



Walberswick Local
History Group

1953 FLOOD

Part 1

Walberswick

Pictures and Memories.

and

Other flood pictures.

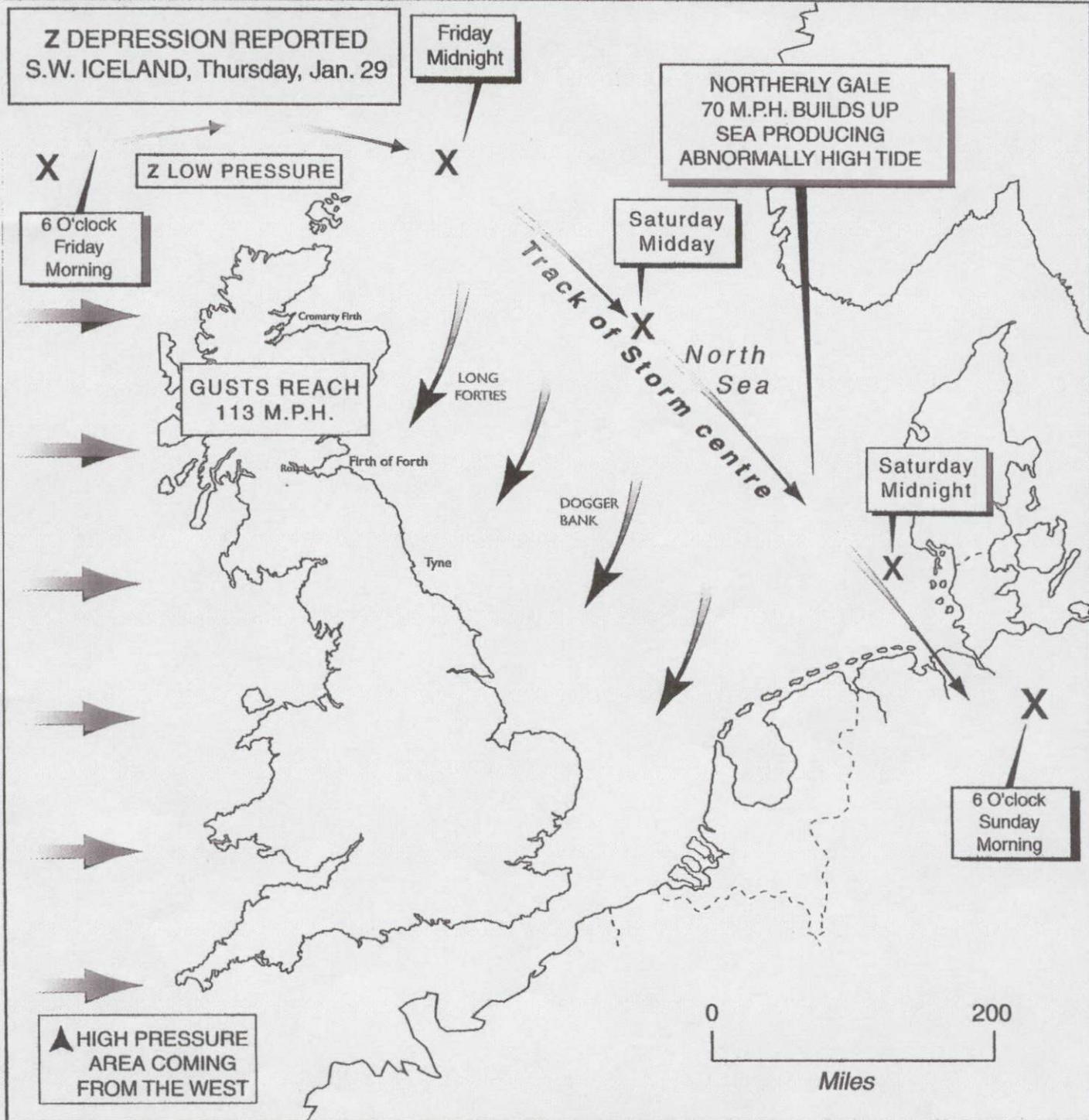
Part of a Exhibition commemorating the 50th Anniversary

Held on May 26th 2003

HOW DID IT HAPPEN!

**FOR 24 HOURS A VERY DEEP
FAST MOVING DEPRESSION
TRAVELLED DIAGONALLY
ACROSS THE NORTH SEA FROM
SCOTLAND TO HOLLAND WITH
HURRICANE FORCE 12
NORTH EASTERLY WINDS.**

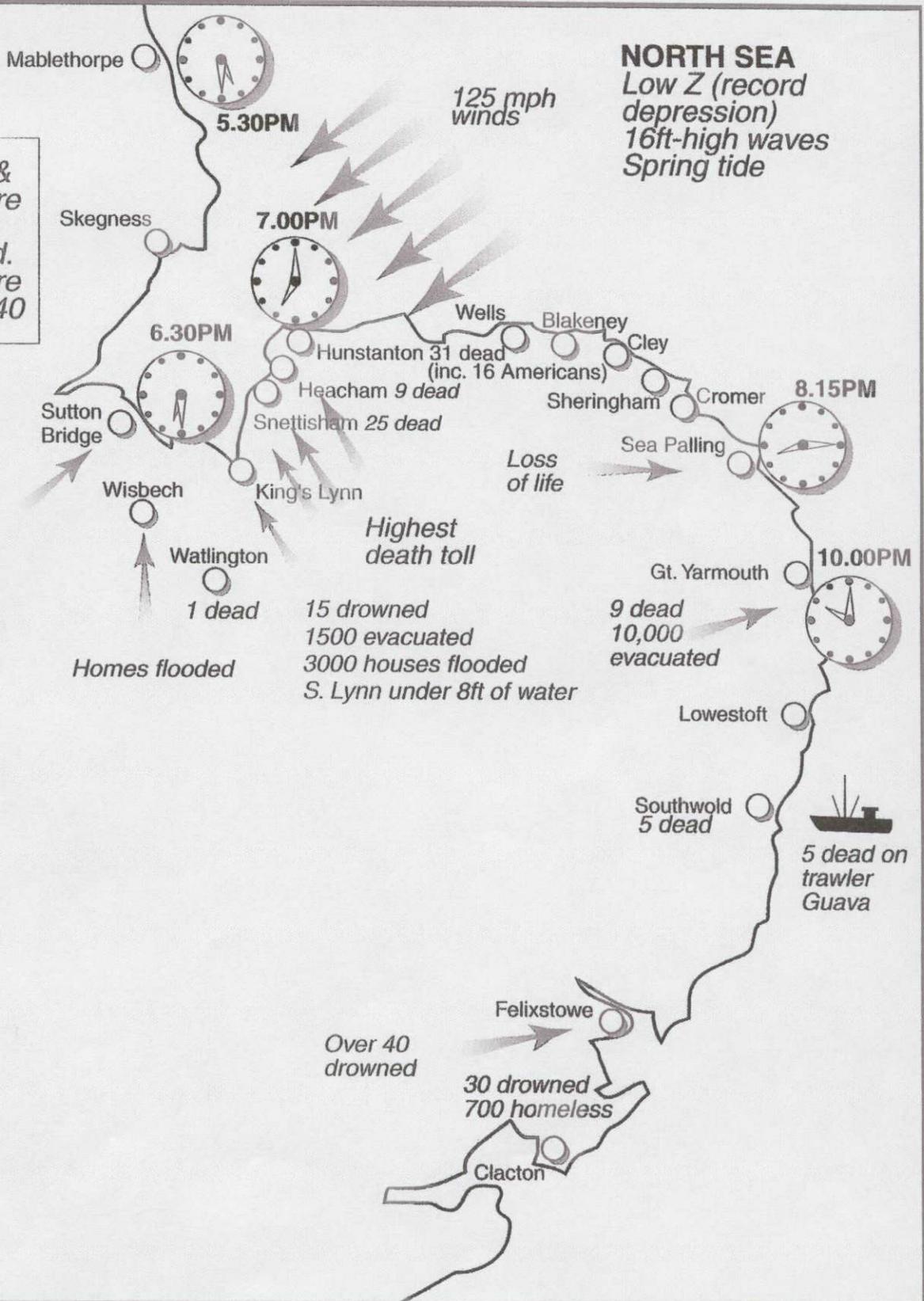
**THIS PRODUCED A MASSIVE
8 FOOT (2.4M) TIDAL SURGE
WITH WAVE HEIGHTS
IN EXCESS OF 12 FEET
ALONG THE EAST COAST.**



**Map charting the progress of Low Z
from 29 January to 1 February 1953**

Yorkshire & Lincolnshire coastlines devastated. Lincolnshire death toll 40

80 homes flooded when River Nene overflows





Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

Newsletter No 3 Jan 1993

Extract from the editorial by Derrick Allen

I would like to start this Newsletter with an extract from Miss Browton's diary. She realised the importance of a recorded village history. Many of you knew her and the following is a tribute from us of the of the History Group:

The flood in 1953 when the dykes overflowed was very severe at this end of the village and for hours the road by the green became a roaring stream.

A family consisting of a mother and three small children had to be evacuated from their cottage with the aid of a boat from their bedroom window and it was a sad sight for days afterwards, when furniture and goods were carried out on to the Green to dry and to get rid of mud and water. It was two or three years before the land recovered from the salt water, the marshes were ruined for cattle feeding. It is to be hoped that the high banks and other protection work that is only just finished will prevent another such disaster.

From that entry our curiosity is aroused as to who the children were, and what has happened to them, now that they are in their forties (93).



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

Newsletter No 4 Aug 1993

Extract from the editorial by Derrick Allen

Our last letter quoted recollections of the 1953 Floods as recorded by Miss Browton in her diary. Specifically the rescue of people in the vicinity of the village green. There was a good response to our request for, if possible, more details, most of which I obtained from ex Special Constable Arthur Sharman who lives not too far away from the scene of his salvage operations, which he performed from a dinghy complete with oars which had been left providentially in the vicinity.

The most difficult rescue was that of Mrs Cowley at "Hidden Hut". She was a lady of large proportions and when the boat arrived, the water was lapping the mattress of her bed, she was, she thought, saved by an act of God. Among the debris which floated in through the doorway, the Almighty had sent her a bottle of Scotch!. Then arrived Arthur Sharman in his dinghy, he had been joined by Harry Meekins (Jimmy's brother). After a lot of persuasion they enticed her to the bedroom window and lifted her into the boat, which was no mean task.

Ruth Goodwin and her two very young children were rescued from "Harbour View", also Mrs Harvey and family living in "Coronation Cottage" by the Green. Mrs Harvey was the daughter of Mr C Adams who will never be forgotten as long as Adams Lane exists.

Mr and Mrs Scott at "Samphire Cottage", where the water had reached the top of the porch, refused the offered salvation, nevertheless they survived.

The water eventually reached "The Anchor" car park before the tide turned. A lot of people were involved through their kindly acts. Crises within a community brings out the best in us.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

SOMETHING ABOVE THE MAXIM

by

BLUCHER ENGLISH

It was the last few days of January 1953. For about three days the wind blew from the South but on the thirty-first it veered to the Nor-West and a terrific gale did blow. All the locals said there would be a big tide. The Moon was at the full that day so things did work just right. At midnight the tide was lapping at our doors. From Todd's corner to the Anchor Hotel the road was like a canal.

They rescued folks by boat in the night - a thing never done in Walberswick Street before. They got them out allsafe and sound and other folks took them in to care for them and see that they were well.

There was Mrs Pell who kept the Tea Rooms, the Sharman's from Concord Cottage and the Harvey's next door at Coronation Cottage with three small children which they lowered from the bedroom window. When they got to old Mrs Cowley they fell down with her. Mrs Goodwin at Harbour View with her two small children got out before it got to bad. The Scot's at Samphire got upstairs and stuck it out for the night with the water rushing in and out. The drapery shop and house

that is now Hedgely where the Reynolds lived was flooded so also was their grocery shop at the other end of the Green, with the foam from the soap powder that had been stored in the cellar oozing out of the doors.

Over the hill towards the Ferry, at Ferry Cottage and the row of cottages, there was old Mrs Jackson, then Mrs Sutton and her family. Tow's Cabin was washed away and John Brunt lost nearly all his belongings but he got out. Michael Jeans and his family had a bad time at Valley Farm.

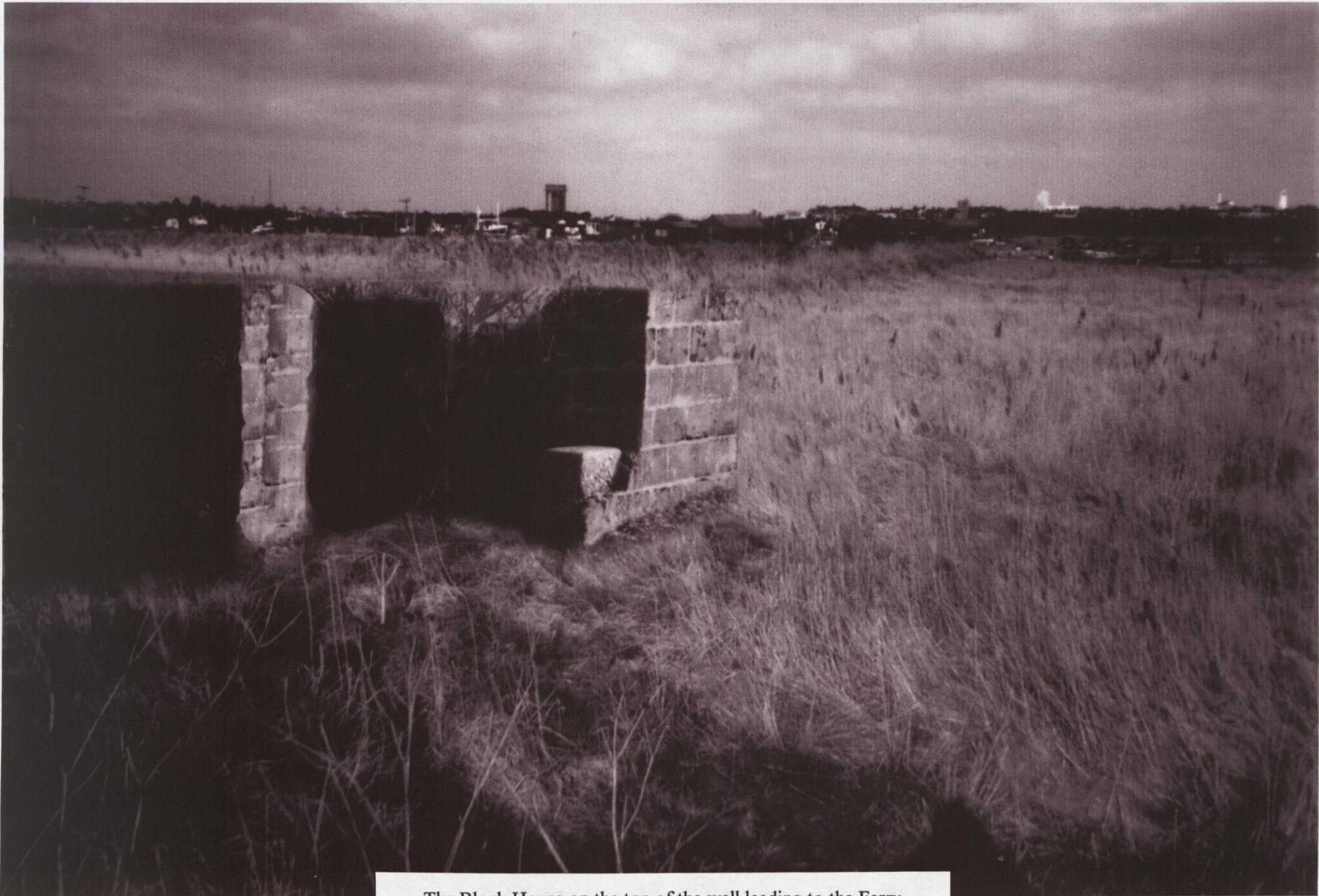
Down Thompson Town (The Lea) at the Anchorage the Misses Hay and Marsh, two old ladies, were rescued and taken to the Bell Hotel, next door Victor Brega and his family and at Crestholme, lived Mr Spall and Miss Norman, there is one that I have forgotten, Miss Haward at the Pottery Shop (Parish Lantern) and lots of empty houses got flooded.

Next day being Sunday, folks were about early surveying the damage, with the tide still very high. As the tide receded so willing helpers started to get the houses cleared, and gathering up the furniture and damaged household things. They soon had the W.V.S. on the scene, and with the few willing helpers things began to happen. The men folk took on the job of washing out the houses and removing the drift that the tide had left behind, and the women folk, did the collecting up and washing all the things that could be salvaged, as every thing was covered with mud. The work was very hard, but every one did it with a good heart, and they got some laughs out of it.

The two old ladies Miss Hay and Miss Marsh, would not have one of the women helpers, as they said she came from smuggling stock, but there, most of the old locals are.

It was just on a fortnight before the village was ship shape again.





The Block House on the top of the wall leading to the Ferry



All that can be seen of the Block House that stood on top of the wall leading to the Ferry, the wall completely disintegrated and the Block House was left standing on its side in a 5 metre deep hole, when the wall was rebuilt they just filled in around it.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

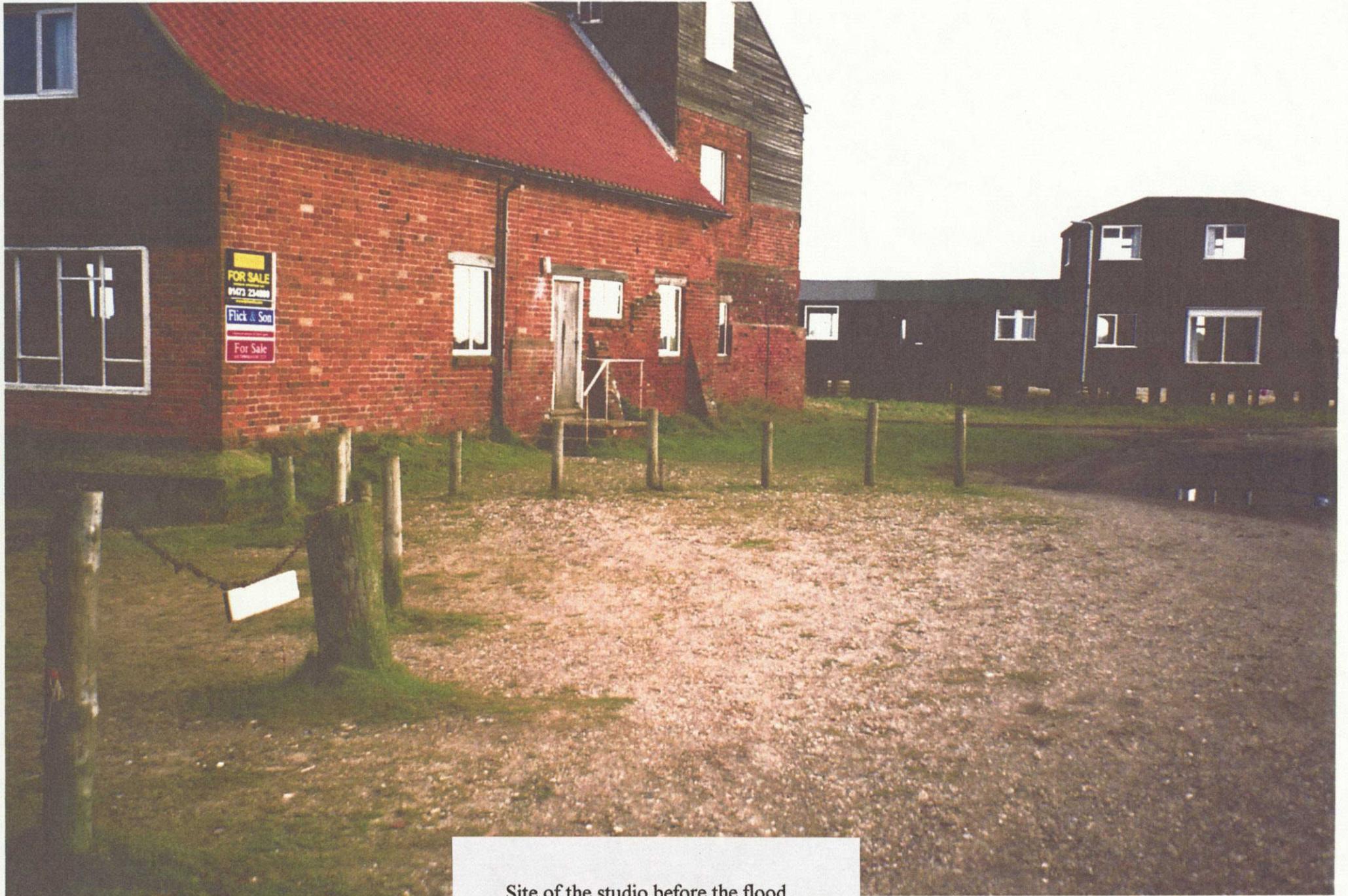
THE CRAFT ROOM

by

ELIZABETH WALTERS.

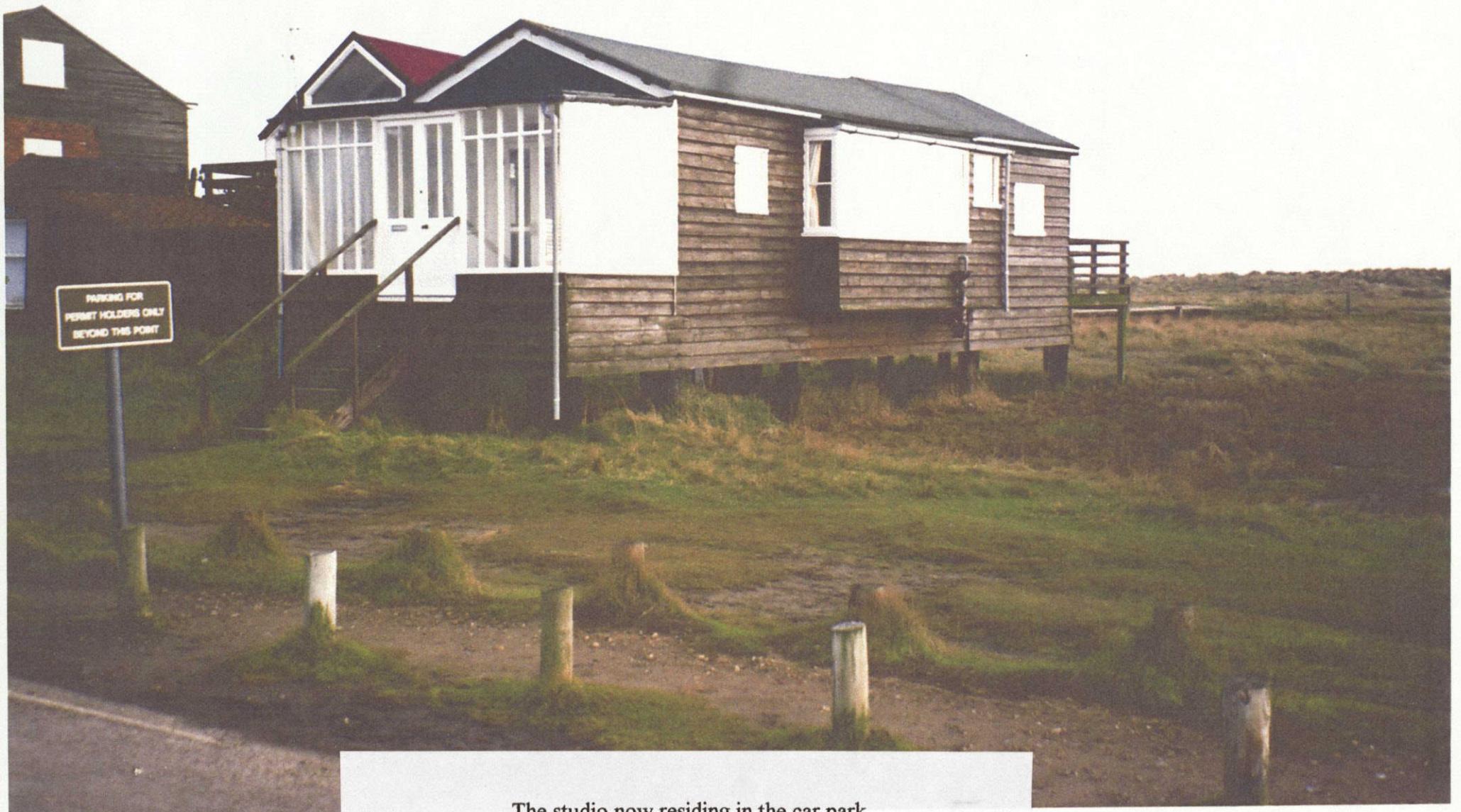
The Craft Room was built c. 1920 by H Block as his builder's shed. Mr Snow used it later on to exhibit his paintings, pottery and hand loom weaving.

This shed originally stood just south of the brick warehouse, that was also known as the yacht yard, between it and the big black studio, during the flooding it floated up the road as far as the Old Vicarage boundary wall, the Charity Trust allowed it to be re sited to the south of the black studio, on the then grassy net drying area, sadly says Mrs Walters we now find ourselves living in the middle of a car park.

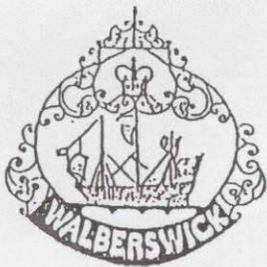


Site of the studio before the flood.





The studio now residing in the car park.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

My memories of the 1953 flood.

by

Trevor Connick.

I was 9 years old nearly 10. The family lived at 4 Church Lane. The weather had been very windy for a number of days but there was no real hint of the disaster to come.

The main bedroom window at No 4 looked out across Church Field. There were no houses on the field side of Church Lane, only Common Edge at the bottom. With no telephone and no television we had no knowledge of the flood until we looked out of the bedroom window when the family woke up. Where we normally had a view of the marshes on the Walberswick side of the river, Blackshore and the golf course which was on the marshland on the Southwold side of the river there was nothing but water. I can remember staring and not really believing what we were seeing. Blackshore including the Harbour Inn was like an island.

Our Uncle Bob and Aunty Bell (Robert Spall and Isabel Norman) lived in Crestholme, the house my mother still lives in at the bottom of the Lea, which backs onto the marshes. We quickly dressed and went to see if they were all right. On reaching Crestholme we found the bottom floor of the house had been completely flooded, it was in a terrible state, mud everywhere. On seeing my mother and father Uncle Bob and

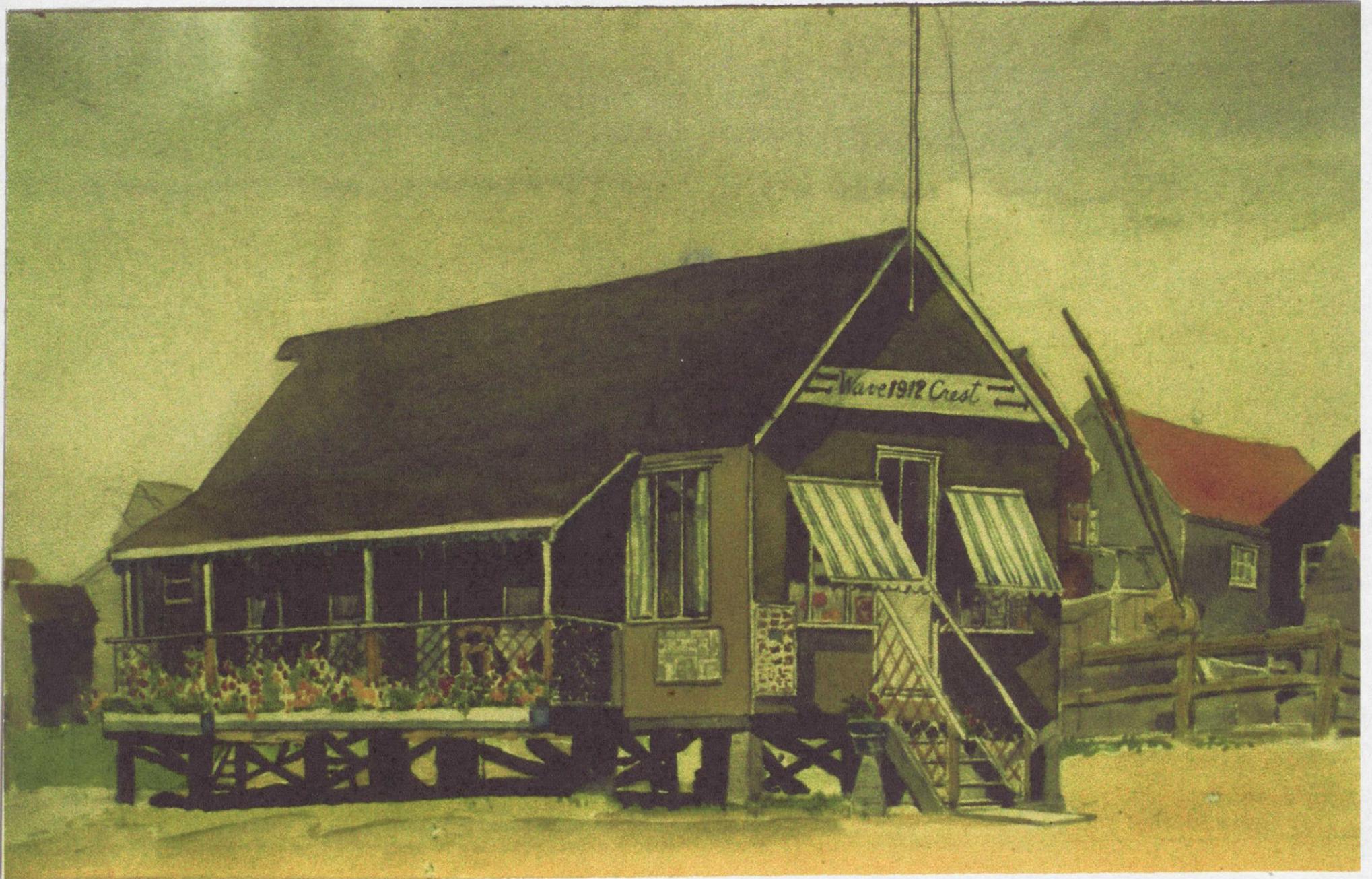
Aunty Bell who had spent the night on the first floor both dissolved in to tears. The water had receded from the house but was still high up in the garden. The garden was my Uncle's pride and joy, the flood destroyed nearly everything. I have always been able to remember the thousands of dead worms all over the place.

My Uncle owned a picturesque tea-room called Wave Crest. It was a big single story black hut on stilts with a veranda and shop blinds that pulled down at the front. Every summer my Uncle grew Geraniums, which he planted out in tubs all along the veranda. Wave Crest was the car park side of Cross's hut and on the opposite side to the green hut. We went to see if Wave Crest was still intact. It had disappeared. We later learnt that the wooden bridge (Kissing Bridge) over the creek had been lifted by the floodwater, floated across and knocked Wave Crest off its stilts.

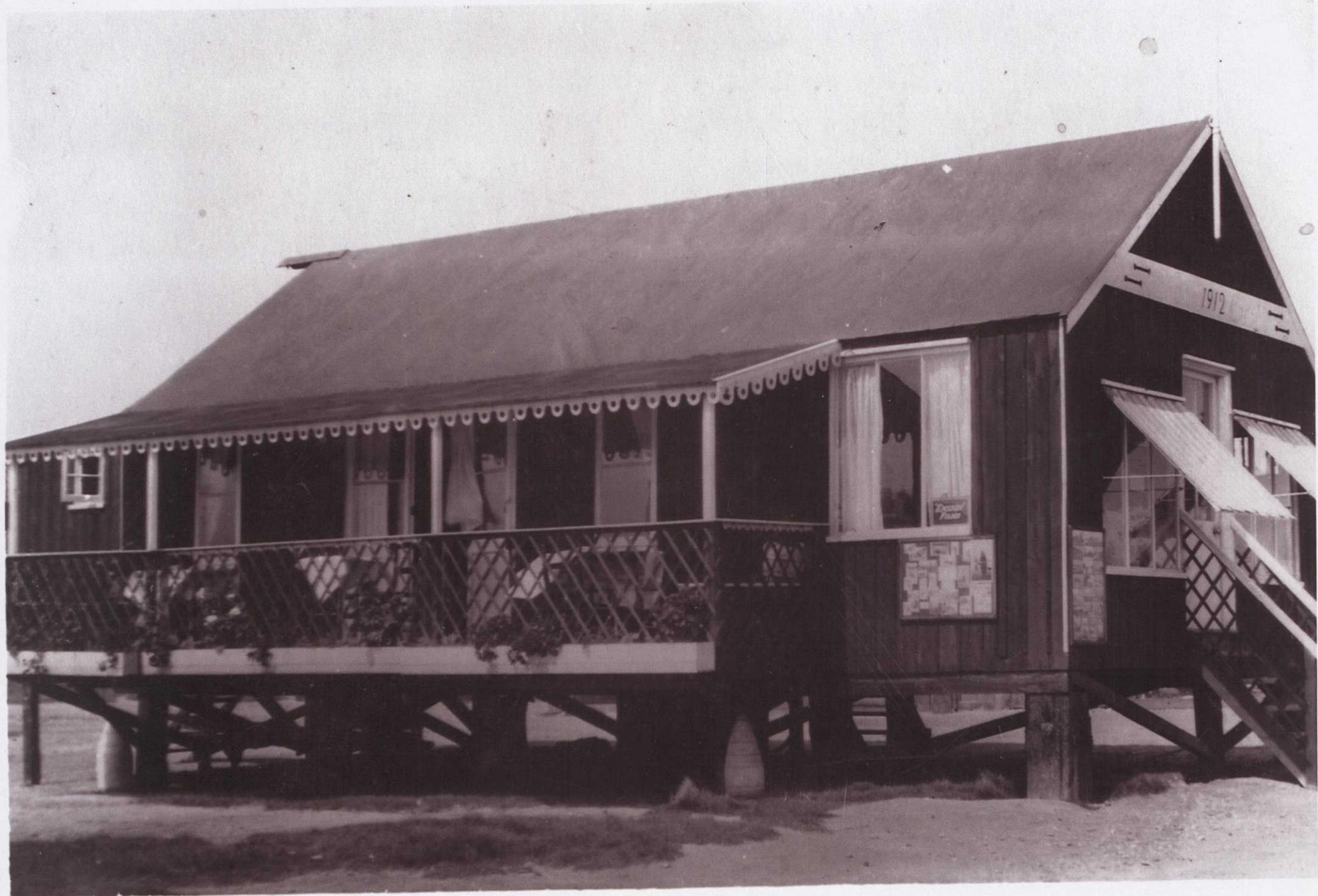
Wave Crest finished up on the river bank on the Southwold side of the river the Bailey bridge side of the Harbour Inn. My father later took me to salvage what we could from the remains. I can remember my father crawling down the river bank and disappearing into the wreckage. There were cups still hanging on the hooks. He also recovered an old music box, which used metal cylinders. While we were there two policemen challenged us. Apparently looting was a bit of a problem. My father had a letter of authorisation from my uncle.

For years after trees in my Uncle's garden gradually died. The effects of the flood lasted for years. Airmen from USAF Bentwaters helped with the clear up. I can remember at school, children from flooded houses playing with "Jacks" (the metal version of five stones or bones) we hadn't seen these before. The Americans had given them to them.

I remember very little about the loss of life. Without television or the media coverage that we would expect today we were protected against a lot of this sort of detail.



"Wave Crest" a painting by John Doman Turner.





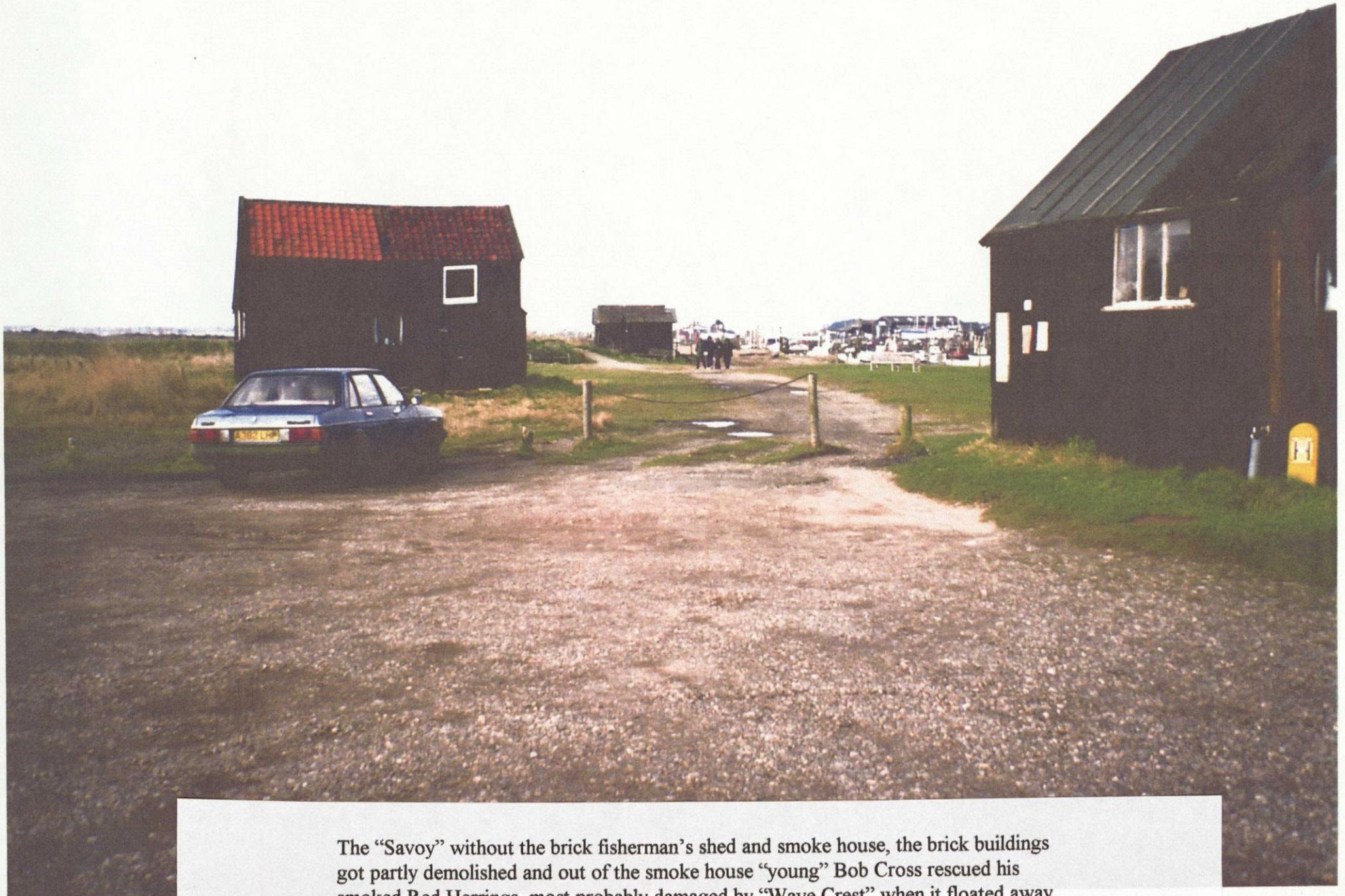
Mr Robert Spall, surveying the damage
and mess in his garden



Mr Robert Spall in the lane with
Mr Francis Perowne, who assisted
in the clearing up.



Site of "Wave Crest".



The "Savoy" without the brick fisherman's shed and smoke house, the brick buildings got partly demolished and out of the smoke house "young" Bob Cross rescued his smoked Red Herrings, most probably damaged by "Wave Crest" when it floated away.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

EAST ANGLIAN DAILY TIMES
SAT MARCH 7 1953

Tide Warning to Son by 'Phone.

Saved by call from Scarborough.

A telephone call from a Scarborough man to his son at Walberswick, Suffolk, on the eve of the great floods, was said at yesterday's meeting of the Executive Committee of the East Suffolk Parish Councils' Association to be the cause of "all the grumbles" about lack of adequate warning by the authorities.

When the son received the news of the huge tide at Scarborough it gave him four hours' warning and said a member, Miss D. F. L. Debney, "he pulled out in good time to escape the disaster."

The committee was considering a resolution from Walberswick Parish Council, "deploring the extreme negligence on the part of the Government Department concerned."

Commenting another member, Mr H. Scrimgeour, "because of the story of this 'phone message, there have been all these complaints."



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

LACK OF "ALERT"
CRITICISED

FLOOD PROTEST
Daily Telegraph Reporter

Lack of official warning of the floods was yesterday criticised by local authorities and inhabitants of stricken areas in East Anglia.

A Meteorological Office spokesman in London said that warnings were sent to catchment boards at 11.30 a.m. on Saturday. They gave 12 to 14 hours notice that trouble was likely to develop with the high tide early on Sunday.

Mr S. V. Ellis, clerk of the East Suffolk and Norfolk River Board, said a warning of high winds from the Central Forecast Office was a routine part of a service for which the Board paid. "It gave no indication that there would be abnormal tides."

Walberswick, East Suffolk, parish council passed a resolution "deploring the extreme negligence on the part of the Government department concerned." East Suffolk County Council roads and bridges committee has decided to make representations about the lack of warning.

A question about the lack of warning was also raised at last night's meeting of Southwold Town Council, Suffolk.

“It is felt that if a private man could give warning in this way, the authorities could have done so too. There is something in it.”

Miss Debney said that lives were saved at Lowestoft, Suffolk, because “old salts just went round and told people what was likely to happen.”

The committee agreed to acknowledge the resolution “with sympathy.

John Blowers worked at “East Point Pottery” owned by Mr Michael Jeans.

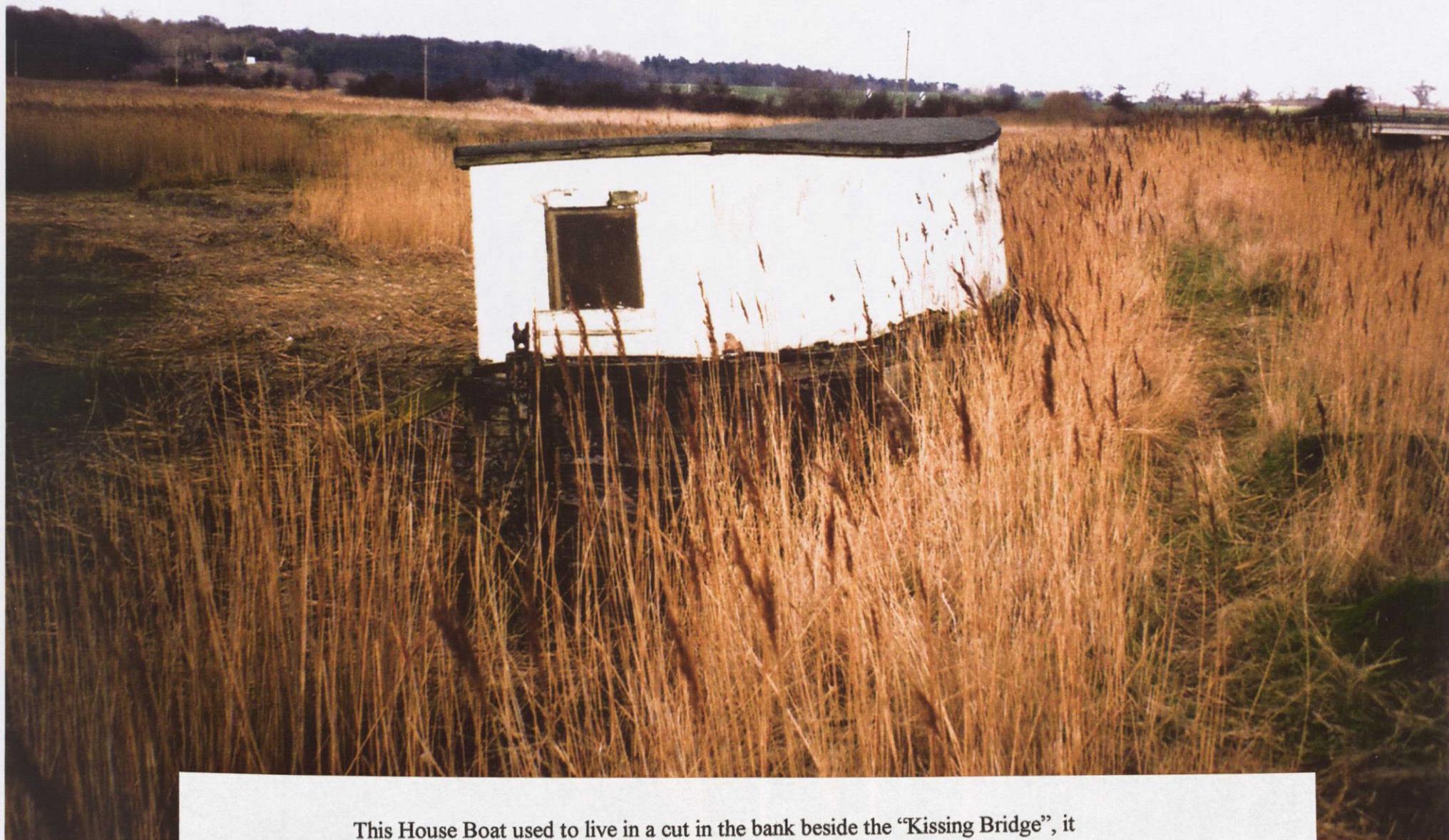


One of our regular floods "East Point" is the building on the right of the picture.



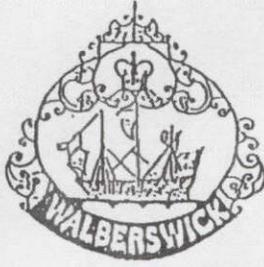
The Flats (used to be a washing and net drying area).
The Kissing Bridge was replaced with a cheap flat model and the House Boat finished
up below Blythburgh Church.

ICES LTD.



This House Boat used to live in a cut in the bank beside the "Kissing Bridge", it finished up left by the tide just below Blythburgh Church, and is still there.





Malberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

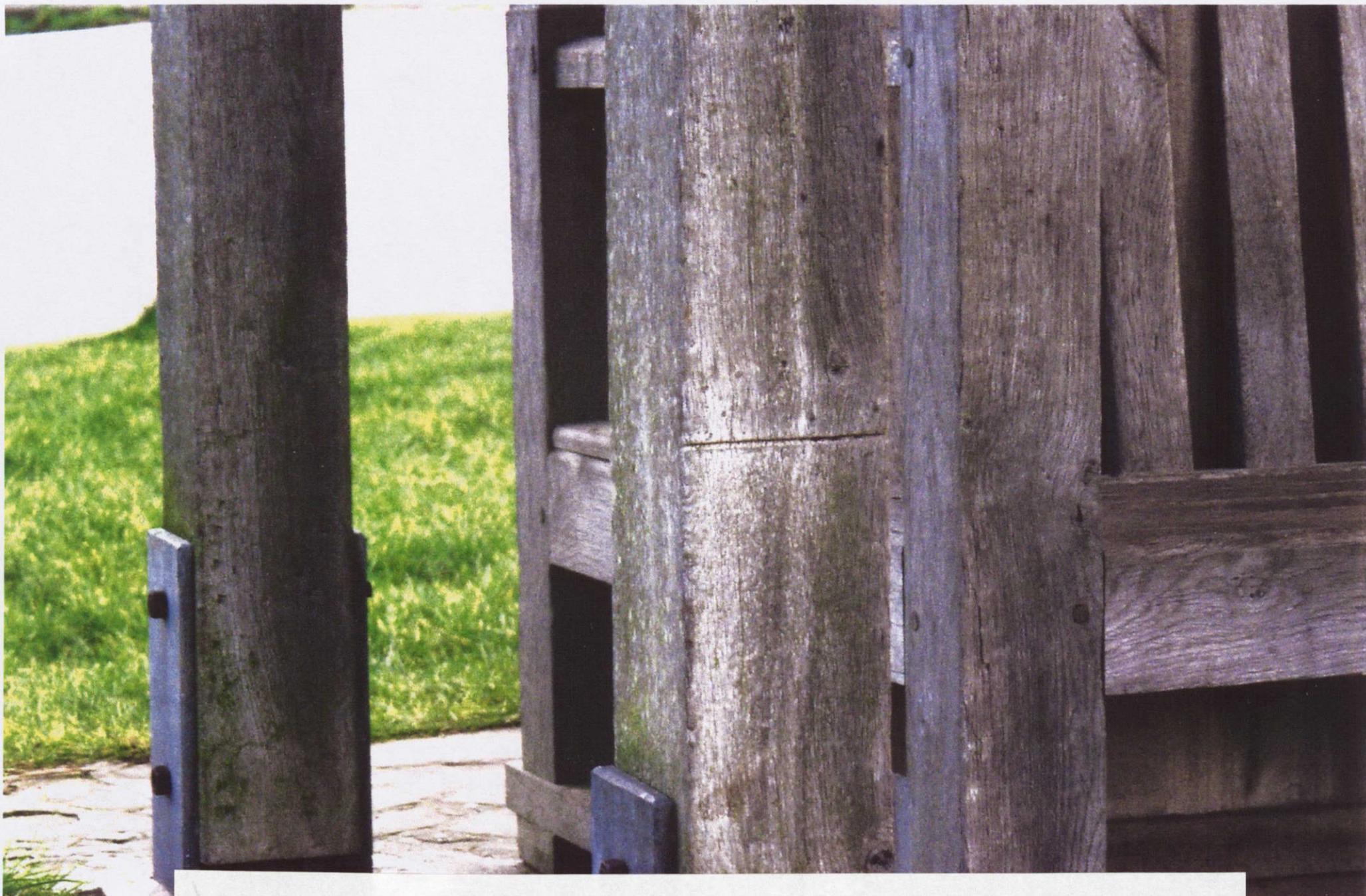
MEMORIES

by

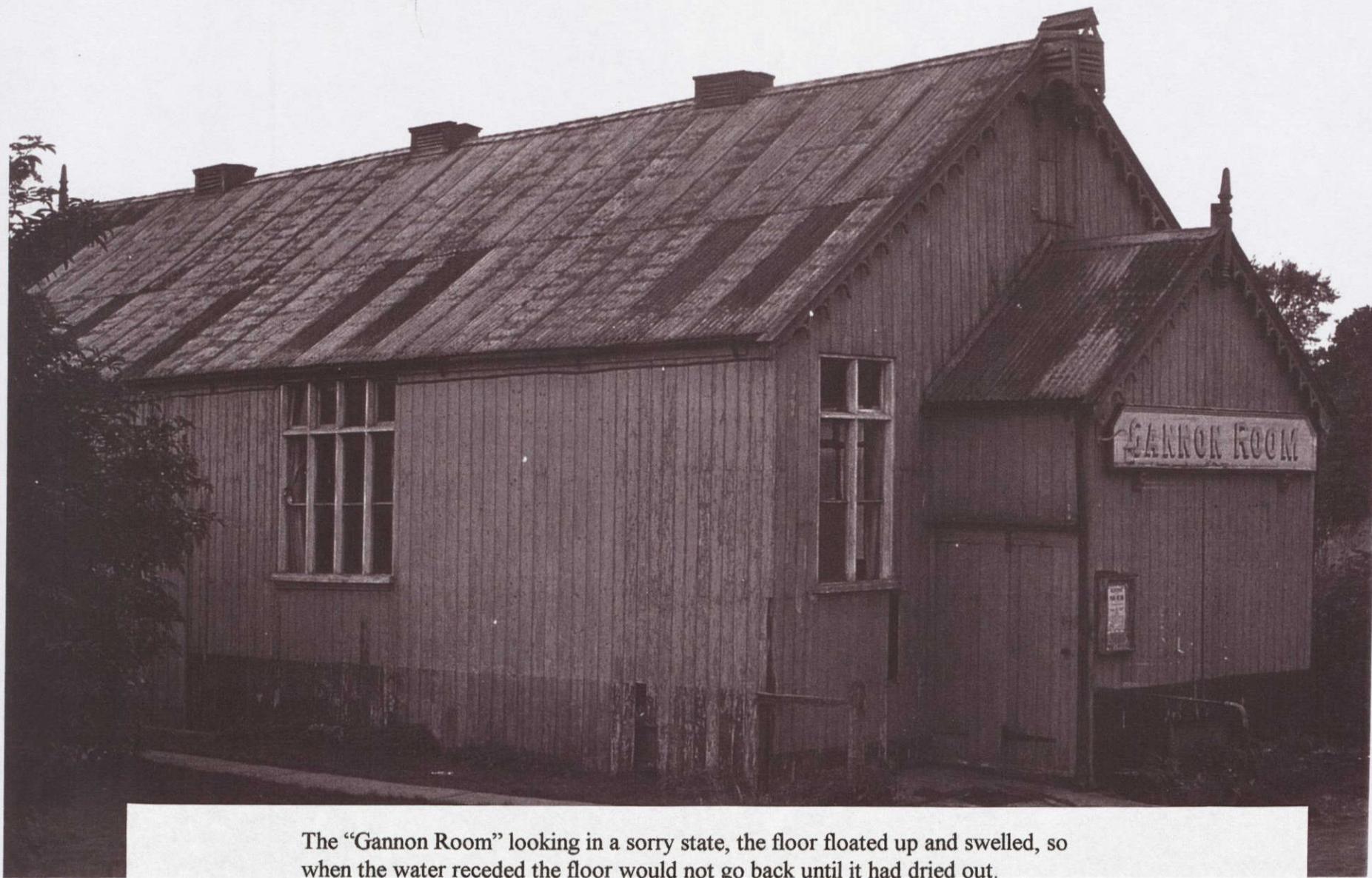
NAN OSBORNE

I remember my father (George Rogers) telling me that if I looked at the Jubilee Seat by the Village Hall, and stood facing the sea, there is a groove on the left hand post. When the flooding had subsided, but when everything was still wet, my father borrowed a saw from Leighton Block who was cycling past. With the saw he cut the notch to show where the water came to. This can still be plainly seen and from this we can tell which buildings were flooded.





The saw cut on the Silver Jubilee Seat, this was the tide height.



The "Gannon Room" looking in a sorry state, the floor floated up and swelled, so when the water receded the floor would not go back until it had dried out. The village retained the "Gannon Room" as a village hall until 1968.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

MY MEMORIES OF THE 1953 FLOOD

by

RUTH GOODWIN

The date was the 31st January, 1953, and our son was just six weeks old. There had been a lot of wind during the day and my husband had been on to the beach to check the tides, etc., because a group of village people were going Old Tyme Dancing at Westleton and he wondered about leaving me alone as I was just recovering from flu. We decided he should go as it seemed reasonably calm and there was moonlight.

Our son woke and needed feeding so I took him from the pram (newly acquired that week) and, after ten minutes of feeding, I heard water gurgling. When I looked out of the window I was amazed to see nothing but water. (At that time there was no sea wall - the road being level with the bank of the Creek.)

I took the baby upstairs and came and the pram, which was quite an effort to get up the stairs but I succeeded with that. When I came down again water was coming in both the back door and the front. I tried to get one or two more things but by that time one wonders what the priorities are. Meanwhile the water was up to my knees and it was no good. I had to retreat



upstairs to the children. I brought my daughter into our bed. By then the lights had gone out but luckily I had a candle upstairs. Then the furniture and other things started to move about downstairs. It was very weird to hear things going "bump" and to know it was things floating about downstairs.

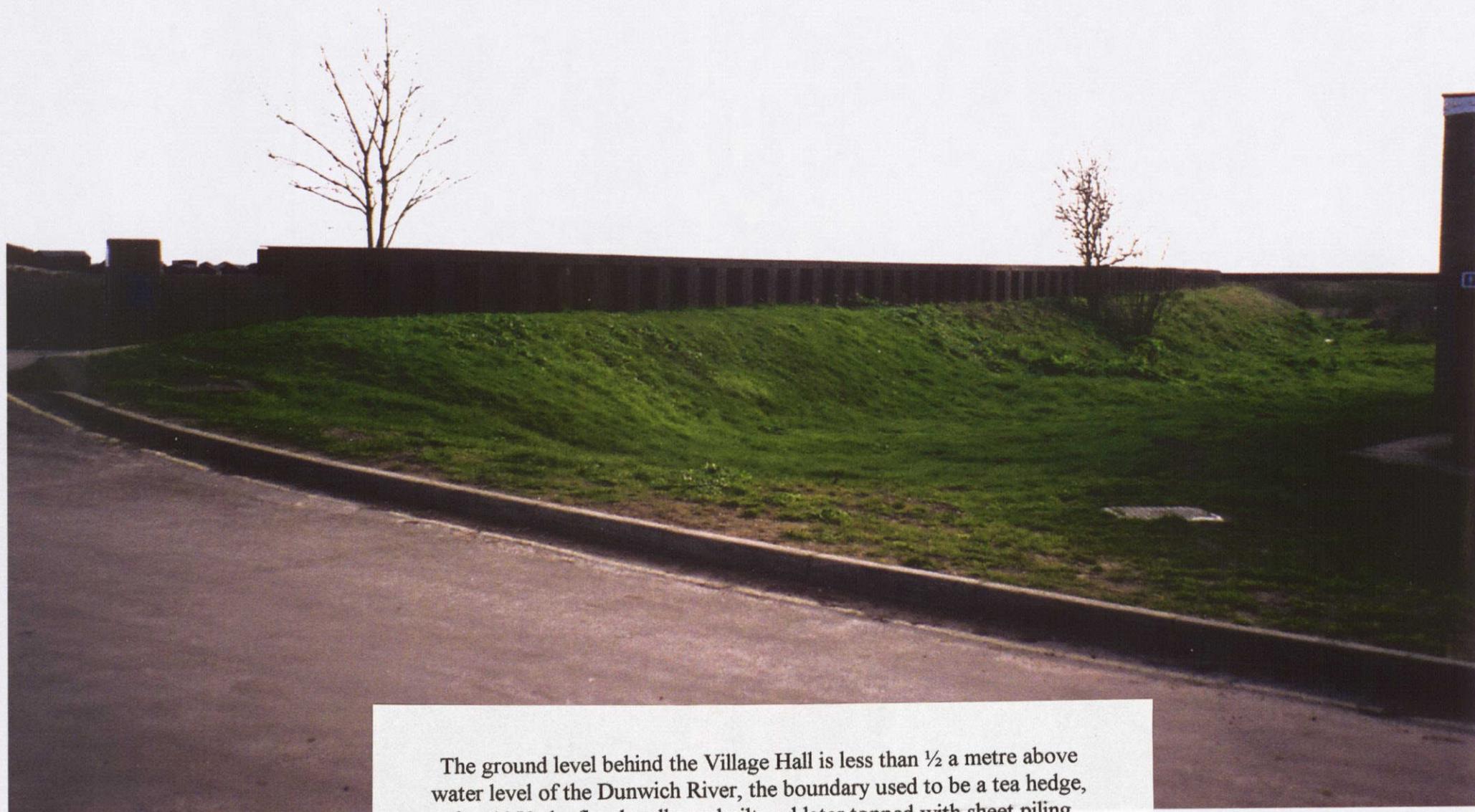
Looking out of the windows I saw a rowing boat (almost unbelievable). It was Arthur Sharman going to the window at the back of the house. He took the children from me and I climbed into the boat. He took us to Greenways - Ora and Claude Hoatebleng were renting it from Mrs Bellairs. He was an airman at Bentwaters the American Airforce Base near Woodbridge. They didn't have water in the house but their cellar was flooded. Ora had phoned Claude and he came home. To our amazement his car was parked above the swings on the Green.

Meanwhile the group were back from their Olde Tyme Dance at Westleton and of course didn't know anything about the flooding. Leslie waded to our house (Harbour View) and the came to Greenways. Next morning he went back and we had 36 inches (.9 metre) of water in the house and everything was every where. We had no shoes and I felt so sorry that my daughter's lovely Christmas presents, along with so many other things, that had been downstairs.

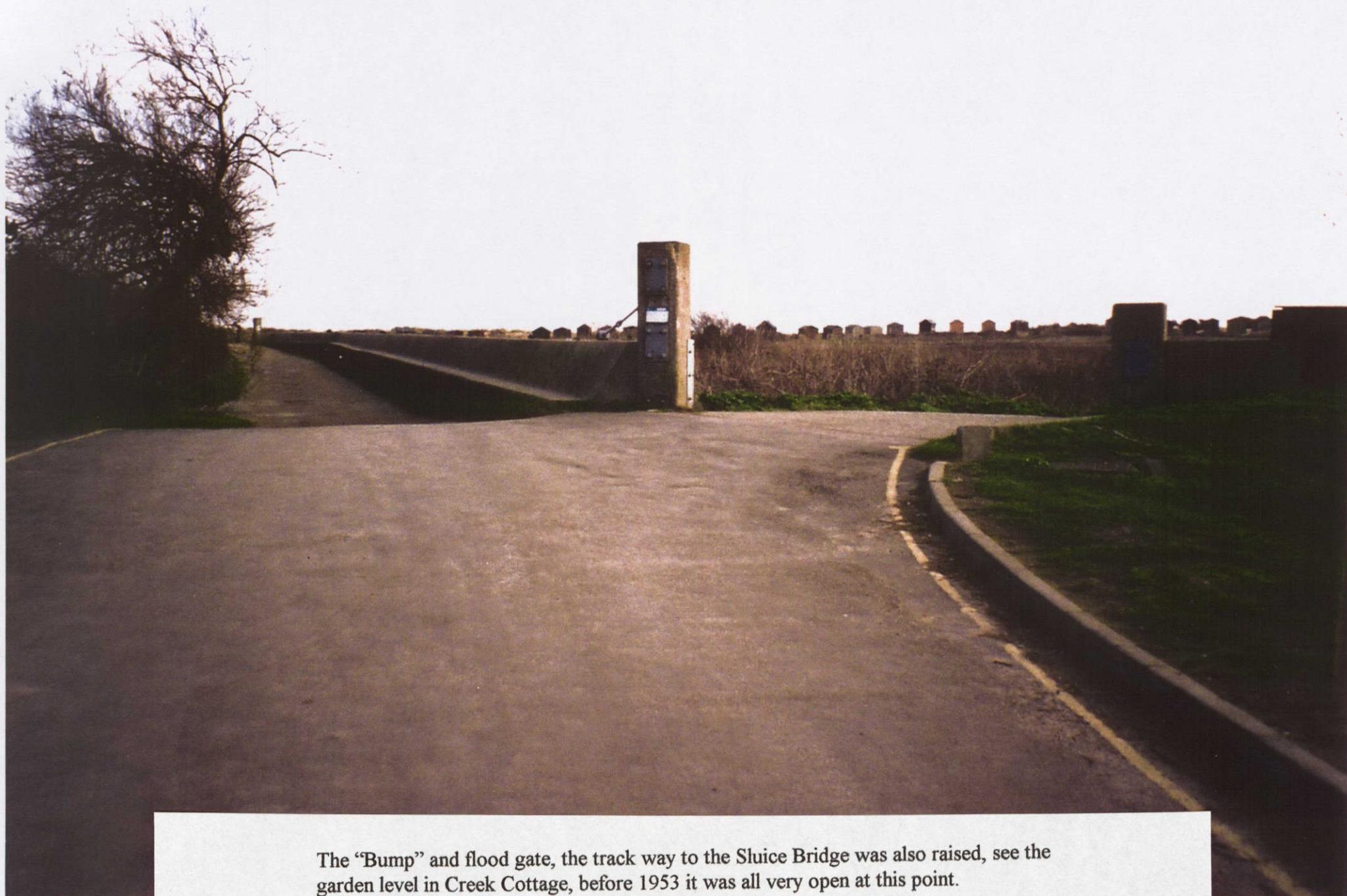
Leslie and I scrubbed , and scoured, tried to salvage and in the end moved as much as we could reasonably save upstairs and lived there until we could get the lower floor habitable again which took quite some while.

They (Norfolk and Suffolk Rivers Board, now the Environment Agency) put in the flood walls, the concrete wall and flood gates and several years later heightened them again.

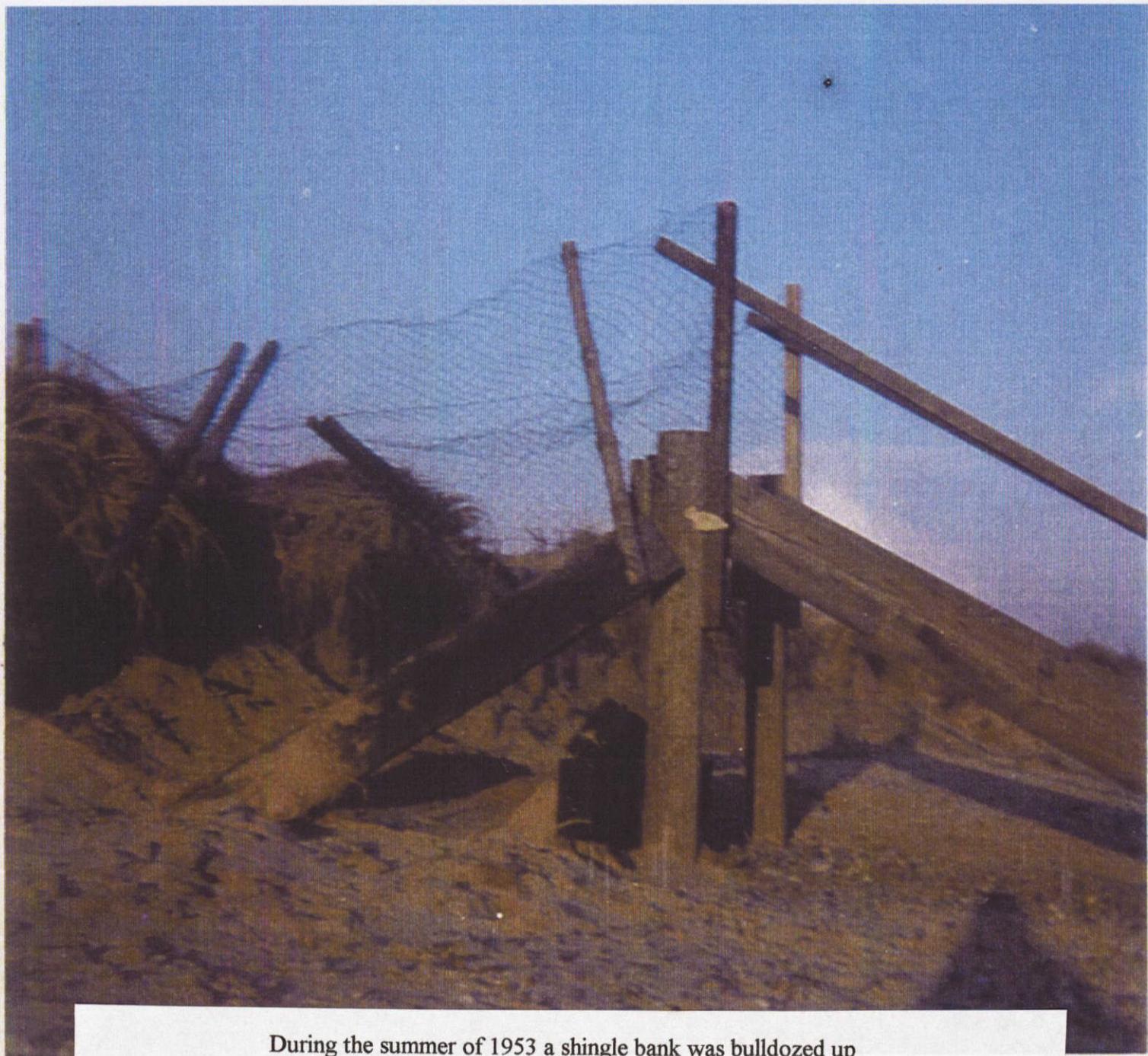
My husband and I held the keys to the flood gates for years till
1990 and took all the flood warnings.



The ground level behind the Village Hall is less than $\frac{1}{2}$ a metre above water level of the Dunwich River, the boundary used to be a tea hedge, after 1953 the flood wall was built and later topped with sheet piling.



The "Bump" and flood gate, the track way to the Sluice Bridge was also raised, see the garden level in Creek Cottage, before 1953 it was all very open at this point.



During the summer of 1953 a shingle bank was bulldozed up on the flat beach, wooden ramps were positioned over the bank, for access onto the beach, but time and tide wait for no man.



The track to the Bailey Bridge, February 1st 1953.



Walberswick Local History Group

1953 FLOOD

MY MEMORIES OF THE 1953 FLOOD

by

PHILIP KETT

It was on Sunday Feb 1st at around 7 o'clock in the morning, when Mr "Boko" English came home to 13 Church Lane, after being down to the flooding at the "Green", he came round and knocked on the door, saying "it's all gone" meaning the huts down by the Ferry, and "their all flooded down by the Green", I was living at "Common Edge" and looking out of the landing window all I could see beyond the Common was water all the way to Southwold Common, with the Harbour Inn and cottages, marooned in the middle of it.

Not being a very nautical lad of 14 at the time the events of the last few days in January were lost on me, the wind had blown strongly from the South and backed around to the North West on Jan 30th, on the 31st the wind swung to the North East and blew a gale, the radio had reported that some of the dykes in Holland had been breached the day before and now the wind was blowing the water down the North Sea towards the East Anglian Coast, the tide hit the North Norfolk Coast and Kings Lynn at about 7 o'clock in the evening, Great Yarmouth about an hour later Lowestoft another hour on, and Southwold about another hour later, around about 10 o'clock at night, the wall of

water had swept over the beach and into Ferry Road Southwold, flushing people from their wooden homes behind the dunes.

At Walberswick the wall of water had flattened the beach and flowed straight into the lower parts of the village, the huts by the ferry had disappeared, "Wave Crest" a wooden tea room set on piles had completely gone, the clay wall that protected the Town Marshes had totally disappeared, but great lumps of mud lay strewn about the marshes, some as big as cars, at the "Old Vicarage" end of the wall there used to sit a W/W II Blockhouse, the force of the water swirling past the Blockhouse had gouged out a hole in the marsh and neatly dropped the Blockhouse into it, it was some 15 ft (5m) deep, the Blockhouse was left standing on its side in the hole, and at the time the wall was repaired the clay was just filled around it, and only a small portion shows above the Marshes today.

Some of the houses by the Marsh got water in them, Mr "Hoody" Spall lost his shed, all the tools that were in the shed lay on the ground, it had not cost a great deal only labour as it was made with reed that he had cut himself, and he soon set about making another one.

The "Craft Room" that stood beside the brick "Yacht Yard" decided it would float up the road towards "Marsh End" (The Old Vicarage) and lodged against the garden wall, there was a hulk of a large fishing boat lying on the Walberswick side and that finished up exactly opposite on the Southwold side of the river, by the side of the "Savoy" stood a brick fisherman's shed and smoke house, and I remember helping (young) Bob Cross to collect the bloaters out of the rubble when the tide did at last drop away, by the site of the "Kissing Bridge" (all the bridges up the Dunwich River except the Sluice Bridge had disappeared) there used to lay a House Boat this finished up just below Blythburgh Church and is still there today.

Around by "Valley Farm", "Tow's" Cabin also moved of its piles, and did not move far, from "Todd's Cottage the water lay deep on the road and onto the low lying part of the Green, and there was a dingy tied up to the swing on the green, this had been used during the night to rescue various people from their houses, "Reynolds" grocery shop had water in it just over the floor, but the cellar was filled, and when it was pumped out the road was covered in foam from the washing powder that was stored in it. Several houses by the Green had water in them including the "Pottery Shop" (Parish Lantern) "W.I. Hut" (The Greenhouse) and George Rogers Garage and Shop, (Potter's Wheel and Tinkers) the Jubilee Green was flooded to a depth of 18 inches (1/2 m) and there is a saw cut on one of the uprights marking the height of the water, the "Gannon Room" (Village Hall) floor floated and swelled so it would not go back down when the water receded, and had to be dried out, on the Allotment Gardens the Chickens and Pigs were drowned, the water had reached the edge of the "Anchor" car park.

On the Cliff Field and the Camp Site, the Beach Huts that had took the full force of the waves had disappeared, some had just floated away, others disintegrated, and some just filled up with sand and stones.

Standing by the Jubilee Seat on that Sunday morning the tide had lowered slightly, the area was covered in dead worms and all the rubbish that a high tide floats and then deposits when the water recedes, looking out to sea the horizon seemed very close in fact it appeared that I was looking up at the sea and waves, and riding out the storm was a large number of cargo vessels, counting them I got to around 50, there was also a large number of fishing vessels out of my view sheltering in front of Southwold, all of these vessels were at anchor and steaming to maintain position so as to not drag their anchors.



The Otter Bridge in August 1952, on the marshes behind the beach, a favourite spot to catch "Bootlace eels" floated away never to be replaced.

It took 2 or 3 days to mobilise sandbags to block the breaches in the river banks these were filled by volunteers but I can't remember where the sand came from.

Because of the flooding there was no school for the older children who had to go to Reydon so we had a week off, in those days we had to cycle to school, the track to the Bailey Bridge had been washed away, it was only made of sand and stone, the bridge itself had moved on its bearers and was on the skew, later in the week, John List and myself, accompanied by Mr Charlie Gilbert a fisherman managed to get as far as the cottages by the Harbour Inn, calling out to the Landlord (Mr Bunny Cross), from the high ground to find out how they had fared, he shouted back that a lot of the fishing boats had sunk at their moorings but some had broken free and smashed into the Bailey Bridge and then sunk in the bend of the river, they still lay there, on the way back we found a cupboard and inside was several tea cups still hanging on the hooks, most probably came from one of the bungalows that got broken up by the surge, from Ferry Road, Southwold.

The big clear up started in earnest when the water receded lots of washing out of houses and getting rid of spoilt furniture, the rubbish and the tide washings were collected on farm trailers and dumped in a pit on the Common near to Heath House, the rubbish totally filled the pit, the Bailey Bridge was straightened when the track way was repaired with soil from the cutting of the old Southwold Railway on the Common, and all the bridges that had crossed the Dunwich River replaced.

As boys we were into anything that was happening later in the year the Bulldozers came down the beach from Dunwich to push back the sand, (as they have done many times since) we were told that they would be coming on a Saturday afternoon so we lay with our ear to the shingle listening for the crunch of the tracks, when we could hear them we decided to go and meet

them, they were based the beach side of the Kissing Bridge for many weeks, soon after the clay bank around Valley Farm and Tow's Cabin was built round to Ferry Road, another clay bank was built around the Allotment Gardens and the Gannon Room, this wall was later raised with sheet piling, along the bank of the Dunwich River a concrete wall was built and this was later raised and two flood gates were also fitted.

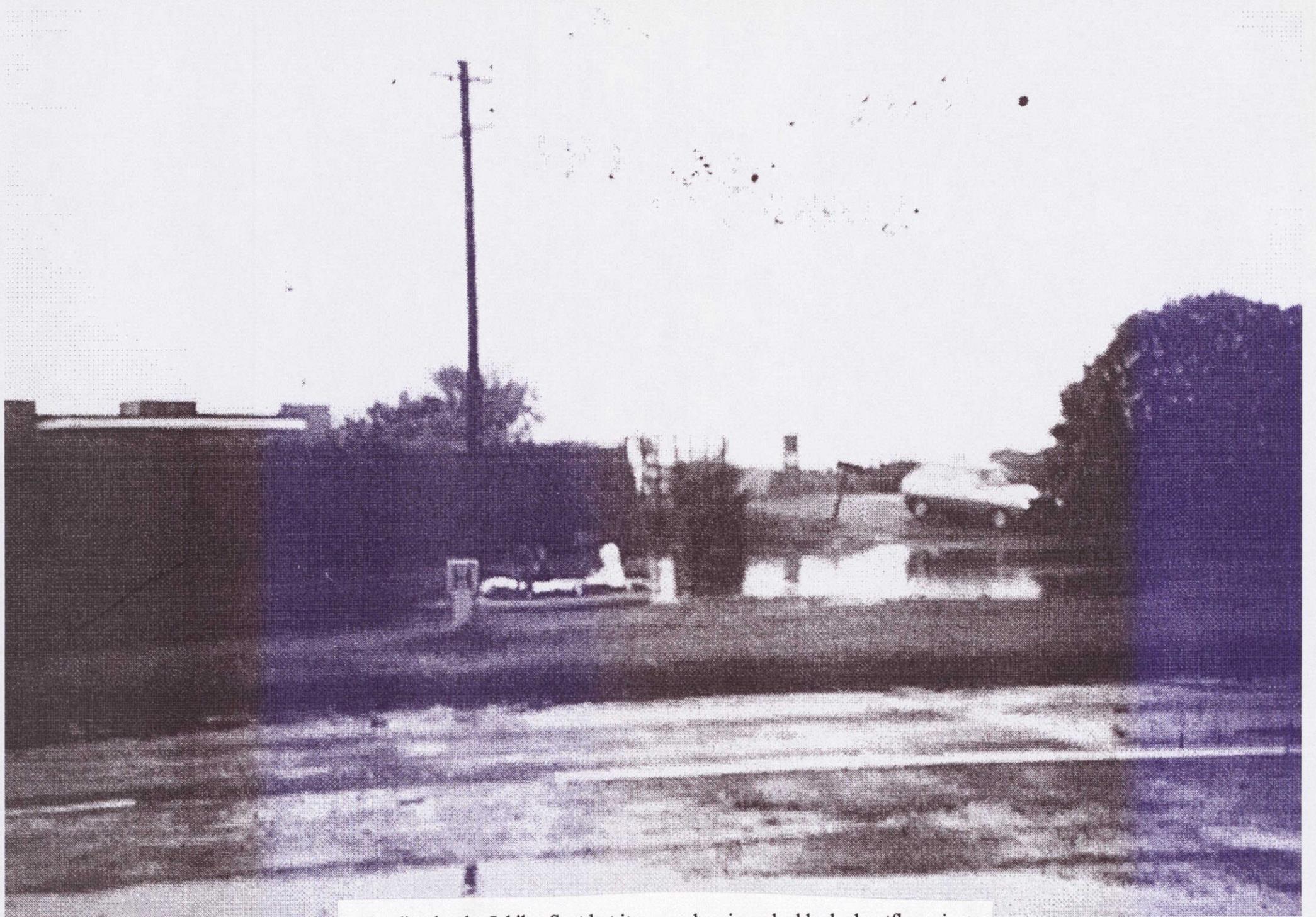
OTHER FLOODING



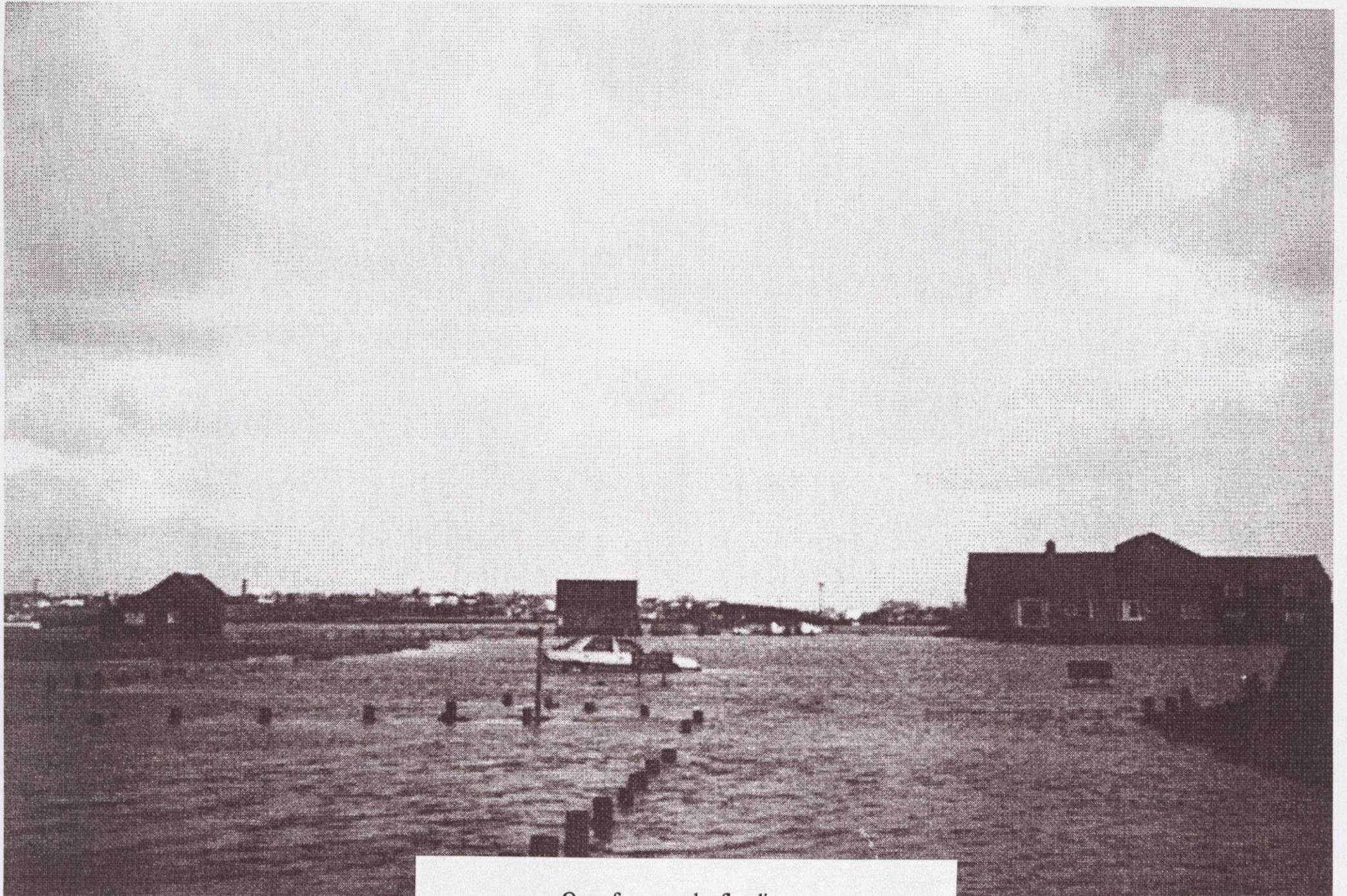
The Campsite area in 1938.



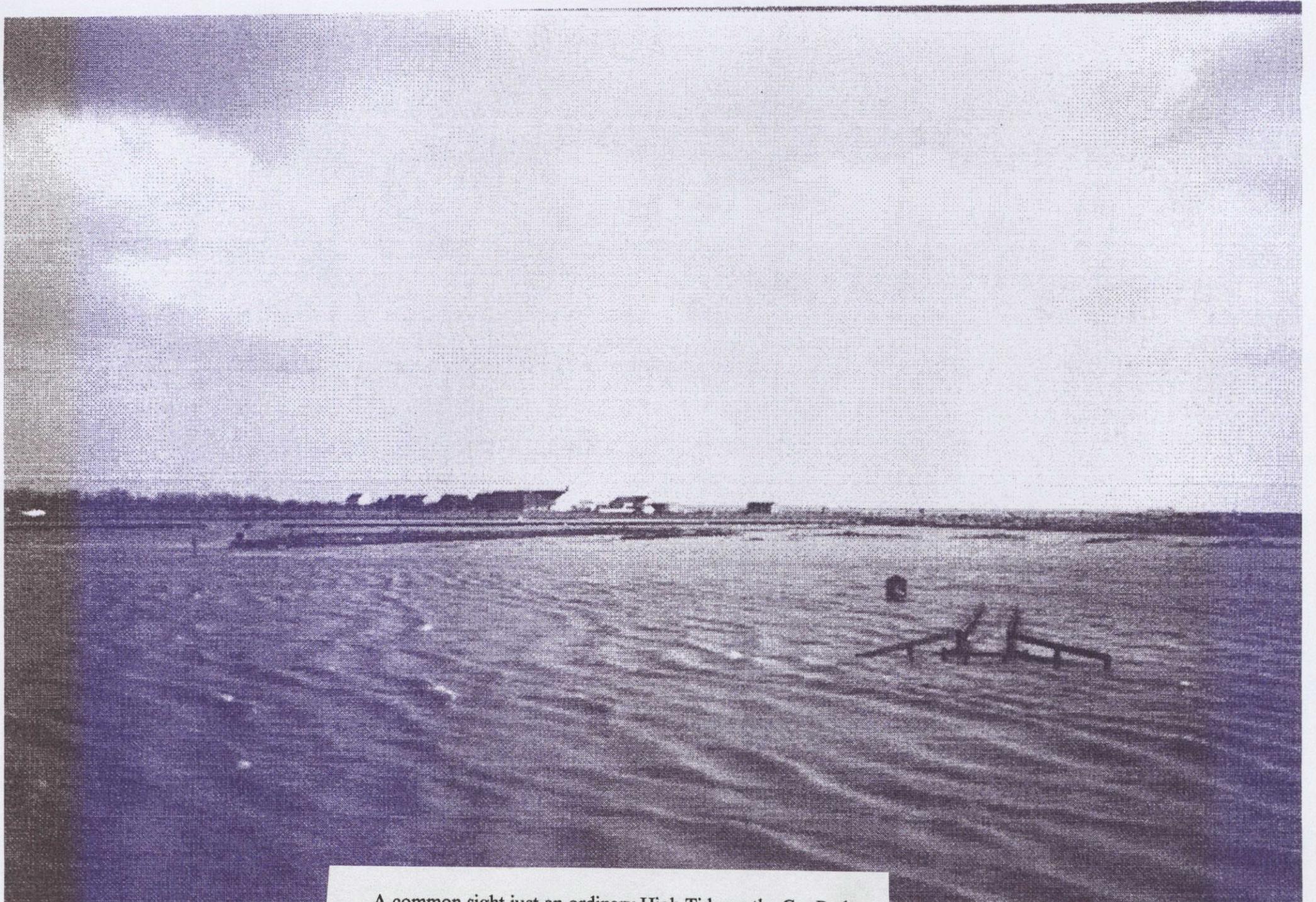
Cliff Field from the Camp site 1938



Flooding by the Jubilee Seat but it was only rain and a blocked outflow pipe.



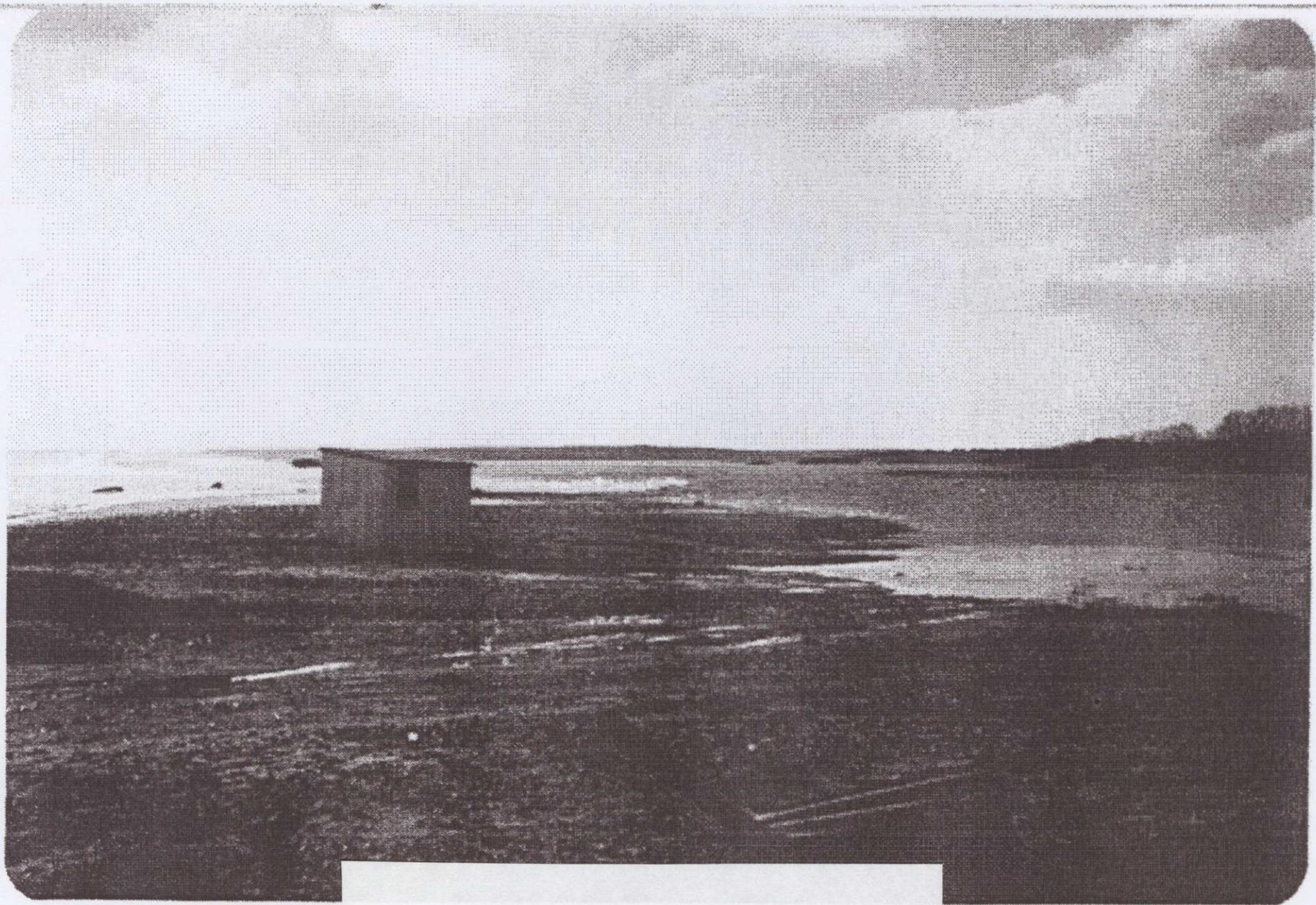
One of our regular floodings.



A common sight just an ordinary High Tide on the Car Park.



The Cliff Field Campsite, winter flooding.



Cliff Field Campsite, winter flooding
notice the flattened beach.



The Caravan Site, August 1978.

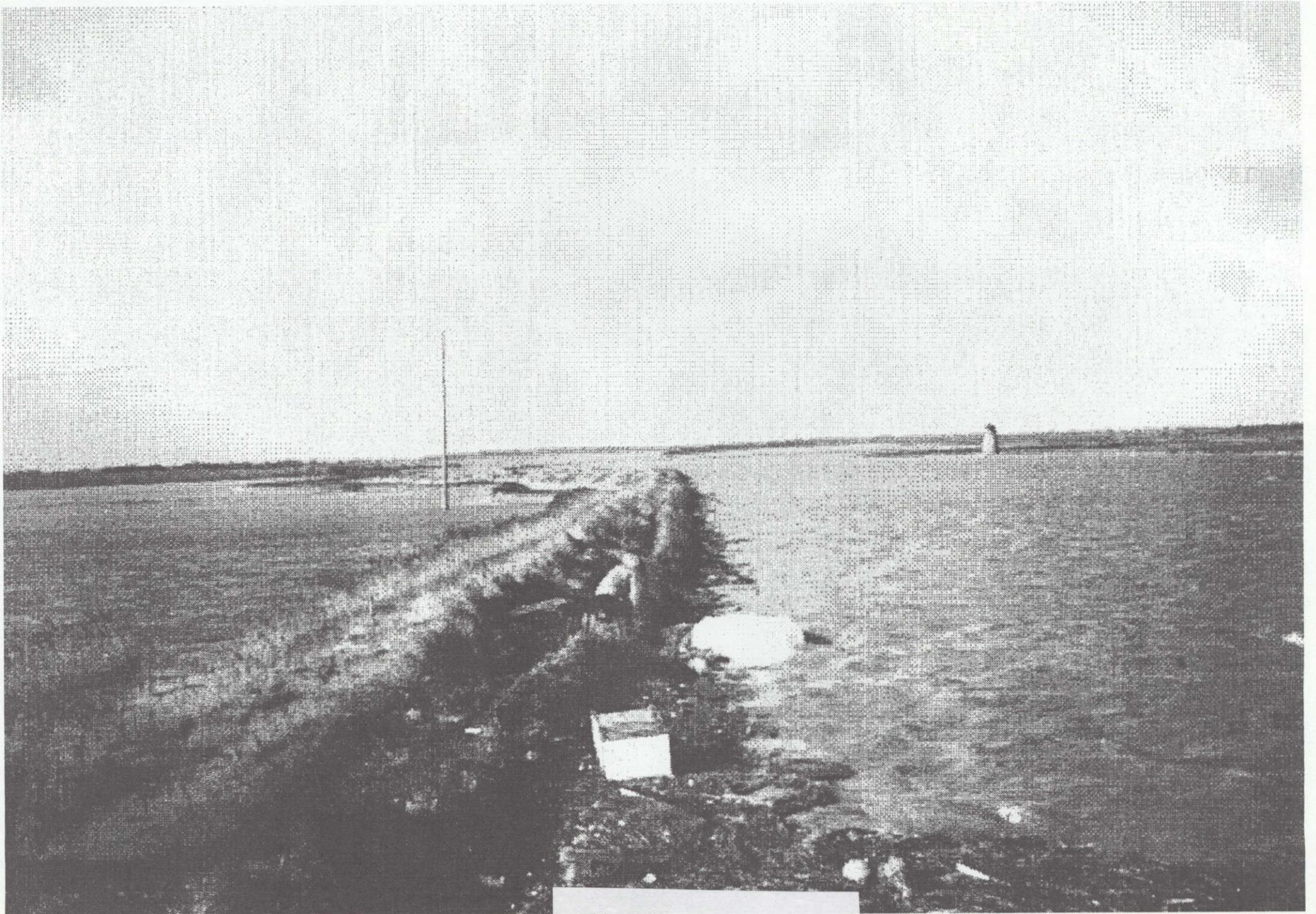


FLOODING, DUNWICH RIVER 1978

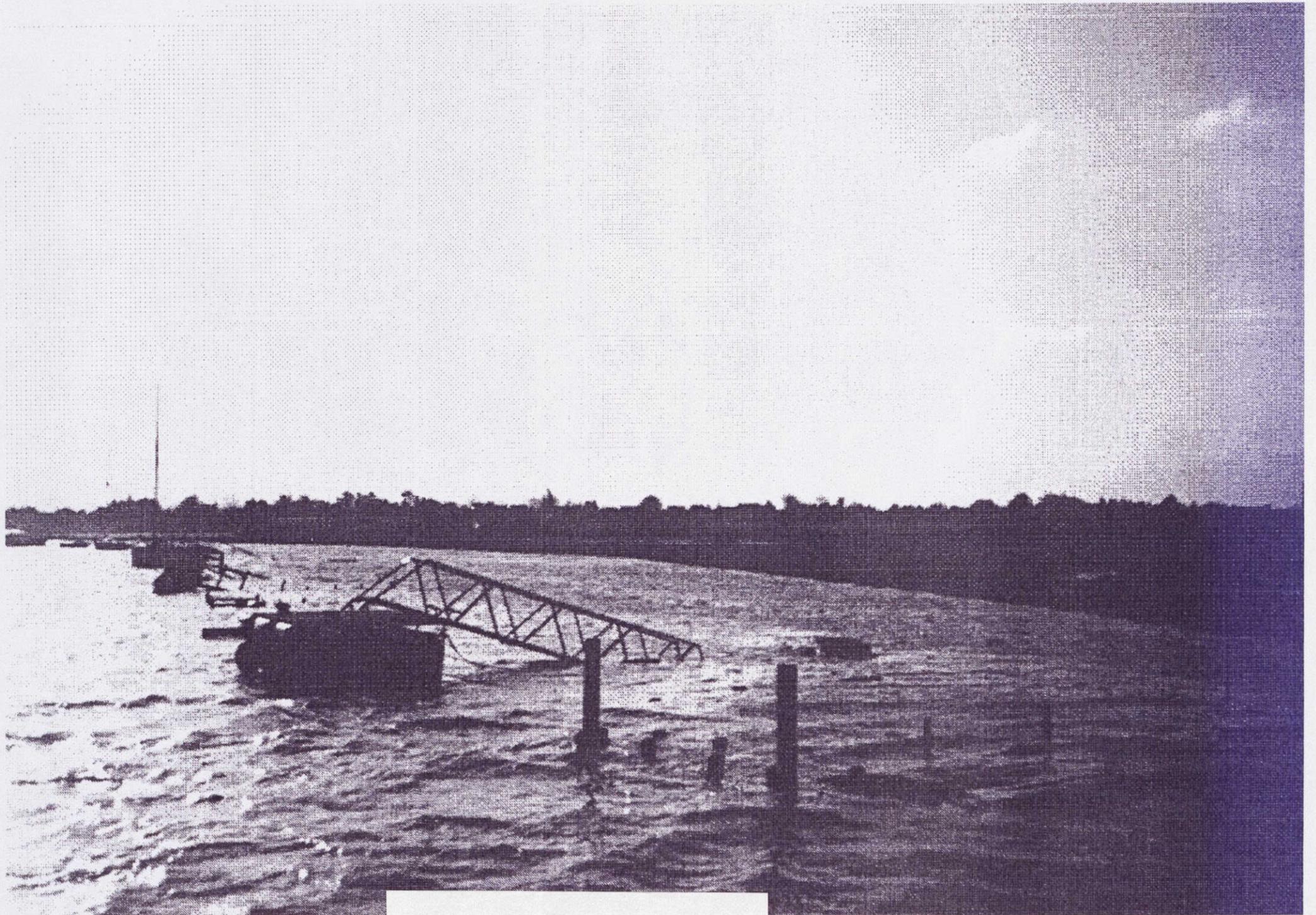




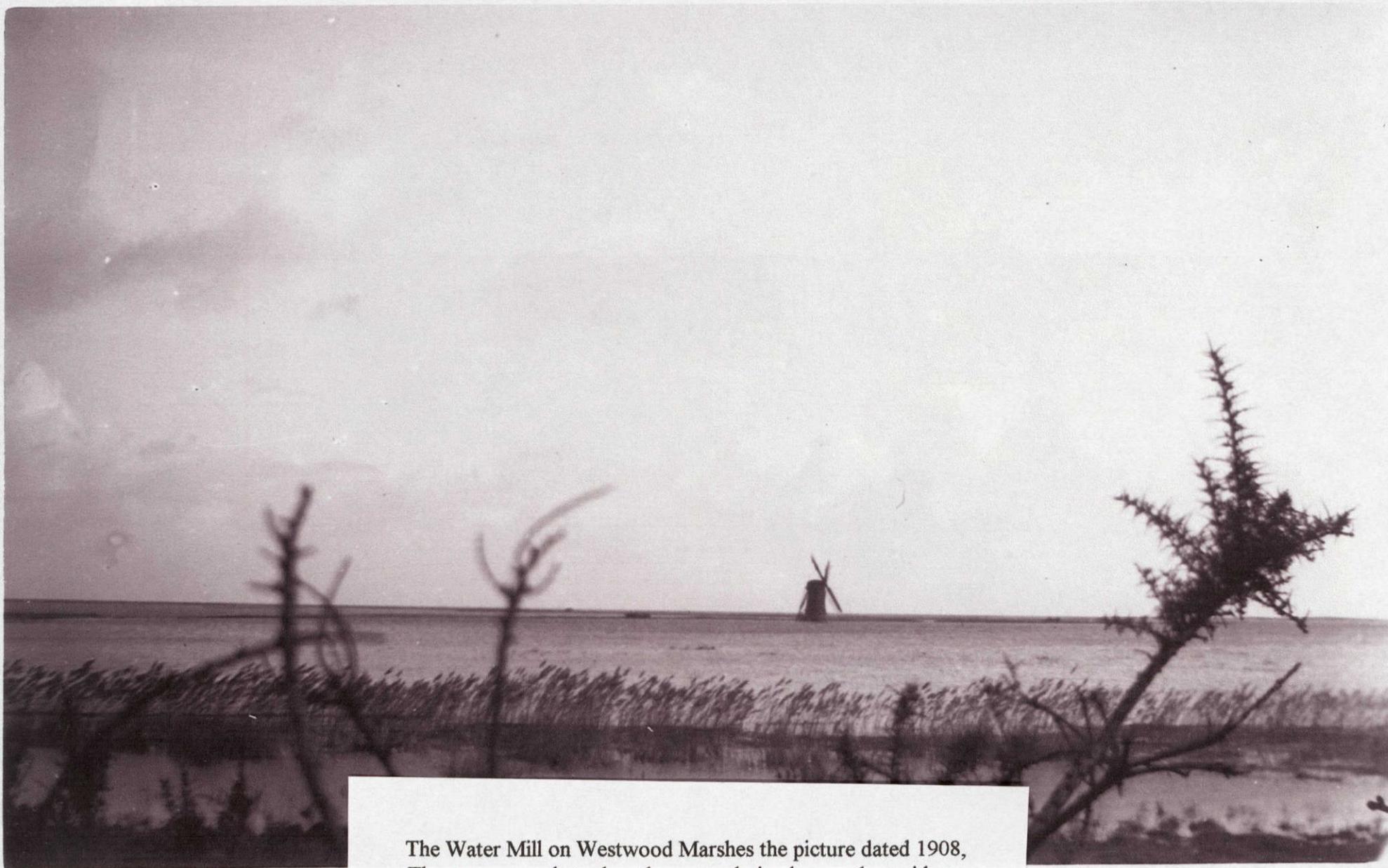
At the Bailey Bridge the water just topping the wall.



Tide washings on the river wall.



The floating stages high out of the water.



The Water Mill on Westwood Marshes the picture dated 1908,
The story goes that when the water drained away the residents
of Blythburgh Fen went out onto the marsh with buckets
and picked up Cod and Flat fish.

FLOOD VIDEO

RUNNING TIME 54 MINS

Films of the floods in East Anglia including the Cambridgeshire Fens 1937 and 1947, Horsey 1938, Houghton 1947, Wells 1978, and featuring the 1953 floods with sequences filmed around Hunstanton, Gorleston, Felixstowe, Harwich and Canvey Island. Also included is a complete film of the work of restoring production at the flooded margarine factory in Purfleet in 1953.

Professor Keith Clayton explains the causes of flooding: heavy rainfall, melting snow, North Sea surges, and how a surge occurs with disastrous results.

WALBERSWICK LOCAL
HISTORY GROUP

WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE
ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY
THE FOLLOWING

THE EASTERN DAILY PRESS.

THE LOWESTOFT JOURNAL.

THE EAST ANGLIAN DAILY TIMES.

FOR THEIR EXCELLENT PICTURE
SUPPLEMENTS.

AND ASSISTANCE FROM

JOHN TOOK.

AND OTHERS TO NUMEROUS TO NAME

THANK YOU.