

# BLYTHBURGH

## FOCUS

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Issue No 71

<http://blythburgh.onesuffolk.net>

Oct/Nov 2023

## MOLLIE BROWN – A LIFE



Mollie Brown was, until recently, Blythburgh's oldest resident. She died on 31 July, just two weeks after her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had been frail for some time, and dependent on carers but Mollie had an indomitable spirit. To the end, she was warm and welcoming, funny, intelligent and waspish (she took no prisoners in conversation).

Eighteen of her family gathered at Lucretia Cottage on Chapel Road to celebrate her centenary (she managed a sip or two of champagne), and family were at her bedside when she slipped away. Mollie had many good friends in the village, and they joined family and friends (many of them from the nearby

age 70

Quaker fraternity) at a memorial service on 23 September in Holy Trinity Church, a place she loved.

Mollie lived a remarkable life which I'll attempt to condense here. . .

Mollie was born Mary Agnes Gertrude Perris in Finchley, north London, the youngest of three children, and was brought up as a Methodist. As a child, she was diagnosed with TB of the lung with a poor prognosis. Remarkably, she survived.

In 1940 she and her husband Wilfred (Bill) Brown met as teenagers in 1940.



Bill, a lifelong Quaker, introduced her to the Society of Friends. Their courtship was difficult through the war years. Bill was a Conscientious Objector, putting his studies at Cambridge University on hold to join the Friends Relief Service, Mollie was evacuated before going to Art College in Hornsey. Following Bill's graduation from Cambridge, they finally married in 1947.

In the early years of their marriage, Mollie was diagnosed with TB of the bone, which required the amputation of her left leg, and the provision of a prosthetic limb.

After, they were both employed at Bedales school: Bill teaching languages and Mollie first as bursar, and then matron. They were unable to have children of their own, but over an extraordinary 11-year journey, they adopted six children.

Bill's first love was music, and by 1951 he became a successful full-time radio singer. He was much sought-after for radio, live performances and recordings. The family moved to Petersfield where Mollie threw her energies into raising the family.

Sadly, Bill died of a brain tumour in 1971 at the age of 49, leaving Mollie, at 47, to bring up the children alone with little money.

But tenacious Mollie went back to college and trained as a primary school teacher (she took a degree in History of Architecture with the Open University). As a teacher she believed in allowing children creative space to learn.

At home, Mollie's parenting style was a very personal mixture of structure and freedom. For decades, summer holidays were mostly spent in Alberswick camping or in a local friend's



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home. It became a kind of second home. Also, a place where Mollie could find the space to express her own considerable artistic talents, especially painting, while the children ran amok!

As the children grew into adulthood, Mollie met Ron Heap, another Quaker, through the Leiston Meeting House. Ron, a mathematician and teacher had raised his first family in Turkey but had returned to Halesworth. In 1986 the two of them married, sold their respective houses and bought Lucretia Cottage in Blythburgh.

Mollie and Ron threw themselves into village life. Mollie, it turned out was a demon at carpet bowls! They created a bountiful vegetable and fruit garden and kept bees (with 13 hives at one time).

Ron suffered from Seasonal Affective Disorder, so every year, the pair of them would head for the sun by car. Their destination was a house in Hania on the island of Crete. They would leave in October, with Mollie at the wheel, taking a month to get there, taking a different art trail across Europe each time, returning to Blythburgh in April in time for the spring.

This migratory pattern continued for a number of years, until Ron became unwell, and unable to travel. His health deteriorated over the years, and he died in 2002.

In widowhood, Mollie remained fiercely independent, even though regular visits from her children (and by now grandchildren) sustained her enormously. Mollie was extremely welcoming, and her humour was ever-present, but it had a rapier's edge. She disliked cant and cliché. And continued to ask questions till the end.

She was a voracious reader, whose tastes spanned the genres: she was as happy reading a literary novel as she was a cold war thriller. She was a particular fan of Alexander McCall Smith. She immersed herself in story, discovering the joys of Netflix only very late in life.

Age and infirmity crept up on Mollie, but she remained herself throughout. She'd always made it clear that she wanted to remain in Lucretia Cottage for always, so eventually 24-hour carers moved in, and she responded to them and their lives.

Mollie's was a life of no-nonsense courage and integrity. She was at home with herself and – perhaps because of her Quaker practice – she could welcome silence and solitude. She leaves a rich legacy of family, friends and stories. Her unique, abundant life touched us all and we are grateful.

**Malcolm Doney**

## **HELP SPREAD THE LOVE**

The Blythburgh Latitude Trust is the local group which takes the money from the sale of Latitude Festival tickets to Blythburgh residents and uses it to fund community activities and support local individuals and families in need.

It also, in more recent years, has organised the actual sale and ballot of Latitude tickets. This year, all full-time residents (134) who applied for tickets received them. For the first time (as far as we know) there were more overall applications than there were tickets available (Festival Republic, who run the festival, decide on our allocation). Nevertheless, a further 56 individuals received tickets in the second ballot (for people who own property in the parish but don't live there full time, non fulltime residents, or for full time residents who wanted to pass their tickets on to others). We're sorry that some people were disappointed.

In the last five years, the Blythburgh Latitude Trust has given away £21,781 to local initiatives and individuals. Nonetheless, funds have built up over the years and we are actively looking to support projects which will benefit our community. We are painfully aware in the current cost of living crisis, that some people are in need. If you are struggling to pay bills (for energy, food, transport say) or need support for your children's clothing or education, you can apply to the Trust's administrator [blythburgh.trust@gmail.com](mailto:blythburgh.trust@gmail.com).

If you have ideas for a community event or initiative which needs support, please do let us know. For instance, the Trust plans to organise free entrance and transport for parish residents to the Suffolk show next year.

The Trust is also looking for someone to join the team. We're actively looking for someone who'd be happy to be part of our lively, friendly board of trustees: the people who decide how the Trust spends its money. It's not an onerous task, in fact it's a pleasure. So, if you're interested let us know by emailing [blythburgh.trust@gmail.com](mailto:blythburgh.trust@gmail.com). Thank you.

**Timmy Allen, Chair, Blythburgh Latitude Trust**

## **CHRISTMAS IS NEARER THAN YOU THINK!**

And there's nothing like the advent of the **Blythburgh Christmas Market** to put you in a festive mood. Plans are shaping up for a bumper event this year. There will be 38 stalls and a great mix of preserves, crafts, cards and Christmas gifts, etc.

As ever, it will be held in **Holy Trinity Church, Blythburgh** on **Saturday November from 11.00am to 3.30pm**. You can look forward to mince pies & mulled wine, bread & homemade soup, sausage rolls, delicious cakes, coffee and coffee – and it will be the perfect time for you to buy all your Christmas goodies.

## BLYTHBURGH FIELD NOTES

Late July/August saw an exceptionally good second brood of the delicate, pale Holly Blue butterfly. Look for it on ivy, it's main alternative larval food plant.

Early August saw the first notable return of Northern waders on the Blyth Estuary, with Greenshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Whimbrel and Green and Common Sandpiper, while on the 19th the first Grey Plover was seen.

As an experiment, an almost daily visit was made to a 12- foot high dying Hawthorn bush on the East side of the Estuary, which was intertwined with Bramble. Here a surprising number of species were seen, including Reed Warbler, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear, Stonechat and Reed Bunting, as well as both Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail, the latter two species both former breeding species in the Parish, but now only very occasional visitors.

On the 25 August, a Honey Buzzard was seen over the village, this species has always been a very rare breeding bird in Britain and it is a rare treat to find one of these birds digging out a Bee or Wasps' nest.

From the 2 September, an Osprey was seen on the Blyth, which was then seen daily for almost two weeks. While an adult Hobby and two juveniles, have also been regularly encountered. By the second week, a total of three Curlew Sandpiper and three Little Stint were present on several occasions and by the 14th the first Knot had arrived. Two Water Rails have been seen regularly, look along the edge of the reedbeds on a falling tide.

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## LAISY BANK CXIV

Every Saturday I take our orange car out and drive it to the posh cake shop on the A12. The main reason is to run the car up so the battery doesn't go flat. This has happened once so far; i.e. the battery being flat and having to get breakdown assistance.

Several times on this weekly run, I see a blue 2CV in front of me and get enormous pleasure from overtaking it at ramming speed. The driver is odd-looking, typical of someone that drives that sort of vehicle, which in my opinion is well past its 'sell by date'. When he was young he probably went to folk festivals, wore open-toed sandals, and now votes for the Green Party. I usually get a waving fist and sometimes more obscene finger gestures. As if I care!

Every Saturday I take our little blue 2CV car out for a run to the 'up market' cake shop on the A12. Often I'm overtaken by a horridly livid orange Ford Mustang. The driver is probably showing off how much faster his 5-litre monster is than my 602cc sensible and more environmentally friendly car. An odd-looking man drives it who looks like a more mature version of Mr Toad. I think he's Lewis Hamilton but is probably a retired bank manager, or an accountant who thinks he's 20 years younger than he is. I wave my fist at him and make other indelicate signs, but it doesn't seem to make any difference to him, what I would call, reckless driving behaviour. People like that should be banned from driving! The world would be a better place for it.

Back to the reality! I'm so pleased that our redesigned front garden has survived the winter and most of the plants I planted last year have blossomed. I've planted another Rambling Rector and a Kiftsgate rambling rose that hopefully will eventually cover the ugly tree stumps further along the lane. The laurel in the back garden has all but covered a yew tree which started life as a bush and is dazzling in its whiteness when in full glory. I remember Dennis Potter, the playwright, in an interview with Melvin Bragg talking about the whitest white of May Blossom. He was terminally ill at the time and everything seemed to him to be more accentuated than ever, both in colour and form.

I'm aware of course that many people are by no means in our position with this house and its wonderful garden. All I can say is that it was a mixture of serendipity and luck that led us here all those years ago and an astute mother who insisted that I buy a house in my 20s, rather than wasting my life and money on foolish ventures and profligate self-indulgence. She and my father and my brother and I nothing in money, inheritance or property. Instead, they gave us with a good education, invaluable advice and love. A winning combination for which I'm eternally grateful.

**Jul Bennett**

## Blythburgh Horticultural Society

It's been a busy time for the Horticultural Society (and all gardeners) since the last edition of Blythburgh Focus. Reports are given below for our Annual Summer Show and the Summer Garden Party. In early October, we are planning an Apple Day although, rather sadly, this is not a good year for apples which appear to be in short supply. Following Apple Day, the committee have partnered with the White Hart Inn so that members can enjoy an evening of good food and good company. Finally, our 2023 programme draws to a close with the AGM which is scheduled for 10 November.

### Annual Summer Show

We had a very successful 2023 Annual Summer Show on Saturday 29 July. There were 28 entrants who submitted a total of 173 individual entries across the 44 categories: this is a small increase on last year. We were thrilled that no less than 15 entrants achieved a first place in one or more categories. Our judges were impressed by the number of entries in several categories, and by the overall quality in what has been a year of challenging weather.

Many people came along to view the exhibits during the afternoon and enjoyed tea, coffee and cakes. There was no charge for the refreshments but we did ask for Donations for the Food Bank and thanks to your generosity we collected £126.50.

Val Carse, Chair, presented the trophies and congratulated all the trophy winners (listed below) and thanked everyone who took part. Proceedings were drawn to a close with an auction of produce. Thanks to the skill of Colin Huggins, and your generosity, we raised an additional £109 for the Food Bank. The committee donated a total of £250 to the Food Bank from this event: a fantastic amount. A number of photographs from the day can be viewed on the Horticultural Society website <http://blythburgh.onesuffolk.net/horticultural-society/2023-summer-show/photographs/>

### 2023 Trophy Winners

*Petrie Rose Bowl* for the Best Single Rose: Brenda Motley

*Betty Troughton Shield* for the Best Petite Flower Arrangement: Sue Ireland-Cutting

*Bob Stringer Plate* for the Best Hanging Basket: Olive Forsyth

*Peggy Allen Shield* for the Best Foliage Plant: Carol Nichols

*Derek Kett Trowel* for the Best Runner Beans: Sue Gerrard

*Beryl Stringer Spoon* for the Best Dessert: Sue Ireland-Cutting

*Val Carse Pegg Cup* for the Best Fuchsia: Val Carse

*Vegetable Plate* for Overall Winner in the Vegetable Category: Sue Gerrard

*Willaby Cup* for Overall Winner in the Flower Category: Sue Ireland-Cutting

*Woodward Cup* for Overall Winner in the Cookery Category: Jenny Allen

*Wood-Caulk Cup* for the Overall Winner across all categories: Sue Gerrard

### Summer Garden Party

As *Cilla Wilson* writes . . . On Saturday 12th August we held our annual Garden Party. This year the venue was the beautiful garden of Stephanie and John Tompkins. Thirty four people attended, all bringing plates of delicious food. It was a sunny afternoon and we were able to explore their extensive garden and eat and drink under sunshades.

As usual, Terry Goss supplied us all with delicious Pimms and Sue Ireland-Cutting worked her magic with a fabulous array of raffle prizes – a very big thank you to them and Stephanie and John. Cilla Wilson presented Stephanie with a lovely white Hydrangea as a token of our appreciation of her hospitality and hard work.

If you are interested in joining the Hort Soc please contact Sonia Boggis via [sonia.boggis@btinternet.com](mailto:sonia.boggis@btinternet.com) for more information

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## WILDWATCH

Anyone who lives within reach of the sea or by a tidal river, as we do in Blythburgh, will be aware of the movement of the tides. Periodically, when forces coincide, towns and villages can be inundated by exceptionally high tides.

Everyone knows now that these events are caused primarily by the elliptical orbit of our moon around the Earth. Approximately twice a month, when the moon and sun's combined gravity is at its strongest, we experience spring tides, often triggering flood warnings from the authorities. Less commonly, when a spring tide is accompanied by a storm, the combination can cause devastating flooding and loss of life, as in January 1953.



While we humans wisely keep a close watch on the tides, it's easy to forget just how much these entirely natural events affect our wildlife. A low tide on the Blyth Estuary allows thousands of birds to feed on the exposed mudflats. There's also an intertidal zone that is exploited by a whole ecosystem of species, whose entire life is spent in this dynamic habitat.

But the relationship between the Earth and its moon goes back billions of years.

When NASA began the Apollo project in the early 1960s one of the science objectives was to attempt to find the origins of the moon. There had been a number of theories, which included an impact scenario, but this could only be confirmed by returning moon rock.



Wolf Moon Blythburgh

The success of the project led to the now accepted theory that the moon formed early in the evolution of our solar system. A smaller planet, called Theia, collided with the proto Earth, and the ejected rock coalesced to form what we now call our moon. The rocks that the astronauts returned

shared many similarities with Earth's rocks.

At the beginning of its existence, the moon was considerably closer to Earth in its orbit. Its gravity was enough to move the entire surface of the planet. As

the moon's orbit began to recede, it allowed the formation of the Earth's solid crust and oceans.

The scene was set for life to begin on Earth and there is strong evidence to suggest that the moon played an important part in this process as well. In the next issue of *Blythburgh Focus*, I'll explain the moon's role in the evolution of life on Earth and how it continues to influence our wildlife as well.

Paul Lacey

## MERRY, STARRY NIGHT

Love the contrast between the long days of summer and the dark evenings of winter, and that transition is no more apparent than at the times around the spring and autumn equinoxes.

The equinoxes are when the length of the day and night are roughly equal throughout the world. The autumn equinox fell on 23 September earlier which we have less daylight than night time. This is accentuated by our moving the clocks back on 29 October from BST to GMT meaning sunset moves from 6:32pm at the start of the month to 4:27pm by the end.

What may be bad news for some, is good news for us stargazers. The best objects to observe throughout October are the planets Jupiter and Saturn.

Jupiter is easy to find due to its brightness. At about 10pm it will be in the east and about a quarter of the way up from the horizon. Other than the Moon in the first few days of the month, Jupiter is by far the brightest object in the sky.

Binoculars should be enough for you to see the disc of the planet, distinguishing it from the pinpoint light of a star. A powerful set may let you observe its four brightest moons in a straight line extending on either side. A small telescope will certainly give you this view. If there are less than four then the missing ones will be hiding behind the planet.

Saturn is a harder object to observe. It's about the same height in the sky as Jupiter so the easiest way to find it is to look at Jupiter and then turn almost 90 degrees to your right where you will find Saturn. At over 800 million miles it is more than twice as distant as Jupiter and much dimmer, although still the brightest object in that area of the sky.

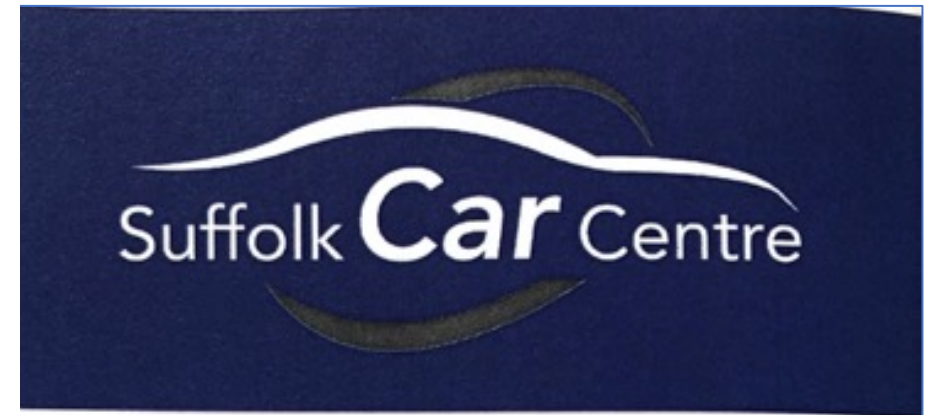
A decent pair of binoculars should show you that something doesn't look quite right with Saturn. It appears oval rather than circular. This is because of the famous rings protruding from each side. Powerful binoculars (at least 40x magnification) or better still a telescope, will actually allow you to see the gap between the planet and its icy rings.

The tilt of Saturn's rings as seen from the Earth changes over a 15 year cycle and by March 2025 they will be edge on to us and not visible at all.

**Colin Huggins**



Telescopic view of Saturn from Blythburgh in 2021



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## A Walk and a Mardle

One Friday in August, specially selected so we reached Butley Creek at low tide, 13 enthusiastic walkers set out to explore. Our starting point was the recently re-opened Butley Oyster Inn, and our plan was to arrive back there for a well-earned drink several hours later. One of our number had lived on the local estate so – through his contacts – we were fortunate to have permission to enter private areas as part of our walk. The countryside was at its best with lovely sunshine, and a light breeze. Birds were singing, conversations were easy and all was well with the world.

An early stop was the parish church of St John the Baptist, a Grade II listed building with an interesting thatch, a Norman doorway thought to date from circa 1150 and a graveyard full of stories. Next stop was Butley Mills, a disused 19th century tide mill which has been repurposed as an Artist's Centre known as Butley Mills Studios. The aim is to create an inspiring environment, and it is home to a number of artists including bronze, stone and steel sculptors, painters and ceramicists. We popped into Tobias Ford's studio for a glimpse of his human sculptures and a stunning bird of prey. He's also reviving a centuries-old tradition and making bespoke knives with blades forged from carbon steel and handles fashioned from offcuts of wood. Each knife is a work of art, but I was captivated by one that had taken a week and a half to make, and incorporated coffee in the process!

We ate lunch looking over the reeds. "Did you know" said John G, "my roof came from this here reed bed". The reeds were taller than me, but we made it to the water's edge. As planned, it was low tide and clearly visible, lying in the mud was the life size *1000 Tides* bronze statue. It was placed there and allowed to slowly sink into the mud by sculptor Laurence Edwards as his gift to the Creek when he moved to a new studio. *Note: Altar Sculpture (Blythburgh Church) and Yoxman (Cockfield Hall) are also by Laurence Edwards.*

Further on we pass an exposed area of Coralline Crag. These deposits only occur on land in the area around Aldeburgh and Orford. It looks like shelly sand to me, and has been known to contain fossilised sharks teeth. It has been quarried and two villages near Butley, Chillesford and Wantisden, have church towers built using Coralline Crag. Late afternoon sun makes these towers glow with a rich honey colour. On the loop back, we pass an area of land that was previously a polo ground. Built in 1936, it was a private club where teams played by invitation only. Spectators were encouraged, and entrance was free. Anecdotally, it wasn't unusual for 3000, mostly local, spectators to attend! The polo ground was finally ploughed in in the late 1950s. Just time for a swift half before the dash back to line dancing in our village hall!

**Sonia Boggis**



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### BLYTHBURGH CHURCH

#### All creatures great & small

August saw another hugely enjoyable Blessing of the Animals service. Over 100 people and their animals gathered (a remarkable turnout considering the timing coincided precisely with the Lionesses playing in Women's World Cup Final). Dozens and dozens of dogs were joined by six horses, a solo cat, a single chicken, a one-off rabbit, a collection of moths and Jamie the 90-year-old tortoise. The formation of horses was led out into the churchyard among the gathered congregation by Malcolm Doney on his 30-year-old horse Neville.



#### Feasting in the sheaves

We had a splendid Harvest Festival service last month including a hearty Harvest Lunch. A festive gathering of thanksgiving and rejoicing.



#### Coffee break

Usually Trinity's ever-popular café and fair-market takes place on **Friday October 10.30am - 12md.**

#### New book

Southwold resident, writer, artist and volunteer priest Malcolm Doney has a new book out. Called *Hold On, Let Go: How to find your life*, he co-wrote this with Martin Wroe, and it is published by Wild Goose, the imprint of the Iona Community. It contains a collection of short, thought-provoking daily readings, about keeping your feet on this sacred earth, and taking wing at the same time. Less of a 'how to' book than a 'try this' book, it also features a cover painting by Malcolm and his line drawings throughout. The Southwold bookshop has copies in stock, or it's available to buy online at the usual outlets. The best deal can be found at [www.ionabooks.com/product/hold-on-let-go](http://www.ionabooks.com/product/hold-on-let-go).



#### Open village church tour

Malcolm recently reported the church tours which Collin Huggins host reached the magic number of 1,000 visitors in September. To mark this milestone, the church has decided to offer everyone in the village an extra-special free tour. You are cordially invited to join Colin and his assistants Sonia Boggis and Cheryl Doney, Sonia and me in the church at **11.00am on Thursday October**, for a grand church tour followed by coffee, tea and cakes.