

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY
MINUTES OF MEETING 08th SEPTEMBER 2021
MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Paul Salvidge	David Verlander
Heather Salvidge	Mike Rea	Margaret Rea
Tim Snow	Anne Player	Sue Beeston
Valerie Austin	Brenda Davidson	Carol Wylde
Jean Beeston	Therese Clear	Brian Tulley
Eileen Kay	Patricia Holyomes	Lynda Bowcock
Ian Jackson	Nina Gaubert	Joan Weyers
Lynda Jolly		

Apologies:

Chris Bush	Diane Bush	Keith Merrifield
Pam Merrifield	Tony Bailey	Sue Johnson
Campbell Dunn	Lynda Dunn	Roger Clarke
Phyllis Clarke	Jill French	Helen Mudge
Peter Clear	Moyra Jackson	Ian Beeston

We welcome Joan Weyers and Lynda Jolly as new members.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present to our first meeting in eighteen months.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 11th March 2020

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Annual General Meeting

The Secretary opened the Annual General Meeting.

- I. The Chairman presented a review of the Society's activities over the past year.
- II. The Treasurer presented the Society accounts for the year 2020. In light of Covid, it was noted that 2020 subscriptions would be carried over to March 2022.

Secretary's Note: Copies of the Chairman's Remarks and the Society Accounts have been distributed to members with these minutes.

- III. Invitations were extended for nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary.

There were no nominations for these posts so the incumbents will serve for another year.

- IV. It was noted that Jean Beeston and Nina Gaubert had resigned from the Committee and both were thanked for their contribution to the Society. Nina too, for her donation of a pair of folding tables.

Invitations were extended for nominations for the Committee vacancies.

There were no nominations so the existing members will carry on and an election held at a later date.

Secretary's Note: To remind members, Officers and Committee members are currently:

Gordon Barker – President
Ray Franklin – Chairman
Dave Verlander – Vice Chairman
Paul Salvidge – Treasurer
Mike Rea – Secretary

Chris Bush – Committee and Webmaster
Heather Salvidge – Committee
Vacancy
Vacancy

- V. David Verlander was, with the agreement of members present, asked to continue to serve as the Society's representative to the ECA.

There being no other matters raised by the members present the Annual General Meeting was closed and business reverted to the main agenda.

5. Speaker, Nina Gaubert

The Chairman introduced Nina Gaubert who was to talk about the World War One Essex Evacuation Plan. Before starting, Nina explained that this talk had been put together by her late husband Ray Gaubert and centred on the arrangements for Henham residents. Elsenham wasn't mentioned in the plan other than as a way point en-route out of Essex.

As people will know, the first world war was sparked by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist leading to war being declared a month later, the intervening period being used it is said, to bring in the harvest!

As the first months of the war played out the Government decided that an invasion along the East coast was likely, so plans needed to be put in place for an evacuation of the civilian population. To this end in 1915, the Earl of Warwick, Lord Lieutenant of Essex and other eastern counties' lieutenants attended a meeting in London with Arthur Balfour the then Foreign Secretary. It was agreed that Local Emergency Committees would be set up based on the area of a magistrate's jurisdiction. These would be organising committees, actual executive orders to evacuate being given by a military officer through the Chief Constable or his Divisional Superintendents.

The local committees were expected to identify suitable collecting points for transport, animals and light carts. These areas would be sited to the west of the county and approached by minor roads keeping the major roads open for military traffic. In the event of invasion, some 90% of Essex residents were expected to insist on finding safety. A civilian stampede would hinder the army taking the counter-offensive since there were few east-west main roads, most of the county being covered by a patchwork of angled and snaking lanes edging communal fields dating from Saxon times.

Once given the order to move, residents were to take only enough food (biscuits and cocoa) for three days, jewellery and money. Back in Essex, alcohol was to be destroyed to prevent any atrocities being committed by drunken German troops. The destination was Oxfordshire, but what the Oxford people thought about having 1.3 million Essex evacuees plus those from Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire foisted on them is not recorded.

But how to get there? There were a total of twenty-three routes identified heading westwards out of Essex through Hertfordshire. Henham (and Elsenham) were on route six and Henham residents of all ages were expected to walk from Henham down Hall Road to Old Mead, over Elsenham level crossing, then New Road to Orford House at Ugley, onwards to Manuden and entering Hertfordshire through Stocking Pelham. Now the footsore and weary would continue through Furneaux Pelham, Little Hormead, Buntingford, Cottered, Clothall & Baldock and leaving that county via Stotfold. With thousands of people on the move through narrow twisting lanes and no signposts - they were all removed to confuse the enemy not to mention the local populace – there was the makings of chaos especially when you consider that at that time a lot of people hadn't been more than a few miles from where they were born.

In the event the plan wasn't needed and in August 1916 it was scrapped. However, a paper issued by the War Office said that should there be a hostile landing there would be no need to destroy foodstuffs and livestock and that it would not be desirable to remove the civilian population from the area. Despite this a revised plan was developed with eleven routes for refugees all using minor roads. Those leaving Henham would have to avoid the old A11 Stotford – Newport road possibly using North Hall Road and then trekking across country to Newport.

It should also be remembered that the Royal Navy had just fought the Battle of Jutland and despite similar losses on both sides the German fleet had turned tail and sailed for home under cover of darkness where they stayed for the duration. This meant there were now some 150 warships protecting the North Sea and its beaches making an invasion even more unlikely.

So, if the evacuation had become necessary what might it have been like. Imagine attempting to leave at night in winter, snow falling and wardens running down the road shouting evacuate, evacuate! There was to be no ringing of the church bells, it might cause panic. One last look at the infirm left behind, soup bubbling on the stove and the last logs thrown on the fire with the thought of whether you would ever see your loved ones again. Those further along the road are now saying that the lanes are already muddy quagmires and carts and prams are being discarded after less than a mile, everything including children, now having to be carried into an uncertain future.

It doesn't bear thinking about and thanks need to be given that the plan was never needed.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The full story of the plan may be found on the Henham History website, <http://www.henhamhistory.org/WW1essexevacuationplan.html> together with copies of contemporary documents. My thanks go to Nina Gaubert for permission to use extracts from that site.

6. Open Forum and Any Other Business

6.1 Covid Diaries

One of our early lockdown decisions was to try and record the impact of Covid through people's experiences and we asked that if you had any thoughts, stories, anecdotes, pictures or anything else that illustrated life during lockdown, you considered sharing them with us. A big thank you to those that did but if there is anyone else out there with something to share, we would be delighted to hear from you.

6.2 The Other Elsenham War Memorial

As well as the well-known stone cross in the memorial gardens there is another smaller memorial situated at the bend in Church Lane. We were contacted by a villager to advise that it had been damaged by lorries delivering spoil to an adjacent site. A quick inspection showed that the damage was limited to the stones surrounding the base although the whole thing is beginning to look a little sad and it is clearly in need of some attention. Herein lies the rub as no-one seems to know who erected it or when and who, if anyone, has responsibility for it. Is there anyone who can help with this information?

Latest news is that the Site Manager has apologised for the damage and will be arranging for a skilled carpenter to make repairs.

6.3 Development Threats To The Village

There are a number of development threats to the village on top of the circa. 700 new houses that have already been built. These include the 220 houses off Bedwell Road that is currently going through an on-line virtual appeals process and the application for 55 houses opposite that is awaiting a planning decision. There are another 350 houses to be built on the Fairfield site that has now been sold to Bloor Homes. Meanwhile we need to keep a careful eye out for any threats to the cow meadow (or croak) between Elsenham Place and Hall Road, it's the nearest we have got left as a village green.

6.4 St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival

The Village Magazine tells us that St Mary's Fabric Fund will once again be hosting a Christmas Tree Festival in December. Whilst further information is awaited are there any volunteers who would like to help us decorate our tree? Please get in touch if you would like to help.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 10th November. Our speaker will be Ken MacDonald from the Hundred Parishes Society who will be talking about the Hundred Parishes. It was noted however that the current situation meant that speakers may have to change .

ENDS

Minutes Agreed: November 2021
Ray Franklin – Chairman

E.V.H.S. Chairman's Report 2021

The Covid Pandemic obviously prevented the Society from holding Meetings within this Hall.

However, I must thank Chris Bush who continued to update and add further information to our Web Site. This at least gave our members something to look at and read during, "Lock-Down."

Thanks to our Secretary Mike, who valiantly continued to attempt to procure speakers for our meetings when they could resume. I understand that some have been a little reluctant to commit to appear until they feel completely safe.

It may be necessary sometimes to alter our advertised speaker.

Our Treasurer continued to keep a close watch on our spending.

We have continued to sell our publications. Our financial position is good and I thank Paul for his time and efforts.

Members of the Committee have continued to operate, doing many things during lock-down.

I have been cooperating with Saffron Walden Museum assisted by other members to record how Covid 19 effected Elsenham and this area. I have put together multiple copies of all the messages sent to me from Uttlesford District Council, Essex County Council and the Police. These tell of the evolving Pandemic Situation across Essex and how it was impacting on this village. I have a number of CDs with information on them. These are together with photos of events which show self- distancing and a recording of a funeral held in Stansted which shows people applauding the passing hearse. I have already arranged to place copies with saffron Walden Museum. A University has shown interest. A copy will possibly be passed to the Essex Records Office. It has been good that this History Society has been part of preserving records of this event.

My thanks go to all who have assisted with the running of the Club during this difficult time.