

Living History

NEWSLETTER July 2015

New development on site of the former half-timbered cottage in Green Lane, Yarpole, June 2015.



From the north-west looking towards the village centre.

From the south-east.



Articles

The following articles accompany this edition of the *Newsletter*:

- *The Earlier Church* by Ian Mortimer
- *GHQ Auxiliary Units* by Pete Weston

We always welcome proposals for articles. Please contact the *Newsletter* editor - John Turrell on 01568 780677 if you would like to discuss possible articles or if you have contributions for the Newsletter.

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Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2015 are now **overdue**. They can be paid to Audrey Bott either by leaving them at the village shop addressed to her or sending them to Audrey at Horizons, Green Lane, Yarpole (tel:01568780489) Cheques should be made out to "Living History" for £7.50

Contact details

If you have not been receiving emails with Living History news and updates from me (rhianonturrell@btinternet.com) it is because either I do not have your email address or I have an out of date address. Please email me so that I can add you to my list. The most recent news email was sent on 8th July 2015.

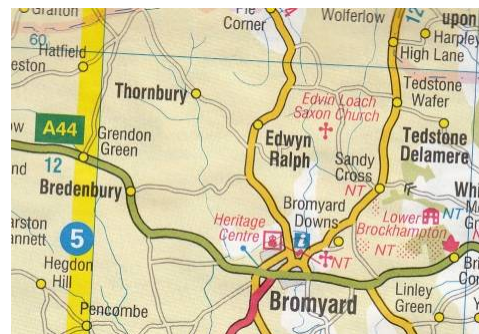
The Church of St. Leonard *Living History*

The Earlier Church:

The church we see today was built in the 14th century but we know, from dendrochronology, that the original timber framed bell tower was erected over a century previously, in 1196, presumably to support a pre-existing church.

It so happens that in the parish of Edwin Loach (just north of Bromyard) there are the ruins of an old church.

The site, now in the possession of English Heritage, contains, as well as the ruins of the old church, the remains of a Norman 'bailey and motte' castle and the new church built in 1860 by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The 'old church', which was in use up until 1860, had been built in the mid-1000s, was rather small and said to have been very dark inside.



The north wall (on the left) which is a fine example of 'herring-bone' construction – typical Saxon masonry, the south wall, with its doorway, and the east wall, with its window, are judged to have been built in the mid-1000s; the tower at the west end was added in the 1500s.



Inspection of the remains of the window in the east wall reveals a remarkable similarity to the pieces of shaped stone which make up the windows of the Yarpole bell tower.

In a previous Article, "The Bell Tower II" (published in 2006) it was shown that the stone structure which encased the original timber bell tower contains recycled material (lintels, windows and the door); the likelihood that some of these recycled materials came from the demolished earlier church is strengthened by the evidence in regard to the windows, from the old church at Edvin Loach.



On the left is the remnant of the window in the east wall of the old church.

On the right is the inside view of the window in the west wall of the Yarpole bell tower.



This is a painting by M. Walker in 1850, when the old church at Edvin Loach was still in use, (reproduced here by the kind permission of Herefordshire Libraries), and, ignoring the tower which had been added in the 16th century, gives us an idea of what our earlier church would have looked like.

The most likely site of the earlier church would have been just to the east of the bell tower for the original timber bell tower to have been erected at its western end.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer with thanks to Allan Wyatt of Bromyard History Society (June 2015).

The GHQ Auxiliary Units of WW11 *Living History*

In 1939 - just 21 years after the end of the war that was supposed to end all wars - Europe was plunged into turmoil and conflict yet again as the might of the German war machine conquered country after country. Following the British retreat from Dunkirk in 1940 the army had been forced to abandon most of their equipment and stores on the beaches, but thousands of troops were evacuated to safety. Great Britain stood alone, the only thing now stopping Hitler from invading was the unpredictable English Channel and the determination of the nation to stand firm and resist. It was perhaps not so much of a question of would Hitler invade but when, and if he did, how was Britain going to resist? Firstly Germany needed to control the skies before an invasion could commence, paratroopers could then be dropped to gain control of vital installations finally allowing troops to be landed to establish a bridge head before pushing on inland. But unknown to Hitler and his planners a top secret organisation was quickly established to deal with the possibility of having to fight the foe, slowing their progress until the invader could be repelled back into the channel. So secret was this organisation that it's only in the last few years and the release of official documents that its story has emerged. The men and women who joined were sworn to secrecy and made to sign the official secrets act, many took their secrets to the grave and few now remain to tell the tale of the GHQ Auxiliary Patrols often referred to as 'Churchill's Secret Army'.

The process of recruiting volunteers now began, but who would be the ideal candidates for the Aux units and how would they operate? Each Patrol or unit would have 4-6 men who would go underground in pre prepared OBs (Operational Bases) stocked with food supplies and weapons. Once the enemy had passed by they would emerge and carry out acts of sabotage and report on troop movements and gather useful information, which could then be passed on. The patrol could be expected to stay underground for up to two weeks before emerging to disrupt enemy fuel supply lines, destroy rail and road networks and if necessary eliminate people who may be assisting German forces. Members of the Patrols knew that if caught, the German invaders response would be quick and brutal with reprisals against their family members and perhaps even the local community.

Who then would make up these patrols? The ideal candidate would be local with excellent knowledge of the area and have a good cover story. The newly formed Home Guard could have some excellent candidates - fit young farmers and workers in reserved occupations used to the ways of the countryside, proficient with guns and knew the local area like the backs of their hands. In each area a security officer was designated to approach potential candidates who in turn suggested possible other recruits, friends and even other family members who fitted the bill. Training would need to be done locally and mostly in night time conditions, secretly, quietly and discretely so as not to alert or draw attention to their activities. A later training course would be conducted at Coleshill Manor in Wiltshire where unarmed combat and the use of explosives would be taught.

Herefordshire would have 6 patrols in total and from 1942 these would be commanded by Captain Geoffrey Somerset Ernest Lacon of Highwood House, Bircher Common.

Geoffrey was the eldest son of Lieutenant Herbert Kevill-Davies of Croft Castle who had been killed in May 1915 whilst serving in Belgium when Geoffrey was just six years old; he had a younger brother, William, aged three. In 1923 Geoffrey went to Eaton College where one year later in 1924 he was joined by his younger brother William. In 1936 Geoffrey (born Kevill-Davies) changed his surname to Lacon in order to inherit his Grandfathers brewery business in Norfolk. Around 1939-40 Geoffrey along with his wife Muriel and their daughter Elizabeth moved back to Herefordshire to reside with his mother Dorothy at Highwood House. In February 1942 he was commissioned into the 1st Battalion of the Herefordshire Home Guard as a Lieutenant before been selected to lead the local Auxiliaries. As Group Commander he alone would have know all the members of each patrol and the location of their secret hides. This in its self, made him a target for assassination by the Auxilliary units and if he was to be captured the whole Herefordshire Auxiliaries' could be compromised. It's quite possible that he would have held weapons and stores in a secret location locally for the re-supply of local units.



A dashing young Lieutenant William Albert Somerset, Herbert Kevill-Davies of Croft Castle, father of Geoffrey Lacon. This picture shows him in the Boer War period when he served with the 7th Hussars in South Africa. In 1914 he re-joined the Army and died of his wounds 15th May 1915 aged 38 whilst serving with the 9th Queens Royal Lancers during the Battle of Frezenburg in Belgium.

Following WW2, Geoffrey returned to Norfolk and sadly died in 1955 from cancer. His brother, William Kevill-Davies, was killed fighting in Burma in 1942. A winner of the Military Cross for valour he is commemorated on the village war memorial.



What could the advancing German Army want in our area? A primary target would have been RAF Shobdon, if captured this would have provided the enemy with excellent links to strike out and on to the industrial heartland of the Midlands and the very important armaments manufacturing factories key to the supply and defence of Britain. If invaded, enemy aircraft would have been sabotaged and runways destroyed, railway bridges and key roads blown up to hamper and slow the enemy advance until mobile units of the army could be brought in to fight the advancing Germans. As each year passed the possibility of invasion grew less likely and finally in 1944 the Auxiliaries' were stood down but no official recognition was given, in most cases no records were kept and Churchill's Secret Army was forgotten. Some of the Patrol members would go on to join units such as the SAS and fight in Europe following D Day but most would just continue their daily life keeping their secrets to themselves.

For those wishing to read more of the activities of this secret army you may wish to acquire a copy of *The Mercian Maquis* by Bernard Lowry & Mick Wilks published by Logaston Press, this tells the full story of both the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Patrols giving the reader an excellent insight into this little known secret WW2 organisation.

Pete Weston 2015