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**A HISTORY OF BELLE COACHS***by Jon Reed*

Mr. Ernest Shreeve came to speak to us in October 1991 about the history of Belle Coaches and B.R. Shreeve and Sons Ltd. His talk represented a good slice of the history of the area in the twentieth century, and it was felt worth while putting the salient details into the Annual Report. Mr. Shreeve very kindly loaned his notes for the purpose.

Mr. Shreeve came to Lowestoft in 1919 when his father, Mr. B.R. Shreeve moved here and started driving for the United Omnibus Company Limited. Mr. Shreeve Senior had the job of collecting the first double-decker bus to be used in Lowestoft. It had solid tyres, an open top and had to be fetched from Bishop Auckland - a two-day drive.

Around 1922 or 3 Mr. Shreeve started in business with Mr. C. Day and operated a bus service around Oulton Broad, starting from the traffic island at Lowestoft Station. In those days there were very few houses between Lowestoft and Oulton Broad, Normanston Drive being a country road. United Buses used to escort the service with two in front and one behind, in an effort to drive them out of business. The service was soon suspended through lack of finance, shortage of staff to check fare collection and for maintenance. Mr. Day went on to found Day's Garage (now John Grose).

Mr. Shreeve Senior then continued on his own, registering Shreeve and Company in 1924. He operated charabancs, painted maroon and black with gold lettering, known as Felix 1, 2, 3 and 4. The livery was later changed to the present one of blue and cream and the charabancs renamed Maybelle, Heatherbelle, Pleasurebelle, etc. Later this gave rise to Belle Coaches. The charabancs had removable bodies which were replaced by lorry decks in the winter for commercial use, such as coal delivery.

In those days there were several operators in Lowestoft:-

Mann Egerton had two vehicles

John Walker (later Francis Fisher) he had one vehicle, the Silver Queen

Fred Reeve Ltd. had four (later five) vehicles called Victory, Verona, Venture, Veronica and Viola

Smith and King had two Tourist coaches

W. Thurston & Sons had two Leader coaches

E. Bowell had two Classic coaches

P.W. Watson & Sons had four vehicles named after, racehorses, e.g. Papyrus

Eastern Counties Omnibus Company had four vehicles

Shreeve and Company had four vehicles, two on the Royal Plain at a time

Shreeves eventually took over Francis Fisher, Fred Reeve, Smith and King, W. Thurston and E. Bowell as well as Wightman's Coaches from Saxmundham, Jackson's Coaches of Southwold and F. Moyes (Nightingale Coaches) of Beccles. In those days the vehicles used to line up on Royal Plain with boards in front advertising their destinations. Drivers and conductors touted for business.

Vehicles were licensed as Hackney Carriages by the Local Authority. Drivers could get a licence at 18 and conductors at 14. This was obviously a rather flexible rule as Mr. Shreeve got his conductor's licence in 1928 at the age of 12. He says that he was quite tall for his age. The licensing procedure was changed by the 1930 and 1934 Road Traffic Acts. The drivers had to be 21 and the conductors 18. Each route was licensed (£3 for three years) and each vehicle was certified and tested every year.

A Certificate of Fitness lasted seven years for a new vehicle and originally cost £2. This rose over the years to £5.50. Compare this to present-day costs where the original test on a new vehicle costs £36.25 with an annual retest at £17.25. The P.S.V. (Public Service Vehicle) Licence originally cost £2 a year, rising to £8.50. Currently the Operator's Licence costs £42 a year per vehicle and lasts for five years.

By 1939 Shreeves were operating seven vehicles, the largest having 32 seats, and two taxis. They were doing mainly excursions, private hire, contracts and, with the opening of the Holiday Camps, Holiday Fellowship work. At the outbreak of war all normal work just ceased because there was no fuel available. Shreeves did some evacuation work, picking up evacuees from the South Pier, where they arrived by boat from the south. The authorities later decided that Lowestoft was not perhaps the safest place to put evacuees, and evacuated them all over again. Mr. Shreeve can vividly recall taking a party of handicapped children to Weston-Super-Mare. There were no signposts and he had never driven to the West Country. They also evacuated expectant mothers.

They were requisitioned by the Army to drive workers to various Airfield sites, to Cantley Sugar Factory (then being hurriedly built), to camps at Woolverstone Park and Cockley Cley and to take around Entertainment Parties to various Naval Establishments. They operated three lorries during the war on aerodrome work, on conveying bombs and for the Local Council. They had operated some lorries before the war in a coal business.

Mr. Shreeve recalled the run to Cantley, especially during the winter. The work was continued 24 hours a day, which meant turning out at some very unsociable hours, in all weathers. The last leg of the workers' journey was by boat across the river from near Reedham, (the ferry did not work at that time). The coach then had to wait for the workers from the previous shift to be ferried back. One very foggy night he dropped the night shift about 9.50 and, as usual, went to sleep on the back seat until the evening shift came back an hour or so later. He was woken about six in the morning by the night shift coming back. In the fog they had missed the boat and didn't walk about on the muddy path on the river bank until it got light.

During the war no new vehicles were available and very few spares. Shreeves consequently finished the war with a fleet of wrecks, in common with other operators. This prompted them to do their own repairs and rebuilds. At first they used part-time coachbuilders, "moonlighting" from Eastern Coachworks, later they employed full-time men. Eventually they built complete coaches and at one time their complete fleet was built by them. They still carry out coach repairs for their own and other people's fleets, but no longer build complete coaches. Their coachworks is busy with commercial vehicle bodies.

At the end of the war they obtained permits to buy two new Bedford coaches, 29 seaters with Duple bodies. The first cost £985. and the second, some three months later, cost £1,065. Today a 35 seater coach will cost around £65,000 and a 53 seater upwards of £80,000. Before the war they seldom had new coaches and Mr. Shreeve remembers a trip to Manchester to buy two 25 seater Star coaches second-hand for £200.

The early regulations insisted that a licensed route must have a full service, the bus having to go whether it had any passengers or not, and adhere to the published timetable. While this is still true for bus operators, it is not a way to make money for the smaller operator. Consequently Shreeves now do not operate scheduled services. They are Suffolk County Council's second largest contractor (after Eastern Omnibus Company) and transport 2,000 to 2,500 children to school every day. They have had 21 vehicles operating for U.S. Air Bases until the recent withdrawal of many U.S. Forces. They do private hire and coach holidays. It used to be that the summer was their busiest time, but nowadays they have to do summer trips to keep their 60 vehicles occupied during the school holidays.

The 1980 Transport Act made quite a difference to them. Routes over 50 km were not licensed. Drivers had to be 18. P.S.V. Licenses were scrapped for vehicles and an Operator's Licence substituted (in 1984 they paid £10,920 for a five year licence). Vehicle testing is now done at an approved Testing Station, the only two in the area being at Norwich and Ipswich. Apart from the test fee there is the cost of getting the vehicle there and back, driver's and mechanic's wages and having the coach off the road for a day. To offset some of this cost Shreeves installed a Rolling Road test facility at their Leiston garage at a cost of nearly £12,000. They still have to pay the test fee but have saved a lot of the other costs. Shreeves have an average fuel bill of £16,000 to £18,000 a month and a wages bill of over £10,000 a week and Mr. Shreeve is adamant that coach fares are too low, mainly due to competition.

Mr. Shreeve says he has spent 60 years trying to design a coach with all front seats and no wheels. He is sure it would be a winner.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE STREET NAMES OF LOWESTOFT

*by Adrian G. Parker*

Editor's note:-

This work was compiled by Adrian Parker up until he left Lowestoft in May 1986. His sources were Local History reading and Building byelaw approvals at the Planning Dept., Rectory Road. St. Margaret's Ward, Oulton Broad (North), Oulton, Kirkley and St. John's Ward, Pakefield, and Whitton Ward/Carlton Ward are to follow.

If anyone can add further information please let us know.

### STREET NAMES : GUNTON WARD

Corton Long Lane	? tithe map origin Long Lane, Corton as subsequently incorporated within Lowestoft Borough boundary
Old Lane	formerly a "Private Road off Long Lane", and informally known as Riding School Lane. Name chosen by residents' poll c. 1978.
The Shires, The Woodlands, Larkspur Close	developer's choices (reflecting Tree Preservation Orders around the site?)
Gunton Avenue	leads to Gunton (New) Hall
Gunton Church Lane	Lane to St. Peter's Church, Gunton
Gunton Park	painters (Gunton Old Hall Estate) Thomas Gainsborough, G. Sutherland, J.M.W. Turner, W. Hogarth, S. Spencer, Thomas Lawrence, Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, G.V. Burwood, J. Cotman, L.S. Lowry, George Stubbs, Samuel Palmer, Degas, Rembrandt, H. Holbein, Jan Vermeer, Raphael, Claude Murillo, ANg. Renoir, Claude Monet, A. Van Dyke*, P.P. Rubens, Canaletto. (*alias Sir Anthony Van Dyck!)
Westside Close	West of Gunton Church Lane
Prior's Close	? after J.H.L. Prior, M.P. for Lowestoft/Waveney 1959-87
Hubbards Loke, Hubbards Avenue	
Harrington Avenue	? after C.B. Harrington, a landowner (e.g. 1914 The Avenue, Kirkley)
Squires Walk	
Middle Way	the central one of three parallel roads,
Bishops Walk, Clover Way, The Meads	
Glebe Close	? glebe land of St. Peter's, Gunton.
Georgian Grove	house style
Gunton St. Peter's Avenue.	St. Peter's Avenue, Gunton; altered to avoid confusion with St. Peter's Road, Kirkley.
Gunton Drive	in Gunton parish; off Corton Road.
Gunton Cliff	same
Beeching Drive, Stephenson Walk	redevelopment of Lowestoft North Station - 1982. Dr. R. Beeching, Chairman of British Railways when line closed 1970.
Station Road	Lowestoft North Station 1903. (North Lowestoft & Gunton building estate 1902)
	Estate : Dene Road, Warren Road (laid out from 1902) (intended to proceed northwards with North Cliff Road, Gorse Road, not built), Heather Road (part built)
Links Road	road to former golf course on North Denes/Gunton Denes : clubhouse on inside.

## GUNTON/CENTRAL WARDS (East of High Street)

## Lyndhurst Road

North Parade North Common formerly on Belle Vue Park.

Scores etc. :

Ravine Score

Cart Score

Lighthouse Score - adjacent to High Light

Arnold's Walk alias the 'Slopes' : land given to Lowestoft in memory of Capt, F.F.W. Arnold 1st En., Suffolk Regt. killed at Sonneboko, 23.4.1915.

Mariners Score

Crown Score

Martin Score

Rant Score

Wilde's Score

Maltster Score

Spurgeon Score

Herring Fishery Score

Frost's Alley Score - lost by redevelopment 1976 - under Suffolk Police Divisional H.Q.

## Old Nelson Street

'old' due to Nelson Street (later Trafalgar Street and Nelson Road, Pakefield. (turnpike road)

## Whapload Road

The Beach Village

Rant Score East – extension of line of Rant Score on level land east of Whapload Road

Ness Road – to Ness Point

Trinity Road –? Trinity House pilotage stores/site of Low Light

Gasworks Road – gas works established here in 1837

Newcombe Road – offshore sandbanks

Wilde's Street – extension of line of Wilde's Score

Hamilton Road – Lord Claude Hamilton, Chairman Great Eastern Railway

1906 – name of Dock nearest to road, (road was rough until 1979 : made up for Rig Yerd on North Pier)

## Anguish. Street

after Rev. Anguish

## East Street

most easterly on the beach

## GUNTON/CENTRAL WARDS (West of High Street/North of St. Peter's Street)

## Camden Street

## Albany Road

## Mariner Street

## Compass Street

## Crown Street

to Crown Hotel. East/West due to Relief Road 1977 - formerly Bell Lane

## Jubilee Way

part of Lowestoft Central Area Relief Road : opened 1977 (Queen's Jubilee Year)

## Duke's Head Street

former public house

Gun Lane

? refers to Royalist skirmish with Cromwell, closed by redevelopment 1965. Southern part name revived 1986.

Wesleyan Chapel Lane

footpath only : alongside Wesleyan Methodist Church 1862-1984

## Old Market Plain, Old Market Street – open market site

covered market = High Street/Compass Street corner

## St. Peter's Street

formerly Beccles Road beyond Reeve Street/St. Peter's Church (corner Tennyson Road) built 1833. Thus : St. Peter's Court, Chapel Court

## Thurston Road

Thurston family – fish merchants

## Factory Street

Lowestoft China Factory site on north side 1752-1801

White Horse Street	public house formerly at southern end
<u>The Hemplands</u>	long straight enclosures : hemp growing for ropeworks.
Osborne Street	
Park Road	opposite Belle Vue Park. Dove Street to Melbourne Road was Albert Street until c. 1910.
Melbourne Road	Prime Minister 1835-41
Queens Road	Queen Victoria and titles of sons/uncles
Edinburgh Road	
Clarence Road, Cambridge Road	
Royal Avenue	started as The Crescent, laid out c. 1901
Oxford Road	? followed (illogically) from Cambridge : two universities
Ipswich Road	
Sussex Road, Worthing Road	(laid out 1905, being built up to 1910)
St. Margaret's Road	to the Parish Church
Church Road Street	same, from St. Margaret's Plain
<u>St. Margaret's Plain</u>	open area in 18th century part of town : St. Margaret's Parish
Wesley Street	
Burton Street	
Winnipeg Road	
Water Lane	
Princes Road	
Newson's Meadow	
Kelly-Pain Court	associated with Trevor Pain, the developer 1984
Boston Road	Boston Lodge - house on west side later Lowestoft Convent
ROMAN HILL/CENTRAL AREAS	
<u>Battery Green (Road)</u>	South gunbattery was the site of Coastguard houses and the road roundabout
<u>Marina</u>	part of the town fields - a field named 'Marina' (Note: several alterations to street 1978-82)
Gordon Road	commemorates General Gordon of Sudan : killed 1885. (Note: several alterations at east end 1978-82)
Grove Road	site of 'The Grove' House
Beach Road	redevelopment of Grove Estate
Suffolk Road	eastward from The Suffolk Hotel (35-77 London Road North)
Waveney Road	after the river name, leading to the <u>Dock</u> of that name.
London Road North	
Surrey Street	
<u>Prairie</u>	an estate yard area of The Grove Estate. ? field name
Regent Road	? George, Prince Regent/George IV 1820-30
Alexandra Road	laid out shortly after 1875 : Alexandra, Princess of Wales
Police Station Road	site of Police Station until 1971, formerly Arnold Street South
Arnold Street	Arnold family
Tennyson Road	poet – was St. Peter's Place until c. 1922
Milton Road	poet –was Mills Road until c. 1922. (This area formerly the town's Forty Acre Field, laid out c. 1905)
Leiston Road	
Katwijk Way	1977 – part of Lowestoft Central Area Relief Road. Twin town of Waveney District Council

Clapham Road	formerly Shuckford's Loke
Granville Road	
Cathcart Street	
Jacob's Street	
Reeve Street	
Rishton Road	until 1971 formerly east end of Stanley Street. Rishton House on south side
Bevan Street	
Tonning Street	town in Schleswig, on west coast : in Denmark until 1864 and trading port with Lowestoft.
Raglan Street/Road	Lord Raglan of Crimean War (1854-56) fame
Alma Street	Crimean War battle
Trafalgar Street	formerly (New) Nelson Street, changed to avoid confusion
Fleusburgh Street	town in Schleswig then (1850) in Denmark, now in West Germany
Denmark Road	reflects port trade in 1850-64 period (up to Prussian-Danish war)
Commercial Road	usual mid-Victorian name for business area
Station Square	1979 : formerly London Road North, and partly 'The Bridge'
Hervey Street	
Neptune Street	
Stevens Street	) the 'Brickfields' streets c. 1860, after ) John Louth Clemence, architect for Peto
Clemence Street	) and throughout late 19th century
Selby Street	
Maidstone Road	
Ashby Road	
Camp Road	
Till Road	
Wollaston Road	
Seago Street	landowner (and off Rotterdam Road)
Ethel Road	(land owned by George Thurston, fish merchant) c.1910
Haward Street	landowner
Walton Road	
Stanley Street	
Norwich Road	
Stanford Road	
Beckham Road	
Roman Road	as in 'Roman Hill' : archaeological find
Union Road	
Sandringham Road	after Royal residence, built 1870 and again after fire damage 1891.
Avondale Road	for 40 years largely undeveloped net drying etc. plots
York Road	Duke of York became King George VI 1936
May Road	
Love Road	
Beresford Road	
Minden Road Estate:	Minden – battle celebrated as regimental day by Suffolk Regiment. Yeovil. Nicholson. Latten: R.J. Latten & Co.? Halcyon. Hill Road = site
Rotterdam Road Estate:	(owner – W.R. Seago) Norfolk Street. Essex Road. Kent Road.
Rotterdam Road	port connections, formerly ' <u>Cemetery Road</u> ' from cemetery to Church Road.

Eastern Way refers to Eastern Coach Works, formerly Laundry Lane until c 1950?

NORMANSTON WARD (West of railway cutting)

Northgate area/Beeches Estate : after The Beeches farmhouse here (now in High Beech)

Marham Road : after main R.A.F. Station, near Kings Lynn (of Harris Avenue after Air Marshal)

'Evergreen' theme :- Myrtle, Broom, Mimosa, Larch, Spruce Court (1984) Lilac, Holly, Bramble, Gorse, Viburnum, Magnolia, Rose, Jasmine, Olive.

High Beech : hilltop with The Beeches farmhouse.

Harp Close Road : field name on Tithe Map

June Avenue

Evans Drive : E.E. Evans – M.P. for Lowestoft.

Greenacre Crescent

Fir Lane

Olive

Elizabeth Close

Normanhurst Close : after Normanhurst (House) now Fire Station site

Woods Loke Bramfield Close; East Suffolk village

Oulton Road from St. Margaret's Church to Oulton Street via. Lowestoft End (hamlet)

Normanston Drive Normanston House and Park to the south, formerly Beccles Road.

Parkside Drive by Normanston Park

Princes Walk

Skamacre Crescent field name on Tithe Map

Drakes Heath. Robin Hill. Fieldview Drive.

### HMS MANTIS - PART 3

by A.M. Turner

I think that perhaps I should explain that this series of articles is not intended as a history of the base in chronological order from Day 1 to the day when it was finally paid off. I am attempting to collect as much information about it, especially from the men and women who served in Mantis, and get it recorded. Hopefully, at some future date, someone will be able to use this and write the full history of the base.

I finished last year's article with an account of the Officers' V.E. Day bonfire by Douggie Sharp, so I will start this year's with two more of his stories.

*'In war time no women went to sea in H.M. Ships. A few days after V.E. Day, whilst we were awaiting instruction from the Admiralty on the future of the base and the flotillas, I was approached by the Senior Officer of the six flotillas in the port asking if they could all take their flotillas to sea for a combined exercise. This seemed a very good idea to fill in the time. Accordingly, the next day I enjoyed watching nearly fifty boats proceed to sea under the command of the senior flotilla commander.'*

*At lunch in the mess there were very few officers left and so I did not remark on the shortage of WRNS on duty, but later in the day it dawned on me that there were very few WRNS or WRNS officers about. I was told after the war that the boats sailed full of wives etc, and most of the WRNS. What meets not the eye grieves not the heart.'*

The New Canteen. *'Tomorrow is the day when the new canteen is to be opened - vegetables and fruit will be available to the boats and trawlers in the harbour and the W.V.S., ably led by Lady Somerleyton, will man it and service it. The opening ceremony is at 15.00 hrs. and will be attended by all the local dignitaries and the commanding officers of the various establishments in the port.'*

*Today is, however, a sad day for Mantis. Last night a unit of Coastal Forces was in action with E-Boats and after the action one of our boats was missing. She had been seen on fire early in the action but no sign of her could be found in an hour long search which had to be broken off as first light*

would shortly be with them and the other boats had to be well clear of the enemy coast before then.

The remainder of the unit returned to harbour, landed casualties and reported the loss of one of their number.

That evening I was sent for by Commander Barnard and told that the Coastal Defences reported signals from sea saying that she was the missing MTB, but that they knew nothing about her and could not get a recognition signal from her. I believe that they proposed to sink her with gun fire. I was told to go down to the harbour and sort it out. After a good deal of argument they agreed to turn on a search-light for a few seconds and if I could then assure them that the signals were indeed from one of our boats they would co-operate and open the harbour defence boom. A search-light was turned on for about three seconds and I was able to assure them that the dismantled and listing boat was our missing MTB. She was then told that the boom would be opened and she could enter.

Whether attracted by the search-light or whether it was just chance we shall never know, but at that point a 'Red Alert' was received and the sirens moaned. We used our torches very sparingly to guide the disabled boat in. The harbour authorities then took over and provided ambulances and the boat was towed straight up to Brookes' Yard for immediate slipping.

A fellow officer and I were just thanking the boom gang when the sound of a lowish aircraft was heard followed by the splutter of machinegun bullets hitting the concrete piers. We naturally dived for cover and then heard the scream of a falling bomb which passed over us and landed right in the middle of the marvellous new canteen which was to have been opened on the following afternoon.

I well remember reporting to 'One fixed and one flashing', (Commander Barnard's nickname, referring to his glass eye) that it had been our boat and that it was now being slipped but that I thought that he could forget his invitation to the canteen opening as the fire brigade had about finished clearing up the remains of the structure.'

It would appear that the canteen referred to in Mr. Sharp's account was the NAAFI canteen which was bombed on the 4th February, 1941. As a postscript to the above account, I can remember Mrs. Pounder, the wife of the Manager of the Midland Bank at that time, and a prominent member of the W.V.S., saying that virtually everything in the canteen was broken except for a crock of pickled eggs which was still in its place in one corner. A slab of concrete had landed on it and not one egg was even cracked.

Mr. B. Dundas was posted to Mantis in April 1944 as a Midshipman, (he was promoted to Act. Sub. Lieutenant while at the base). Among the various documents that he has saved over the years was his bill for one night at The Great Eastern Hotel (where he stayed on his way here) for the night of 11/12 April, 1944. It reads as follows:-

Apartments. B & B	9/6
Service Charge	1/-
Total	10/6 (52½p)

He has also sent me a number of Mess bills. These throw an interesting light on the cost of living in 1944. As an example the account for May 1944 reads as follows:-

WARDROOM MESS  
H.M.S. MANTIS

	£	s.	d.
Mess Subscription	5	0	
Messing	2	14	4
Wines			8
Minerals		-	-
Tobacco	3	0	
Chocolate	2	1	
Extras	2	9	
Mess Guests		-	-
Laundry	3	2½	
Soap		-	-
Sundries (Blades; Notepaper)	2	3	
	£3.	14s.	2½d.

(In modern terms this would be £3.71)



He has also sent me an interesting letter which refers to the final winding up of the Officers' Mess of Mantis. It is headed 'NAVAL OFFICERS CLUB' Hotel Victoria, Lowestoft, and is dated 7th August, 1945. (By this time the Mess in the Royal Hotel had ceased to exist, and I understand that that Hotel had been taken over by the WRNS.) It reads:-

Dear Dundas,

Wardroom Mess HMS "Mantis"

I have now finally wound up the "Mantis" mess accounts and I accordingly have pleasure in enclosing a cheque value £5. 3s. 10d. which is made up as follows:-

	£.	s.	d.
Repayment of loan made to mess	1.	5.	0.
Share of surplus	<u>3.</u>	<u>18.</u>	<u>10.</u>
Gross total	5.	3.	10.
Less mess bill arrears due from you to mess	-	-	-
Net amount due to you	<u>5.</u>	<u>3.</u>	<u>10.</u>

I shall be obliged if you will acknowledge receipt on form below and present the cheque for payment as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) A.P. DUGGAN.

Sub. Lieut.(Sp.) R.N.V.R.

Hon. Mess Secretary and Treasurer

The last boats left the base on the 20th June, 1945, as is indicated, by the following signal:-

TO:- MANTIS FROM:- MTB755 AND 778  
 GOODBYE FROM THE LAST OF YOUR "CHICKENS" THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE  
 WAY YOU HAVE LOOKED AFTER US THROUGHOUT, FROM OPERATION BANGERS TO  
 THUNDER FLASHES IN THE ROYAL. ALL THE BEST.  
 TOO:-200900B.

HAND PL

DIST:- CO, 1st LIEUT., HEADS OF DEPTS. 20:6.45 HH

(N.B. 'Operation Bangers' refer to any operation over the North Sea to the Dutch Coast.)

Two other signals which have come my way might well be quoted here. The first refers to the war with the E Boats and the second to the fact that even in war time the niceties of life are not ignored.

1. ADDRESSED GENERAL C.F. FROM:- MANTIS  
 THE INTERROGATION OF THE SURVIVORS OF E BOAT S88 IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR  
 READING IN THE TRAINING OFFICE.

HAND PL DISTR: GENERAL 4/1/44

2. TO:- GENERAL FROM:- MANTIS  
 I WISH ALL UNDER MY COMMAND A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR.

HAND PL 31/12/45

Mr. Dundas has also sent me a copy of Standing Orders - HMS Mantis dated 1st October, 1944 (copy No.201) and signed by Commander Barnard. This would not be the place to reprint these in full but a few do have a bearing on the local and/or social history of the time. For instance:-

7. DUTY OFFICER H.M.S. MANTIS BARRACKS

(a) There will be a duty officer at the Barracks from 1730 to 0800.

.....

(d) To be present at supper in the Bethel at 1730 and at 0700 - 0720 the following morning for breakfast.

(e) i. He is to go the rounds of the Barracks, The Spread Eagle Hotel and the Polish Canning Factory (see note 1).

1. At 2100

2. Once in the middle watch

3. Once in the morning watch
- ii. He is to go rounds of Walkers Store, Ness point store, Firewatchers at Laundry Lane (if any boats are slipped or berthed there) and at Ice Quay at 2030.

Under "Officers duties and General Information", there is interesting reference to what today we would call conservation and/or re-cycling:-

35 (d) ii. H.M. BARRACKS

1. The Base Accountant Officer and Waste Prevention Officer HMS MANTIS will arrange for collection and sale of Pig food.
  2. The Waste Prevention Officer will arrange for collection and sale of tins.
  3. The Waste Prevention Officer will arrange for the collection of cardboard, paper and other salvage.
  4. Four-fifths of proceeds of sales will be credited to HMS Ship's Fund and one fifth to Port Amenities Fund.
- (e) The Waste Prevention Officer will make a return on the first of each month giving full details of salvage disposed and of sums received during the proceeding month.

38. W.R.N.S. PERSONNEL ABOARD COASTAL FORCE CRAFT

Wren ratings are only allowed on board Coastal Force Craft in the course of their duties except when specific authority is given for Wren ratings to proceed to sea on vessels doing trials etc. They are to make request through Head of Department and Second Officer W.R.N.S. who will obtain permission signed by the First Lieutenant. Wren ratings are not allowed below deck except when working.

41. SOAP RATIONING

- (a) i. Seagoing Officers. Officers will demand soap from the Mess Secretary.
- ii. Base Officers. Officers will be issued with soap coupons by the Base Accountant Officer and will obtain their supplies from any trade source they so wish.
- (b) Ratings. All ratings will demand soap from the Regulating Officer, Royal Naval Barracks. The C.O.R.S. to compile a list of total soap required and will, on the first day of each month forward to N.A.A.F.I. total requirements for Ward Room and Royal Naval Barracks.
- (c) It must be clearly understood, that no soap may be removed either from the Ward Room or Royal Naval Barracks. Officers and Ratings proceeding on leave will be issued with the requisite number of coupons, and are not allowed to 'land' soap in any circumstances.
- (d) Trafficking in soap is regarded as a serious offence and disciplinary action will be taken should this occur.

Charles Mercer, who served on MGB 21 and MGB 122, was with Mantis in 1942-43. He says, *'I was there in early 1942 living in a house in Grove Road inside the base of HMS Mantis. Two crews shared a house. I was the Oerlikon gunner on MGB 21. In April '43 MGB's 17, 20, 21 sank an E-Boat when we were on a Z Patrol. The Z Patrol Lines were further out than the Destroyer Patrol and not many miles from the enemy coast. It was about 10 a.m. when we got back to Lowestoft and the whole Naval Base turned out to welcome us, a Daily Express photographer took photos of all three crews on the deck of 21.*

*I well remember the half hour notice that we were on, and being prepared to sail out of the harbour within half an hour. Perhaps being in a cinema and seeing it flash up on the screen "MGB's 17, 20 & 21" all crews report back to your boats immediately".*

*One evening (all our patrols were at night) we were just waiting in MGB 122 for our officer's to come aboard before setting out on a Z Patrol, when a gunnery rating standing on the bridge, pulled a two star recognition pistol, (which fired star shells) from its holster, pointed it at a signals rating and myself, said "Hands up" and pulled the trigger. There was a loud bang, a cloud of black smoke and the round hit the signals rating in the shoulder. I quickly kicked the burning flare overboard. (Under the wooden deck there were 4,000 gallons of petrol.). The rating, who was badly burned and shocked was rushed ashore. When the captain came aboard he told the gunnery rating that he would be putting it in his report. As it happened that night we were in action with German E-Boats and our captain was wounded. Our boat was hit while attacking a German convoy and with a hole in our stern we were only able to creep along. We turned on our C.S.A. gear, (smoke canister) and*

*eventually MGB 124 towed us back to Lowestoft, where we arrived late the following day. The captain was taken to hospital with a perforated lung and the gunnery rating got away with it!*

*The MGB's had a crew of 15 :- 2 officers, coxswain, wireless operator, radar rating; motor mechanic, 2 stokers and 7 seamen/ gunners. The only food that we took to sea was a large Thermos flask (about ½ a gallon) with soup in it. On MGB 21 we had a mongrel dog called 'Rusty' which had been brought back from Dunkirk by one of the crew. At Christmas 1942 the young lad who delivered stores to the boats went aboard each one and was given "Sippers" of rum. This turned out to be a dreadful thing to do as he had to be stomach pumped.'*

Notes:-

- 1 The Polish Canning Factory was in Hamilton Road. It was built in 1939 and I believe that it had not actually opened when war broke out and it was taken over by the Navy, who apparently used it as a store and possibly as a gymnasium. After the war it became Coastal Canneries and later was taken over by Messrs. R.J. Pryce who used it as their workshop to assemble fire-places. The original building is still present, although the North end wall has been removed, and is now part of "Kwic Fit".
2. At the moment I do not know what the connection was between the Navy and The Spread Eagle Hotel.
3. The 'Barracks' referred to was the houses in Grove Road. I understand that Grove Road was shut off with gates and thus, presumably, closed to the general public. Some of the houses in Beach Road were also used as sleeping quarters for the men.

## THE LOWESTOFT SCENE 1991 TO 1992

*by Jon Reed*

The theme of this year's report is mainly progress on several ongoing schemes. There are some new items and reports on others that were missed last year. One of the big successes of the year is that Lowestoft and Southwold kept the "Blue Flag" clean beach awards and Lowestoft South Beach was named the best beach in Britain by the English Tourist Board.

Starting at the South end of the town, a very large Gateways supermarket was opened in the autumn on the southern edge of the Pakefield Industrial Estate. A new roundabout has been constructed on the A12 about 500 metres south of the Water Tower roundabout, to give access to the new store via an extension to Tower Road. The Gateways store has quickly gained a good reputation for quality and variety. It includes a post office, a dry cleaner, a cafe and a petrol station (with the lowest petrol prices in the area).

In Oulton Broad the main change is, of course, the new road and bridge. The row of cottages, the hall and the Free Presbyterian Chapel on Bridge Road, to the South of Victoria Road, have all gone during the year. The reported "time capsule" in the Chapel has not, as far as I know, come to light. However, the members took a lot out of the Chapel before demolition, including the windows. The western end of Victoria Road is currently closed off, with the usual effect on traffic congestion, for the construction of yet another roundabout. The section of Victoria Road immediately to the east of the level crossing has been re-aligned to provide easier access to the roundabout for traffic. The new bridge has its footings in and has some huge concrete blocks being built to support it. The line of the new road has been established and thousands of tons of sand have been either dredged up or brought in. This has drastically reduced the size of Lake Lothing between the road and rail bridges. A big floating crane has lain by the works for some months and various other cranes have been brought in from time to time, including one that was used with a vibratory pile driver to put a number of large piles in under the new bridge. The car park between Bridge Road and Nicholas Everitt Park has been extended to join up with the one opposite St. Mark's Church. I believe that car access to Royal Crescent will eventually be closed off. The lock between Oulton Broad and Lake Lothing has been closed off temporarily and is shored up preparatory to rebuilding, with a bridge over it for pedestrians and cyclists. By the time this is published the plans are that the bridge will be in and the road open to traffic. Time will tell.

Still in Oulton Broad, St. Mark's Church has a new bell tower but, by the sound of it, the same old bell. There is a row of cottages next to John Lang Court, opposite St. Mark's, and the southern end one has

been completely rebuilt on the original footings. The estate of houses to the east of Hollow Grove Way is nearing completion and the adjacent one to the west of Clarke's Lane is now fully occupied.

In South Lowestoft there has been little change during the year. Two big blocks of flats along the Esplanade are now being fitted out and plans are being discussed to modernise the sea-front. Morton's site, reported last year as being sold, is up for sale again. The big crane on the South Wharf beside Belvedere Road, a feature on the skyline since Sizewell A was built, has been taken down. Richards Ship Builders have been doing well, launching two large vessels during the year. Boulton and Paul are embarked on a £1M refurbishment, which will also provide 50 new jobs. By contrast, Foreman's Confectionery, the last makers of rock in the town, have closed.

In Central Lowestoft, Clapham Road South has received the attention of the road planners. There are several "sleeping policemen" of such a width that a car could be parked on them. The pedestrian crossing has disappeared and nobody now knows where to cross. I have seen several near misses with pushchairs and old people being hassled by drivers. The official name for this is a "Speed Table". This work has been accompanied by the installation of traffic lights on the Katwijk Road roundabout adjacent to Clapham Road South.

After a lot of rumours, argument and press reports, the roof has finally come off Lowestoft station. It seems that B.R. have acted before the building could be listed. Although the station is not the most aesthetic of buildings, it is nevertheless an important part of Lowestoft's Victorian history, that B.R. has subjected to years of neglect. There has been a wide divergence of opinion between the surveyors retained by B.R. and the Civic Society as to the expected life of the timbers and the restoration cost, B.R. now say that they will make the ticket hall "a pleasant waiting area" and that they will "landscape" the concourse. They said at one time they would demolish it entirely. A step forward?

Trade seems to be at a low ebb in many shops in the Precinct and London Road North. The recession shows no signs of improvement, in spite of Government hopes. One of the many shoe shops, Tandem, has closed down and Took's Bread Shop is now a Charity Shop.

The fishing industry has received two boosts and a knock. Colne Fishing have invested £5M. in two new trawlers and a new fishing factory is to be built at Hamilton Dock at a cost of 2½M. However, the Government has announced further restrictions on fishing, including a payment to vessels not to go out fishing. This is all right for the fishing vessel owners but will hit fish merchants hard.

S.L.P., who have been taken over by a Brazilian group, have promised expansion. Birds Eye have been involved, in plans to extend their factory site at Whapload Road. They originally wanted to lease 3½ acres of the net stands on the North Denes. This aroused a storm of protest and the finally approved plan covers less than an acre. The new plant will cost around £18M.

In the same area there are plans afoot to improve Ness Point, the most easterly point of the U.K. and, arguably, the least publicised cardinal point. Further up Whapload Road, the Sparrow's Nest Theatre has finally met its end. This is the umpteenth case of destruction after neglect. Inland from there, Lothingland Hospital is due for demolition. The only substantial buildings going up (rather than being knocked down) seem to be supermarkets. Apart from Safeways at Pakefield, a new Co-op Rainbow Store has opened on the new trading estate north of Lake Lothing, with two or three other large stores. And now the long-awaited Tesco "superstore" at Gunton is nearing completion. This project is accompanied by severe traffic disruption in Yarmouth Road as a feeder roundabout is being put in. This will also connect on the west with a road link, skirting Benjamin Britten High School, to the new road north out of Normanston Park (as reported in last year's Annual Report). A further length of road to the east leads to an empty field which is earmarked for a hotel. Nearby, the old railway line in the Sussex Road/Yarmouth Road area is being turned into a cycleway.

During the year various events have taken place. Sir Harry Secombe did an edition of "Highway". The Princess Royal visited Somerleyton. Timbers were dug up near Southwold which are thought to come from a 1000 year old ship. The Rev. Ian Paisley came for the installation of his son as Leader of the Free Presbyterian Church (the one on the corner of Victoria Road and Bridge Road, which has now been demolished!). Plans to remove some graves in the churchyard of St. Peter's, Carlton Colville to provide a car park have raised a lot of local protest. Waveney Council have unveiled plans for the future of the Lowestoft area.

I acknowledge with thanks the help given in compiling this report by some Society members, particularly Alan Weller.

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## DOWSING. ONE MAN'S WAY – A BOOK REVIEW

*by Dr. N.B. Eastwood*

Dowsing. One Man's Way by J. Scott Elliot. Reprinted by the British Society of Dowsers, 1990. £6.50.

After retiring from his military duties, General Scott Elliot interested himself in archaeology and at the same time discovered that he was able to dowse. From that time on, his archaeology and dowsing went hand in hand.

In his book, he gives his views on the methods and nature of dowsing and by a series of examples demonstrates its use in archaeology. He is able to dowse from a distance and from maps and also illustrates his method of dowsing without instruments.

The relation between dowsing and archaeology is an important one, as Scott Elliot demonstrated. On the one hand dowsing can be used to find and explore new sites and on the other, digging can be used to confirm the reality of the dowsing findings. A similar two-way process operates in the work of water diviners.

A striking example of the use of archaeology as verification of the findings of dowsers, is given in Christopher Bird's book on 'Divining', which describes how Prof. Vire tested leading French dowsers, by inviting them to find underground chalk workings which he had mapped and whose location was known only to himself. The dowsers were successful in this and in addition, one outlined a gallery which Vire had overlooked, and another indicated the position of rectangular columns, which the miners had used to support the roof.

The eminent physicist J.J. Thomson in his memoirs, 'Recollections and Reflections' published in 1956, stated that 'there is no doubt about the reality of the dowsing effect' but does not speculate on how the effect operates. Scott Elliot comes to the conclusion that dowsing is a function of the mind as distinct from the thinking brain, but also appreciates that there must be a physical cause as well.

There will always be a demand for this book, of great interest to dowsers and archaeologists alike. There is a copy in Lowestoft Library.

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## RESEARCHING MY ROAD - STRADBROKE ROAD, PAKEFIELD

*by Lilian Fisher*

Ever since we moved to Lowestoft and to our home in Pakefield, I have been aware that there were a few houses of some antiquity on the road, but only recently have I begun to try to trace their history.

My first step was to visit the Library, where I looked at the 1883 Ordnance Survey map - the oldest available. From this map, it was clear that Stradbroke Road, at that time called Carlton Road, and before that, Beccles Road, was almost completely undeveloped, with Grove Farm (known as Peto's Farm until 1905) at the end of the road nearest Carlton Colville, and White House Farm near what is now the junction of Stradbroke Road and London Road South. In between were just a few other dwellings, and I was able to cross check with the Tithe and Apportionment Map of 1836 to find out who was living in the properties at that time. Surprisingly, some of the names were familiar to me. In fact the descendants of the Stone family were still living just over the road until very recently.

Grove Farm was easy to research, for the house is a listed building. It has a 17th century core, with later extensions built to the east in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was originally timber framed and probably thatched. The timber frame has been covered mainly with red bricks, although some pale yellow bricks form part of the facade. The roof has an interesting structure, with pantiles to the front roof and slates to the rear, and this rear roof extends far below the level of the front roof. The usual design of a 17th century farmhouse was of three ground floor rooms:- hall, parlour and buttery (or dairy). As time progressed, the dairy was often turned into another living room with a chimney added and a dairy built on at the back with the roof extended over it. This is exactly what happened at Grove Farm. The farmhouse has now been divided into two dwellings, and the owners of the more westerly (and older) part kindly invited me in to look round their very lovely and spacious home. Unfortunately, Bloodmoor Road was driven through the old farmyard, destroying the barn and farm cottages, and the farmhouse is further threatened by the proposed widening of this road.

At the other end of the road, White House Farm is tucked away behind three houses and the British Legion Hildesley Court. It certainly has the appearance of a 17th century house, with its central chimney stack and steeply pitched roof, but the figures 1768 are clearly visible on the gable end. This rather puzzled me, but the date could have been added after alterations to the property, for there has, at some time, been an extension built at right angles to the original small house. Again, there has been an extended rear roof similar to that at Grove Farm, but on a smaller scale. The farmland, I am told, extended from where London Road South now is to Blackheath Road, encompassing the old Golf Course and Recreation Ground. There was a large pond near the farm surrounded by poplars on the site of the present buildings housing the Post Office and other shops.

White House Farm has not been listed, nor have I seen inside the house, but a former owner told me how he bought the farmhouse and the land immediately in front of and beside it, just after the war. Although not a believer in the supernatural, he recounted how, at times, various smells filled the house. In the Autumn, there was often a smell of cooking apples, despite the fact that no such cooking was being done. There was often, too, a strong smell of violets - and of pipe smoke, yet no one in the house smoked. All very mysterious! As I checked old Census records, I discovered the name "Peto" cropping up again as one-time owners of this farm, and in White's Directory of 1851 I read that "most of the soil of Pakefield" was owned by James Peto. From Morton Peto's family tree, I saw that James was Morton's younger brother. Did James encourage Morton Peto to come to Lowestoft, telling him of the opportunities for development? Who knows? An earlier owner of the farm, in 1841, was Frances Elizabeth Acton, who gave her name to the nearby Acton Road.

Another interesting old house, now numbered 28, intrigued me. It looks like a typical 18th century small farmhouse and has a twin roof, with the gable ends facing the road. The original entrance is still faintly visible, and faces west, away from the road. At first I wondered why this was so, and then discovered that the Mill Common extended from the old windmill through to Stradbroke Road, bounded by what are now Saxon Road and Nelson Road. It seems likely, then, that the house was built facing the common land. Exactly how old the property is, it is hard to say. The new owners kindly welcomed me into their home, and let me see the earliest surviving deeds, which show that in 1847, the Reverend Jermy owned the property, and it was willed through the family until 1919. At that time there were outbuildings, including a "cowhouse" and a barn. At some time in the mid 19th century, the property became two cottages, but later reverted to a single, spacious dwelling. On the 1836 Tithe Map the property is shown as belonging to William Gray, Farmer.

From its structure, it would seem that the westerly half was built first, and the easterly part added later, for the walls of the westerly portion are far thicker than the rest of the house, including what is now an internal dividing wall.

The shop (now a fish shop) at the end of the terrace of cottages at the junction of Stradbroke Road and London Road South is reputed to have been a Toll House, and it seems quite likely this was so, judging from its design and the fact that a turnpike road ran from Beccles, along what is now Stradbroke Road, up Pakefield Street and north along a road now long gone into the sea, and so on up the High Street. I can find no records to confirm that this building was a Toll House, but it is widely accepted as such by the local historians I have spoken to. Similarly, the story which was told to me of a coach driver, sitting aloft on his coach travelling along this turnpike road in the bitter cold and snow, who was found to be dead on his arrival at the Crown Hotel, High Street, literally frozen to his seat, has not been substantiated. It makes a good story though, and it could be true!

So, that is about as far as I have got with my research. There are still a few old cottages tucked away amid more recent development about which I hope to discover more. Perhaps I can report on my findings at a later date.