interesting discoveries every year.

The History Group has also started to organise trips for its members. In March, Charles Croydon kindly arranged for us to visit St Edmundsbury Cathedral Ancient Library in order to inspect a range of wonderful books including a beautifully illustrated 16th century Polyglot Bible, musical scores, herbal remedies and the rather unexpected discovery of a medieval shopping list.

The History Group's major work over the coming months is to finish then publish a book. At present we intend to base this on a series of walks through time. However the book continues to evolve as we find ourselves in our own race against time (quite literally) because, as we analyse the past, new history is constantly unearthed as our village grows and the local landscape changes around us.

Like Waldringfield itself, our group might be small in number - but it has a large and important task to perform. We are all guardians of our shared past; we welcome new members and recognise that there are many in the village whose families have contributed so much over the years not only to village life but also to wider society. We are dedicated to keeping their stories alive.

We are also grateful to the Parish Council for its support this year.

I will finish by quoting another colourful local character from Waldringfield's past, W.G. Arnott, Woodbridge Estate Agent, Auctioneer and Author:

"I know why so many people come to Waldringfield.....Most of us love to look into a dream world different from our own, even though it may be only trees and clouds or a setting of the landscape and here, in this village, they can do so."

Please come and join us at one of our meetings in the autumn or one of next season's talks.

Jane Hall

Secretary Waldringfield History Group

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