

WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 76

February 2025

Newsletter Editor's report

Dates for your diary

There are a number of planned events in 2025. The following ones are events with confirmed dates in the first half of the year. Please check the web-site for updates [Walberswick Local History Group » Walberswick](#)

The first date for your diary is **Saturday 15th March 2025**. This is a "two-parter" comprising a swift AGM followed by the return of Libby Purves.

- The AGM is at 6:30 pm
- This will be followed at 7:00 pm by a talk by Libby Purves entitled "**My Early Life and Family in Walberswick**".

The second confirmed date is **Saturday 7th June 2025** at 7:00 pm when there will be a talk on "**The Lost Cheeses of Suffolk**" by Vivian Bamford of Sciapod Dairy. The Lost Cheeses of Suffolk are still lost so no samples, but I am informed that we will be serving some more recent samples of locally-made cheese!

The talks are in The Village Hall and are free to members and £5 for guests of members and can be booked through Edward Wright at ewright123@btinternet.com.

Exhibition (in the Heritage Hut)

"A Moment in Time" - 25th anniversary exhibition of the Millennium in Walberswick
- Saturday and Sunday 5th and 6th April 2025 (10am – 4pm each day) to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Millennium in the village. This will include – amongst other things - the Millennium record of all the houses in the village, the Millennium Breakfast photographs and the Auction of Panels painted by local artists. If you were lucky enough to be the owner of any of the panels, I would love to hear from you. Also, if you have any photographs or memories you would be willing to share (I will return them), please contact Pat Lancaster, patlancaster@btinternet.com.

I am indebted to Penny Fox who has produced yet another well-researched article, this time on one of the special houses in Walberswick, the person it was built for and the architect who designed it. This follows a short piece related to another special Walberswick house and the couple who once lived there. This short article resulted from one of the many requests for information directed to our archivist. Finally, we have a book review including a description of houses that would be difficult to identify in 2025.

John English – Newsletter Editor

Man of Mystery who retired to The Mercers Hall - George (Jerry) William Wensley-Waight – John English from the archive

This article is partly about a request for information from an internet searcher (we are read all over the world) and partly a plea for information. It is about a couple who made Walberswick their home and their final resting place. The plea is for information about them and, specifically, to try and answer a question – why did they come to Walberswick? Maybe one of our non-Walberswick readers will spot this and fill in some of the gaps.

The story starts (for WLHG) with a routine enquiry about a former resident, a George Wensley-Waite, known more affectionately as Jerry. The WLHG website receives many such enquiries which are answered mostly from information in our extensive archives. Ultimately this enquiry was based on a misunderstanding as the enquirer related that he started researching Jerry Waight by accident when researching Carl Webb, the 1948 Somerton Man. The Somerton Man story is well beyond the scope of Walberswick-related history but for the curious here is a link - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerton_Man. Despite this, the Walberswick connection to Jerry W-W was just too good to simply file.

Let's start at the end and work back. To the right is the last resting place of Jerry and his third wife, Peggy, in the grave yard of St Andrew's Church. As can be seen, Jerry died in 1967 and Peggy followed in 1977. The monument points to a couple of facts in Jerry's life. Firstly, there is the reference to the 8th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force. Jerry was involved in both the 1st and 2nd World Wars and his widow clearly saw this as a significant part of his life. Secondly there is the lack of a birth date or age. This is something that hampered the research into his pre-Walberswick life. One other interesting feature is the modern flower holder in front of the stone one, which in an earlier photograph found on the internet dead flowers can be seen. So, maybe the grave was looked after for some time? Is there anyone able to shed any light on this?



Jerry married Jean Margaret Elizabeth Grocott, his third wife, in 1957. She was born in Friern Barnet where the marriage took place. Depending on an estimate of Jerry's date of birth of 1891 to 1894, she was quite a bit younger than him having been born in 1910. It is not clear when they came to Walberswick but it would be around 1960. Their residence was the iconic Mercers Hall (see right in 1931 taken from the Walberswick Scroll by kind permission of WPC).

WLHG archives record that Frank Jennings, the architect responsible for a number of Walberswick houses, bought this timber-framed house in Lavenham for £80 in 1908 and moved it to its present position in Walberswick for the cost of £400, as a dwelling for his sister Rose Gabe. In 1931 the house was called Fishersway (as it was in the 1921 census). It seems that it was changed to MERCERS HALL by Mrs. Wensley-Waite. Peggy's father was a mercer and possibly (all conjecture) this is where the money came



from to buy the house. Of interest, but of no relevance, Bertie Stannard told Richard Scott that the bank in front of Mercers Hall contains a flint wall.

A number of Walberswick people still recall the couple but none can provide any information about how and why they retired to Walberswick. They are remembered quite fondly as pleasant, affable and polished people. Jerry was involved with the cricket club but not as a player. Apparently, they were both quite "large" people and Jerry had "medical issues", possibly heart disease. Significantly, Jerry is remembered as a famous Australian journalist which fits with the research of the enquirer.

So, why "man of mystery"? It's only a mystery if you attempt to trace Jerry's life before he retired to Walberswick. For a famous Australian journalist there is very little detail about his life and no pictures. He wrote mostly using other names. You may also note that earlier he is referred to as Jerry Waite. The "Wensley-Waite" seems to have been a later name. Additionally, his activities during both world wars seemed to involve a certain amount of propaganda work. Having said that he ended up in an English hospital at the end of WWI where he met his first wife. They married in 1919 in Brixton after a four-month courtship. The couple went to Australia in 1920 where things did not go well for them. The 1926 divorce petition says he was then 35 years old (b 1891) and born in Windsor, state of Victoria (although this seems uncertain). He married once more in Australia before returning to England sometime after WWII. What brought him to England when many were going in the other direction? His career in Australia indicates a well-connected man of intelligence, and with interests ranging from mathematics to dancing. Surprisingly or by design he left very little evidence of the real Jerry.

He died, not in Walberswick but in Yorkshire. After probate he left £567 (about £11,000 in today's money).

Felix Walter, Clifford Russell and Paules Fenn – Penny Fox

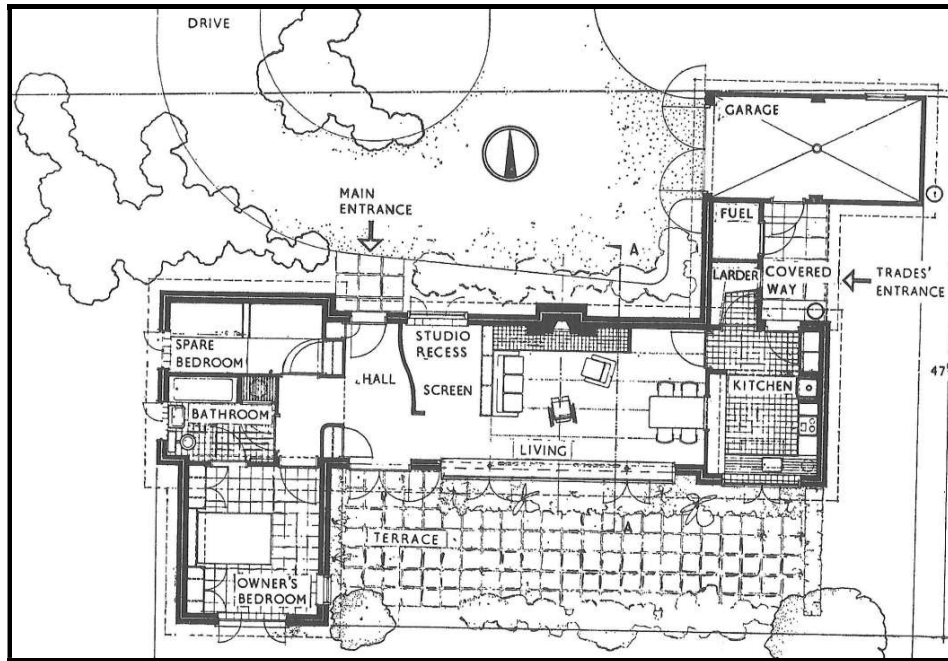
In the Spring of 1949, two neighbouring building plots in The Street with two different owners received planning permission, one to erect a dwellinghouse, the other a bungalow. The dwellinghouse became known as White Cottage, the bungalow as Paules Fenn.

White Cottage has a recognisably cottage style: steeply-pitched, almost catslide roof, a pair of windows facing the street, and a decorative angled brick frieze, the whole modestly sized, inoffensive, unobtrusive in its village street setting. Paules Fenn, on the other hand, is notionally a bungalow having a single storey, but the mix of the sharp and slightly angled main roof combined with two flat roofed extensions, a chunky chimney stack, a single front window and lack of any external decorative detail make a colder statement. No cedar cladding softens its edges. Some people find the style unsuited to its location, disruptive even.

The architect of Paules Fenn was Felix Walter, one of the Suffolk Group of Chartered Architects in Woodbridge. Previously resident in Southwold, his clients included Adnams, and in 1939 he designed plans for their new Plough Inn at Wangford(i). But it was the Paules Fenn commission that would alter the trajectory of his professional life.

Paules Fenn would also change the professional life of his client. Clifford Russell, had designed ads in the print industry before the war. He was later stationed at the Orford Armoured Training Range and was part of the armoured tank advance through Europe. His daughter, the artist Tassie Russell, relates that in 1944 a mortar explosion left him badly wounded and he was later air-lifted to the UK and the recently-opened Stoke Mandeville hospital. Paralysed from the waist down, he used a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Felix Walter's brief was to design a home suitable for Clifford Russell and his wife Diana Tacon. Overleaf is the floor plan.



Note the studio recess, the window facing North and The Street.

The total floor area was 1,140 sq.ft.. The living room (31ft x 12ft) subdivided by waist- or chest-high 'screens' which, Felix Walter noted, give *'a sense of space in a house which, for financial reasons, has a limited floor area. All doors – there are as few as possible – are 35 inches wide to take the owner's wheel chair.'* There were no raised thresholds. The main bedroom and the living area had glass doors and large windows - 20 feet wide in the living room - facing south and to the sea. This was all done on the tightest of budgets: £2,170, the equivalent of around £93,000 in today's money.

The specification notes wall finishes of *'stone paint, light buff-peach colour on brick walls externally ... chimney stacks in local red facing brick'*, and a red pantiled roof. Seven decades later, one of the red brick chimney stacks has been removed above the roof line, the remaining stack painted white as are the once buff-peach external walls.



Paules Fenn North elevation facing The Street

These two images and others appear in a book, *'50 Modern Bungalows'* edited by Felix Walter and first published in 1955 by the Architectural Press. In its third and revised edition of 1959, the book contains another house designed in the intervening period by Felix Walter: Galewood

(now known as Chalk Hill), near Cambridge. Galewood won the Ideal Home magazine 'House of the Year' in 1962(ii).

The Galewood client commissioned Felix Walter having seen Paules Fenn in the '*Bungalows*' book. Galewood, '*The House They Made With Glue*', is described by Ideal Home as a '*single-storey*' house, '*with walls of double glazing and cedar cladding ... the framework is based on a new type of box beam developed by the architect....*' It was a glamorous version, and more than twice the size, of Paules Fenn, with five bedrooms, three reception rooms, a cellar, and an internal courtyard. And it was a *very* 'Modern' house. Felix Walter's particular contribution to contemporary architecture was duly noted and Paules Fenn was referenced in a variety of publications(iii). Screens, internal courtyards and cedar cladding appeared in some of architect John Penn's much-admired nine Suffolk houses some ten years later.

Walter continued to write about and design domestic architecture. However, the Paules Fenn project, combining practical use (the first recorded house in the UK designed specifically for a wheelchair user) with 1950s 'Modern' building design (functional, minimalist, lacking ornament), marked a significant shift in his focus. In the late 1960s and early 70s he produced several publications on architecture and disability, both for domestic and public buildings, as well as detailed studies of architecture for 'wheelchair and ambulant disabled'(iv).

And what of Clifford Russell? He studied English at the University of London and attended Art evening classes at Goldsmith's College, continuing there to study painting, illustration and typography. Below is a rather dashing photograph of him which appears on the 'Suffolk Artists' website(v). Next to him is one of his tank studies, painted and drawn from his gun turret, several of which are in the Imperial War Museum's collection(vi); he was wounded and evacuated three months after completing this German tank watercolour.



OBJECT TITLE

**A German Mark IV
Tank : August 1944**

Art.IWM ART LD 5563

Clifford Russell lived in Southwold after the War; during the 1940s and 50s he continued to paint and exhibit, was a member of the Ipswich Art Club and a founder member of the Southwold art group, now known as The Southwold Art Circle. He was a prolific artist, painting numerous views of Suffolk, of the buildings and landscapes, (see *Southwold High Street* overleaf, from the Suffolk Artists website). In 1951 he made a town sign for Southwold to mark the Festival of Britain, and in 1953, while living at Paules Fenn, designed a village sign for Walberswick to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. He was also producing inn signs for various Adnams pubs.



Southwold High Street from the Market Place

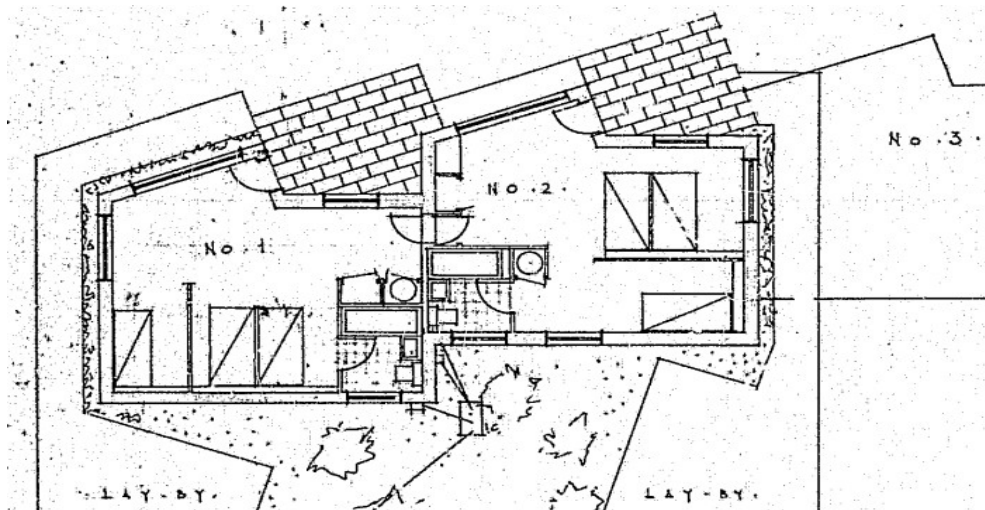


Walberswick village sign

Following the experience of working with Felix Walter on the design of Paules Fenn, Russell trained as an architect. Some of his early work was for The Anchor Hotel in Walberswick between 1959 and 1967. At that time The Anchor had just one public bar – half of the now Front Bar. The rest of The Anchor's ground floor was for the residents, including a sitting room, a dining room and a private bar.

In January 1959, and working from Paules Fenn, Russell designed the first pair of 'Summer Houses' to be sited in the grounds of The Anchor. In the following years, he drew up plans to add further rooms to the main hotel. In January 1964 he produced drawings for three more Summer Houses proposing '*inset panels in vertical tiling, with brick Tuscan's (sic) surrounds.*' These flourishes were a step too far for East Suffolk Council: '*Suggest omit inset tiled panels.*' There are echoes of Paules Fenn in the Summer House designs: the large window, light from several further windows, the simplicity of the design.

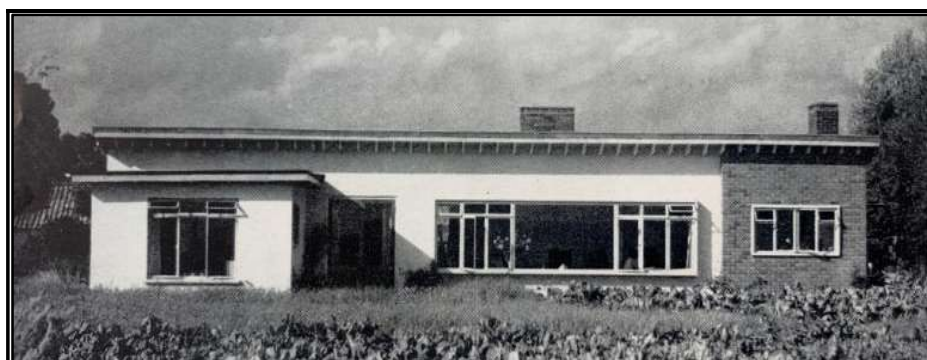
In 1967 another three Summer Houses receive planning permission, though the Council refers to a complaint from a neighbour concerned about '*the number of Chalets in the Anchor field.*' The neighbour notes that while the chalet parents lie-in in the morning '*their children are up, teasing dogs, crying, fighting each other. They are left with bored Au Pairs while the parents sail or drink.*' (vii).



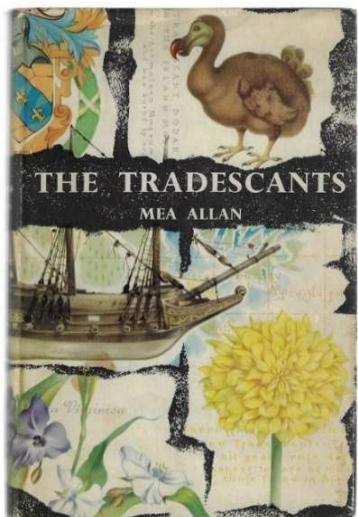
Russell's 1964 plans for three Summer Houses, and the 1967 versions overleaf



The 1967 Summer Houses at The Anchor



Paules Fenn South elevation facing the sea



As well as architecture and painting, Russell maintained his skills in print design. Of particular interest is 'The Tradescants', a 1964 book by the prolific author Mea Allan (who lived in Walberswick at Eastwood)(viii), for which Russell designed the cover.

The Suffolk Archives hold some of Russell's plans and planning applications for various local buildings in the 1970s; by then he was living in Grove Farm, Frostenden. He also designed the GP Surgery in York Road, Southwold which opened in 1985, unsurprisingly with full wheelchair access.

Walberswick Parish Council notes: 'Paules Fenn and its garden play an important part in the character of the conservation area ... an excellent example of early 1950s design, combining local vernacular while being 'Modern' in style.' And: 'The lowness of the existing house ... providing a sense of the openness beyond towards the sea.' It is identified in the Walberswick Conservation Area Appraisal (2013) as an unlisted building that contributes positively to the conservation area(ix). The Suffolk Preservation Society states that Paules Fenn: '... is part of the oeuvre of a nationally recognised architect for a local figure that made a strong contribution to the local community ... in the opinion of the Society, it satisfies the (East Suffolk) council's criteria for the building to be identified as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset being of architectural as well as historical, social and communal value.'(x)

Meanwhile, Paules Fenn stands as a modest domestic monument, not only to the combined talents of Mr. Walter and Mr. Russell but also in its name to the memory of a dark and dramatic period in Walberswick's much earlier history.

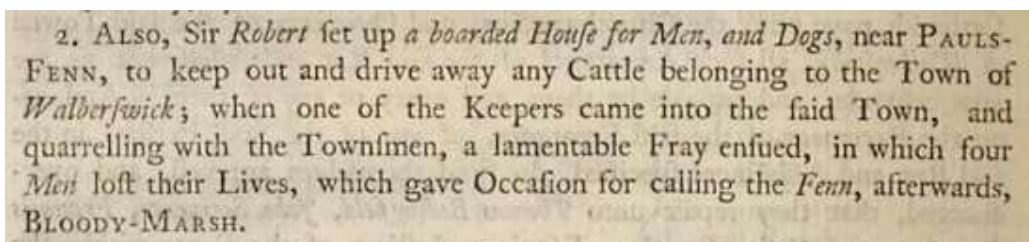
Notes:

- (i) Suffolk Archives, Ipswich, ref: 540/64
- (ii) Ideal Home magazine, August 1962
- (iii) See references in: *A Popular Modernism? Timber Architecture in Britain 1936-39* by Alan Powers; *The Journal of the 20th Century Society*, Journal 4; *Houses of Today* by Colin Penn (illustrated with an interior photograph of Paules Fenn);
- (iv) *An Introduction to Domestic Design for the Disabled*, 1968; *Sports Centres and Swimming Pools: A Study of Their Design with Particular Reference to the Needs of the Physically Disabled*, 1971; *Four architectural movement studies for the wheelchair and ambulant disabled* 1971.
- (v) <https://suffolkartists.co.uk/>
- (vi) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections>
- (vii) East Suffolk Council, Planning Dept. Historic Record Case File. Property 20000 464 2509. Ref. E5339.
- (viii) WLHG Newsletter Number 56, September 2019. 'The History of Westwood Garden'.
- (ix) Planning Consultation response, ref: DC/21/3496/FUL. August 2021
- (x) Letter from Fiona Cairns, Director, Suffolk Preservation Society to Charlie Bixby, East Suffolk Council. 4 August 2021.

Who or what was Paules Fenn?

Paules Fenn was a piece of land which, along with East Marsh, was later incorporated into Westwood Marshes. Reminders of it - Fen Hill, Fen Covert - are still noted in some modern maps. In older maps Fen Cottage appears, as does Great Paules Fen(i) and the Pales Fenn River(ii). The C17th owner of Westwood Lodge, Sir Robert Brooke, could gaze from his south-facing first floor windows and see Paules Fenn in the middle distance, slightly over to the right and close to the parish boundary.

The marshes are a peaceful landscape now but 400 years ago the ownership and rights to Paules Fenn, then estimated to be around 26 acres, were hotly contested between Sir Robert and the townsfolk of Walberswick. There was litigation, disputes over parish boundaries, land enclosure, the focus being on private ownership versus historic common rights. In the Spring of 1644 the dispute culminated in a violent and shocking event, described by Thomas Gardner(iii):



2. ALSO, Sir Robert set up a boarded House for Men, and Dogs, near PAULS-FENN, to keep out and drive away any Cattle belonging to the Town of Walberfwick; when one of the Keepers came into the said Town, and quarrelling with the Townsmen, a lamentable Fray ensued, in which four Men lost their Lives, which gave Occasion for calling the Fenn, afterwards, BLOODY-MARSH.

John Barwick, a Walberswick churchwarden, writing four years later, noted that the Keeper, employed by Sir Robert to keep the townsfolk away from Paules Fenn, was a '*stout fellow*' who abused the people of Walberswick and their cattle and when '*there was noe more cattell to abuse*', he '*cam into our town and fell a quarrelling and fygthing that afterwards he dyed. And Sir Robert soe followed it that 3 after were hanged, and would have hanged more.*'(iv). The names of the three hanged townsmen of Walberswick were not recorded.

The etymology of 'Paules': is most likely derived from 'pale' or 'palus', and describes the close pallisade fencing that, in this context, kept cattle either in or out depending on the season. In the town of Dunwich, the Palles Deike or Pales Dyke was a huge defensive structure which historians believe was surmounted with pallisade fencing(v). Charlie Haylock, a specialist in the history of spoken English and its dialects, believes the most likely early Suffolk pronunciation of 'paules' would have been 'palez'.

Notes:

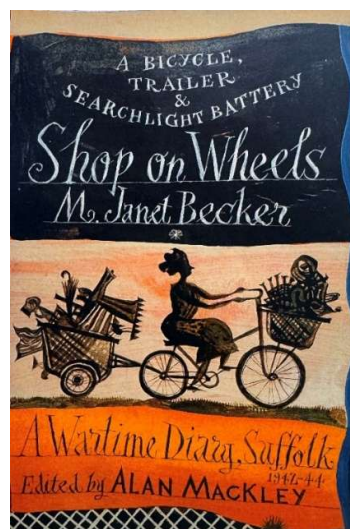
- (i) Map1 in *Bloody Marsh. A Seventeenth-Century Village in Crisis* by Peter Warner*
- (ii) Map of the Town of Dunwich attributed to Joshua Kirby c1750, which is a copy of the Radolphus Agas map of 1589 (Dunwich Museum)
- (iii) *An Historical Account of Dunwich, Blithburgh, Southwold, With Remarks on some Places contiguous thereto* by Thomas Gardner. Pub. 1754
- (iv) Op. cit. in (i) Document 14
- (v) Figure 9, *Men of Dunwich* by Rowland Parker*. Also, Suffolk Institute of Archaeology, Volume XXXII Part 1. *Note on the Historical Records of Dunwich's Defences* by Norman Scarfe

*Copy available in Walberswick Local History Group Archives

Shop on Wheels by M Janet Becker – A wartime Diary, Suffolk 1942-44 Edited by Alan Mackley

A recently discovered war diary, kept by Margaret Janet Becker (1903-1953), but always known as Janet, has been made available and edited by Alan Mackley. Much of Janet's diary is about the searchlight battery at Henham. However, we know that there was also a searchlight battery at Walberswick, which Janet clearly visited and identifies as "hard by the site of the old station". Her description of wartime Walberswick is difficult to reconcile with Walberswick today.

"This afternoon I walked over to Walberswick to find Chediston's new site. The village up from the ferry looks like a Russian one the Germans have evacuated – the houses that aren't in ruins are all shut up – and by ruins I don't mean bomb damage so much as the ravages of time on the Jerry-built houses of the last war"



Carol Christie left her Ferry Knoll manuscripts to Janet.

From 1942 to 1944 Janet kept this occasional diary describing the support she gave to the troops. This involved attaching a trailer to her bicycle – her shop on wheels – and riding from Wangford to Henham Park with everyday items she thought the men would like to buy. In addition uniforms-repair services were offered and competitions and demonstrations arranged.

WLHG has received a copy for the archives and Harry Edwards reviewed the book and says "I would like to thoroughly recommend *"Shop on Wheels"* as a delightful and moving read about an extraordinary woman, Janet Becker, who cycled from Wangford to Henham to help and support the searchlight battery stationed in Henham Park".

"Shop on Wheels" is available from BLYTHBURGH BOOKS for £5 plus £2 p&p. Email your order with name and address to bburghbooks@btinternet.com for details of payment by bank transfer, or send a cheque payable to A.L. Mackley, at 1 Angel Lane, Blythburgh, Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 9LU.

Watch this space.... the book has been short-listed for an East Anglian Book Award 2024 in the Biography and Memoir category. Category winners to be announced in mid-January and overall winner in February.