

KETTLESTONE HISTORY PROJECT UPDATE 2023

The main focus of the history project is to research and record the memories of Kettlestone and its inhabitants in the 20th century and publish them through our website.

Work on WW2 continues. During the last twelve months, with Seb White's expertise in sound recording, we have continued to add to 'Village Voices', a section of the website where the experiences of villagers who lived through WW2 can be heard. Pat Dixon, Paddy Greenwood, Gill Baguley, Alec Peck and Pauline Bassingthwaite have all related vivid memories of growing up in the war, and a further recording has been added of a conversation between Pauline and Gill. Both lived through the Baedeker raids on Norwich and in their dialogue, they share both their memories of the blitz and what day to day life in a bombed city was like. Their fortitude and courage are truly amazing.

Researching village life in Kettlestone during WW2 is more problematic. For WW1 we were very fortunate to have the notes of the rector, Reverend Share which provided leads for us to follow up. We have not been so lucky with WW2 but we have continued to research the 1939 list which contains the names of villagers from that time. However, as the names of all those who are still alive have been redacted it is rather difficult to find anyone to interview with memories of the village. However, we do have some of the minutes of the village hall committee as a resource which detail some events such as a dance to the music of the A1 Swingettes.

One exciting find was to discover a connection between Kettlestone and the British Resistance Movement. During WW2 a network of top-secret cells called auxiliary units was set up. These were usually underground bunkers, armed with guns, grenades etc. and their purpose was to provide a last-ditch defence in the case of invasion. Farming was a reserved occupation and so many of the men recruited for this role worked on the land. One such unit was at Alethorpe Hall. There were 6 men in the unit, one was David Burgis's father and another with a connection to Kettlestone was Alec Newstead a cousin of Ted's. Service in the Auxiliary Units was expected to be highly dangerous, with a projected life expectancy of just twelve days for its members, with orders to either shoot one another or use explosives to kill themselves if capture by an enemy force seemed likely.

We hope to put this information on the website shortly.

An exciting distraction from our WW2 research has been researching the table top tomb in the churchyard. Whilst repairing it the inscription was revealed and showed that it belonged to the Dennes family. As detailed in the newsletter, in 1813 following the death of Thomas Martin Dennes his estate and mansion in Kettlestone, and land in the Snorings were sold off. He had been a tenant at East Barsham Hall until about 10 years before his death and it is puzzling to know how he suddenly became the owner of so much property and land around here. We've not completely solved this mystery but we have established that the mansion house that he sold is Kettlestone House.

Next month we are holding a coffee morning to raise a little money. The project is need of funds to pay the annual website charge and there are other small expenses incurred for example when we photograph documents in the county archive. We also hope to raise enough funds to invite Neil Storey the local historian to give a talk on Norfolk in WW2.

Bridget Fielden

Judith Kilbourn