

VILLAGE MATTERS.

1. Street Lamps. 1902-35.

On a number of photographs in the Historic Photo's section of the website you will perhaps have noticed street lamps. These were fuelled by paraffin oil and the light given out was tiny by comparison with today's lamps, only dimly lighting the area around the base of the lamp. Whale oil may also have been used. The distances between the lamps meant that most of the village would still be in darkness and the oil was often of variable quality, affecting the amount of light given out. Sometimes only the lantern part was purchased, with the post or lamp pole being locally made.

It was the responsibility of the Parish Council to negotiate satisfactory oil prices, maintain the lamps and pay the 'lamp-lighters'.

Lamps were lit, ".....by a man who used to go around every night as it was getting dark and there were paraffin oil lamps. There was one at the corner where the doctor used to live, at the corner of Bridge Lane (Ed. this is Dumpling Bridge Lane) and then the next one would be at the Chequers and further up to the Bell. There were quite good distances between them and he would go in the morning and fill the lamps and come back in the evening and light them at a certain time, but he always had to come back again and have them out by 10 o'clock. There was no light in the village after 10, none at all. He had to go up the ladder to light the lamps, by the time he got down the wind had blown the lamp out and he had to go back again, they were very far between that you couldn't really see light from one to the other, so you didn't go out a lot after dark".

The lamplighter was a Mr.Coleman, nicknamed Bubby (possibly Bibby).

Doris Ditchburn. Interview by Ray Bonnett.

Ed. I have heard a few ribald tales about lamplighters and certain ladies in the village! Are they true? Who knows?

So far, it has not been possible to establish a definite date when street lamps appeared in the village, but evidence suggests that oil lamps were installed during the reign of King Edward VII (1901-1910)

The village street continued to be lit by oil lamps until 1935.



Silver Jubilee celebration. High Street. The Bell Hotel with a lamp opposite.



This lamp is complete with its decorative finial.

2. Here is The News.

In 1855 the Newspaper Tax was repealed, making newspapers more affordable and The Bury Free Press was established. Before the railways, as transport developed, national and county news had become more speedily available in larger towns. National daily newspapers were despatched, first by mail-coaches and then later by train to large centres such as Bury St. Edmunds. Quite soon they were transported, often by carriers' waggon, to outlying places such as Lakenheath as demand grew for 'news'. When Lakenheath Station opened in 1844 on the Cambridge to Norwich line they may well have been delivered here.

Eventually the Bury Free Press might well have been delivered here on Ernie Fincham's 'Kettle'.

The Post Office Directory for 1939 lists ERNEST (Ernie) FINCHAM as an Omnibus Proprietor. His 'bus' was locally known as 'The Kettle' because it regularly over-heated and boiled over. Later it came to be known as a 'coach'. A regular stop on a local route was arranged at Tuddenham en-route to Bury St. Edmunds where a pot of ale could be enjoyed whilst the engine cooled down. The conductor was a Mr. Cummins.



The Lakenheath Kettle

However, it's clear that, despite these developments, most local news continued to be passed by word of mouth in and around villages as it had been in bygone days and notices posted locally, giving information, were a regular feature. Official announcements had been made by town criers for centuries and this continued in our village until the late 19th/early 20th C.

By the beginning of WWI national newspapers were being despatched to all parts of the country each week day.

Lakenheath Town Criers.

This is an extract from an audio interview of Doris Ditchburn. (1909-2004), by Ray Bonnett in 1998.

RB "Let's go back to the early days in Lakenheath. At one stage there used to be a town crier or village crier, that's fairly unusual. What did he do"?

DD "The town crier was Mr. Allsop, known as 'Trotman', every little while there would be notices to give out, and of course they were not printed and put up on a notice board. He would come round after dark, usually about 6 o'clock wearing corduroy trousers, a big cape on his shoulders, a top hat and a bell".

Josh Bennett said, in a memory, that he and his sister and other children would follow Mr. Allsop along the High Street and when he rang his bell the children would pretend that they had a bell and would ring their bell too. This would be about 1914.

Doris continues. *"He would start at The Bell and give his messages there, move on to The Bull and then on to The Chequers. When he arrived at the Chequers the people down Anchor Lane would open their doors and listen to what he was calling out to them. He would ring his bell and call out. *'Oyez, oyez, oyez', meaning 'ALL HEAR YE'. (In ancient times this was a command, not a request). Three times he would call that out then he would say, 'this is to give notice on January 15th there will be a meeting for the letting (emptying?) of drains to the Sandpits, Station Road, Pashford", and the various places he would say. Then he would go on to another place. He was well known and had a good loud voice. People would know what was going to happen, the one way of letting the village know".*

RB = Ray Bonnett. DD= Doris Ditchburn.

Lakenheath had at least two town criers, perhaps three. In the early 20th century Mr. Allsop succeeded Mr. William Household, and Mr. Luke Coleman continued the tradition. It is thought that Mr. Allsop died in 1923.

Lakenheath Life. May 2000.

Doris Ditchburn wrote this poem, 'The Town Crier', which was published in 1990 by The Christian Enterprise Foundation in their booklet, 'More Memories'.



Doris Ditchburn

August 2001

Photographed at Lakenheath Village Home by Ray Bonnett

The Town Crier

*'Twas evening time when he
Trundled down the village street
In corduroys of Khaki shade
And gaiters to protect him from the cold
His brawny shoulders covered with a cape.
And with top hat and bell his news he told.
His voice, familiar to the ear
Would send his message forth so clear
Across the cold night air.
His first stop was the Bell Hotel,
He drew deep breath, his tale to tell.
'Ding Dong, Ding Dong' the bell rang out
And village folk in lamp light dim
With doors half open would listen to him
"OYEZ,OYEZ, this is to give notice"
A pause for breath, and then a loud:
"Tonight at the Bell Hotel 7.30 p.m. prompt
There'll be the letting of the droves for feed,*

*Claypits, *Cawsey Horn, Eldon Drove, and then
One acre more or less in Stallode Fen;
Millmarsh and Newman's, close to the Lode;
Breakers Hill and Callege down the Station
Road,*

*OYEZ, OYEZ, OYEZ".
His call he then repeated by the Bull
Then to the Chequers telling all his news,
His loud chimes filled the lanes with glorious
sound
Which boomed across the bleak fen miles
around.
Town Crier, though your solid age has gone
In memory, now comes back your ancient
song. "OYEZ, OYEZ, OYEZ."*

*On he trundles bright and gay,
Another call to make, but wait
The dim lit street begins to feel so weird,
A howling dog, an owl hoots,
The Fenland bleak, space all around,
Yet feet are firmly on the ground.
Town Criers your solid ages have gone
Remembered only by your cry or song.*

Doris's memories from her childhood recalled in this poem contain a wealth of information from earlier times.

Her reference to the auction for 'letting of droves for feed' shows that the system of maintenance and control of the dykes, ditches and pumps and of farming activity on the Fen established in 1768, (The Lakenheath Fen Commissioners, described in timeline 3), was still in operation under the governance of The Lakenheath Internal Drainage Board which had similar rights and responsibilities. This body still oversees the Fen. Does anyone know where Millmarsh was?

The village may well have had a Town Crier into the early 1930's. JOE MORLEY remembered a Mr. Coleman as the Town Crier, but Kelly's Directory of Suffolk for 1912 states that WILLIAM HOUSEHOLD ALLSOP, occupation 'Bill Poster', was also the Town Crier at that time.

"Death of Mr. W H Allsop.

*....has been removed through the death of Mr. William Household Allsop,
who was Town Crier for more than 50 years. Until failing health necessitated
his retirement, he frequently was to be seen with his bell, wearing a top hat,
white jacket and apron. The funeral took place on Thursday week, the service
at St. Mary's Church conducted by the Vicar."*

From a fragment of The Bury Free Press dated 1923 which appeared in the Church magazine, Lakenheath News.

The newspaper was found by a Mrs. M Starr under some linoleum. (Usually shortened to ('lino').

**'Cawsey' (Karsey in dialect) is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1881 as being north east of Maidscross Hill or roughly west of Wangford.*

Radio.

The British Broadcasting Company was established by manufacturers of wireless equipment who saw the possibility of establishing a public service in 1922. In 1927 it became the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). A licence to receive radio signals was immediately introduced*, issued by the General Post Office (GPO). Very simple DIY receivers were possible but these needed an aerial up to 100ft. long and earphones were needed to hear the broadcast. These receivers, technically known as Crystal Sets, were popularly called a 'cat's whisker'; a mineral crystal with a fine wire touching it (hence the 'cat's whisker') was one of the components. Making crystal sets continued to be a popular boy-hood hobby well into the 1950's. The development of electronic valves made possible the valve radio, enabling a whole family to listen at the same time by using a 'loudspeaker' but these needed a source of electrical power. Now it was possible for one person to be heard by the whole country.

Vintageradio.co.uk

To be produced on demand—NOT TRANSFERABLE. (See Condition 9)

Removals.
Any permanent change of address must be promptly communicated to the Postmaster of the district in which the Station is being established. The serial number and date of issue of the Licence should be noted in all cases. Notice of a change of address is not required.

Renewals.
It is desired to continue to use the Station and/or work the same after the date of expiration of the Licence must be taken out at least fourteen days before the date of expiration. Heavy penalties are prescribed by the Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1904, on conviction of offence of establishing a wireless station or installing or working the same without the Postmaster-General's Licence.

Dangerous Use of Supply Mains.
Power for the working of the wireless receiving Station is taken from the public electricity supply, whether by a battery eliminator is used, direct connexion should be made to the supply mains and the

FEE
10/-

RECEIVING LICENCE.

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY ACTS, 1904-1926.

(This Licence expires on the 12th Dec 1926.)

Mr. LADY GRACE BRISCAE
(Name in full to be shown in block letters—Surname last)

OF THE HALL, LARNKETH
(Address in full)

authorised (subject in all respects to the conditions set forth on the back) for sending on the date shown above, to establish a wireless Station for the purpose of messages in the premises occupied by the Licensee at
above address
(Address of Station)

The payment of the fee of ten shillings is hereby acknowledged.

Dated 1 day of Jan 1926

Issued on behalf of the Postmaster-General }
for Postmaster.

Stamp of Issuing Office

**The radio licence for The Retreat.*

The threat of war brought an upsurge of radio sales as 'news' and urgent government announcements became common.

By now some radios included a loudspeaker in a furniture-like cabinet and radios could receive programmes, including the national news, from several 'stations'. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's Declaration of War on 3rd Sept. 1939 was heard by millions of people. The BBC announced in the Radio Times for the 4th that there would be:

NEWS ON THE HOUR

**There will be News broadcasts at 1 a.m., 3 a.m.,
And 5 a.m., and at every hour throughout the
day, if there is any important news.**

The same issue was announcing

“FIRST STEPS IN FIRST AID”.

An easy course for everyone
By a doctor.

From Genome bbc

It was also possible to listen to broadcasts from other countries, for example, Hilversum in Holland.

A range of programmes helped to maintain public interest in difficult times, including music, variety shows and comedy well as informative talks and religious services. The ‘wireless’ played a significantly important part in the ‘war effort’: most importantly it helped unite the nation by making possible important official public announcements which were heard by almost the whole population. Listening to the ‘wireless’ became a family activity which often took place at the fireside. A popular comedy and variety programme, I T M A, (It’s That Man Again), starring Tommy Handley was broadcast throughout the war. Light relief came from the ‘Elusive German spy, Funf’, the ‘Minister of Aggravation’ and the ‘Office of Twerps’.



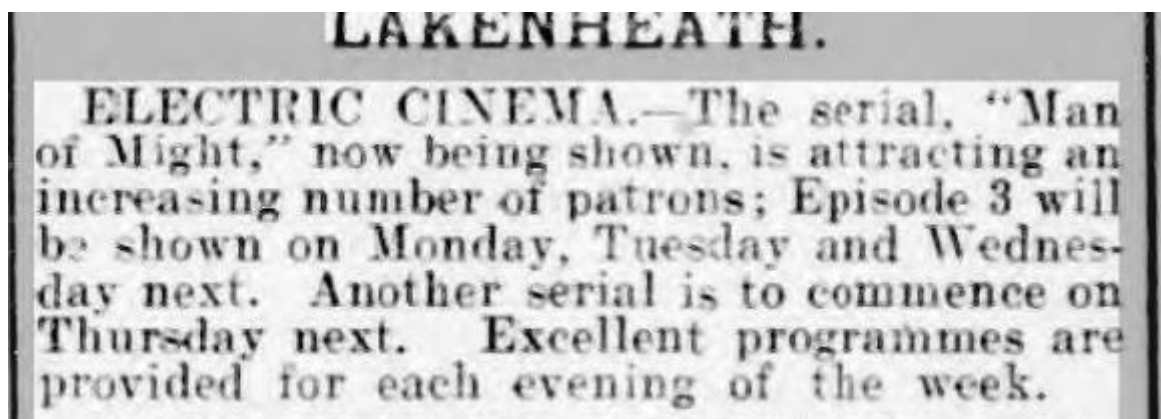
In 1940 this was an up-to-the-minute radio. The variety of 'stations' available is slightly misleading. Photo: Martin Taylor.

Ken Turner's dad bought a radio in 1938, quite possibly from Tom Rolph's 'Radio Stores'. Many houses did not have a mains electricity supply so radios were powered by dry cell batteries and an acid/lead accumulator which had to be recharged regularly. In Lakenheath recharging would be done by TOM ROLPH at his shop and workshop at the back of the 'Tap' on the site of the old brewery. The cost would have been about 5d. (Old pence) which included delivery by a boy on a bike converted by Tom to carry around 12 accumulators; quite a task!

At the outbreak of war in 1939 all technical development of domestic radio and the infant television service was halted to allow the development of radar and radiocommunications for the forces. After the war radio and television developed rapidly.

The News on film.

Associated British Pathé was formed in 1933 when British International Pictures acquired the Pathé Newsreel rights. By this time the 'Talkies' had arrived and commentaries accompanied the 'Newsreel' which with its distinctive crowing cockerel had become an ever-present part of a night at the 'flicks' throughout the country. By this time the old village Electric Cinema had been demolished. (In September 1927). Major news items had been shown in cinemas since 1910 and silent newsreels had become very popular. The advert below shows 'Pathe Gazette and Pictorial' showing in the Electric Cinema during the Christmas period in 1920/21.



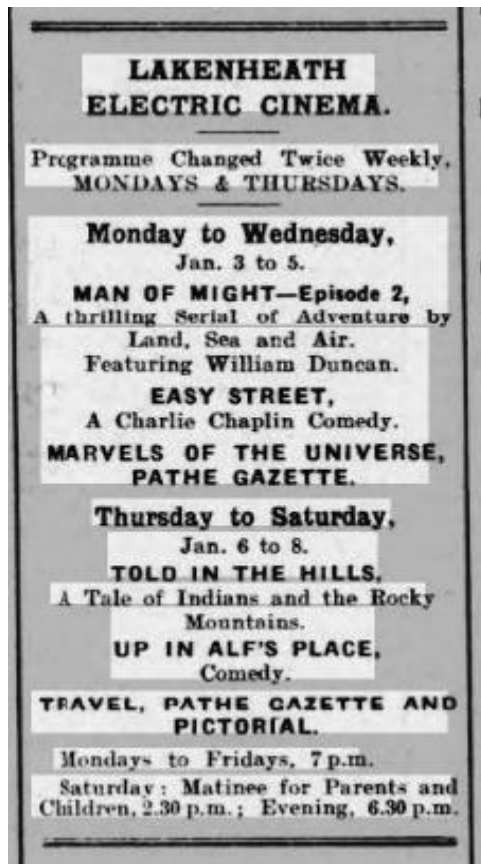
3. The Cinema comes to the village.



The Electric Cinema.

In September 1920 a special meeting of the Parish Council was held. Messrs. Allinson and Newton were proposing to build a cinema on a site known as the Vicarage Close, formerly the site of the medieval vicarage, then later an orchard belonging to the church. It's now the site of two 1970's detached houses. The Council had no objections to the proposal.

By December the Lakenheath Electric Cinema was advertising the showing of several films, all silent of course, including 'The Vagabond' starring Charlie Chaplin and in a January follow-up he was appearing in 'Easy Street'.



The Bury Free Press

The pianist, who accompanied the silent films, (they weren't called 'movies' until much later), in the Cinema was MARGHUERITA (Birdie) FLACK who had come to the village on holiday and met and married ARTHUR FLACK. She was 19 and he was 30. Their life together can be read in 'Times Remembered', in HARRY FLACK's contribution, 'School Days'.

By 1927 the building had outlived its usefulness and had been demolished and the reclaimed materials sold by auction. For some time before its demolition it was used by The YMCA and The Church Army. Films were later put on in the Peace Memorial Hall.

But all was not completely lost; Travelling Cinemas' made their brief appearance.

A LARGE CROWD assembled near the War Memorial on Wednesday, when Messrs. Lyons gave an interesting and instructive cinema display by means of their day-light talkie cinema van. The music and pictures were appreciated.

LAKENHEATH.
TOURING CINEMA.—The Conservative cinema van visited the Peace Memorial Hall on Monday, and gave an interesting display of moving pictures from life in various parts of the Empire and political cartoons, etc. The hall was well filled. Mr. Bolton moved a vote of thanks to the lantern operator.

The Bury Free Press

4. Tom Rolph: Mechanical Engineer and shop-keeper.

Thomas Albert Rolph. 1904-1992.



Tom Rolph in 1962. Photo by kind permission of Jenny Ottewell.

In the early 1930's Tom set up as an Agricultural Engineer and a short time later further developed the business when he also became an Electrical Engineer. He repaired farm machinery, sold farm supplies, like binder twine, nuts and bolts, lubricating oil. He seemed to be able to come up with anything to keep his customers happy.

The arrival of electricity in the village was made possible by Tom. Before electricity became available via the national grid he purchased a heavy-duty generator which was operated by a large stationary engine located at the back of his premises just behind and to the side of the 'Brewer's Tap' public house which was owned by his great-grandfather, James 'Tapman' Rolph. James brewed the beer as well as owning the pub so his nick-name was 'Tapman'. Tom was the only child of Albert and Mabel Rolph who later lived in Bala House, also known as the Brewery House so Albert might have inherited the nick-name as has been suggested.

Tom's daughter Jennifer remembers him always spending part of the night in an arm chair, going down to prime the electric generator at 2am before going to bed. (*Large generators were in use by heavy industry from around 1890*). He erected posts along the High Street at his own expense to carry the cable which provided electricity to homes of private clients and with the advent of valve radios he operated a 'charging' service for the accumulators of battery-operated radios and sold radios; later televisions could be either purchased or rented.



An accumulator. Property of Roy Allsop.

At the relatively young age of 29, he played a significant part in the eventual provision of mains electric street lighting throughout the village, advising the Parish Council in 'technical matters', and his advice in connection with electricity was taken. The lights were ultimately supplied by the East Anglia Electricity Board switched on in January 1935 and he appears to have handled negotiations between the Council and the Electricity Board. (See the Timeline 1933**). As part of his earlier agreement with the Parish Council he had promised to extend the new street lighting to the installation of the 40 new houses which the District Council were proposing to build along Eriswell Road without further cost!

The Bury Free Post September 16 1933.

With the advent of WW II Tom served as a Special Constable and received a medal for his service.

Ken Turner remembers Tom.

"My father, as a farmer, was for many years a customer of Mr. Rolph, and I remember how he had difficulty in getting Mr. Rolph to send in the bill for work he had done, sometimes it would be two years before he received one. He was a very trusting person, my late teens and early twenties I often took various farm implements for him or his employees to repair; on occasions when I needed a replacement for a broken bolt or something similar, and he was busy elsewhere he would tell me to go to his storeroom and help myself. A very trusting man was Mr. Rolph".

Ken Turner

When domestic electricity was eventually supplied by a national grid, making his generator redundant, Tom continued to repair and supply radios, and later, villagers could rent a TV for a few shillings a month. As electrical appliances became more common he expanded the business to include the supply, repair, and maintenance of electrical and other equipment, utilising his engineering skills and knowledge. He also supplied electrical and plumbing components and with the rising popularity of DIY Tom established a shop in the village. By the end of his life Tom had made several important contributions to village life.



Tom's Advert. The Bury Free Press



The shop on the right displaying bunting is Tom's shop in the early 1950's. Who is the girl?



Tom's shop in the late 1950's.



Tom's shop in the late 1960's. Lakenheath WI scrapbook 1965.



Tom in retirement. Photo by courtesy of Jennifer Ottewell.

5. The Good Friday Market.

At some time around the late 1920's, early 1930's, but possibly earlier, a market was organised by village shopkeepers which continued for several years. The market took place on each Good Friday on the Warren at Maidscross Hill which was then known as 'Good Friday Hill'. It's possible that the severe economic depression of the time may have provided a reason for the market. I have heard tell of a number of instances where items were sold at the same price as in the village which caused some head scratching amongst the villagers. I prefer to think of it as a treat for the children!

"Every Good Friday afternoon the people would go up on the Warren where they would find little stalls with oranges, sweets, cockles and various things for sale. After they had been up to the Warren then they would come down and at the Methodist Chapel they would always have a service of songs and a tea provided, so they came back and had a wash and change, put something new on, or the best they had for Easter and go along to the service of songs. In those days there were quite good singers, Mr. and Mrs. John Mills, Mr. and Mrs. Drew and various villagers who had quite nice voices and they would all join in, and that was a well-known thing in the village".

Doris Ditchburn

The Market was probably discontinued not long before WWII in the late 1930's. For many older villagers Maidscross and the Warren represent happy childhood times. It features in the poems written for the 'Celtic Cross' art installation which was placed at or near the site of an ancient earthwork on the warren. The poems are displayed in the Community Centre.