



WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO: 81

Special Edition March 2026

Newsletter Editor's report

Forthcoming Talks/Speakers

- Saturday 14th March - AGM at 18:30 followed by a talk by Harry Edwards on growing up in Walberswick.
- Saturday 13th June at 19:00 - a talk by Dr Tom Johnson about the book he is writing on medieval Walberswick.
- Autumn and Christmas 2026 – to be announced

All talks are in the Village Hall. These talks are free to members and £5 for guests of members and can be booked through Edward Wright at ewright123@btinternet.com.

Exhibition

- Saturday and Sunday 18th and 19th April. Works by Chris and Wendy Sinclair. To be held in the Heritage Hut

This is the second newsletter of the year and the year has only really got underway. This is a "special edition" to allow us to publish quickly more work from Keith Roberts. Keith kindly offered to write a series of illustrated articles based on the Walberswick chapter of his book on Francis Newbery. We grabbed his offer with both hands.

The first article published late last year concerned Lewis 'Luke' Cady, a member of the once large Cady family of Walberswick. The current article centres on Newbery's studio (or studios) on the Blyth. It contains a wealth of pictures. It's a great one for viewing on a proper screen. Thanks again Keith for sharing these.

Like the Walberswick scroll the paintings are also part of a historical record of the time. This area was drastically remodelled in 1953. Harry Edwards notes that the building on the extreme left of John Doman Turner's picture (see page 2) is actually The Studio, probably the only surviving building of them all. It was moved to its present position after the 1953 flood.

John English – Newsletter Editor

The Newbery Studio on the Blyth by Keith Roberts

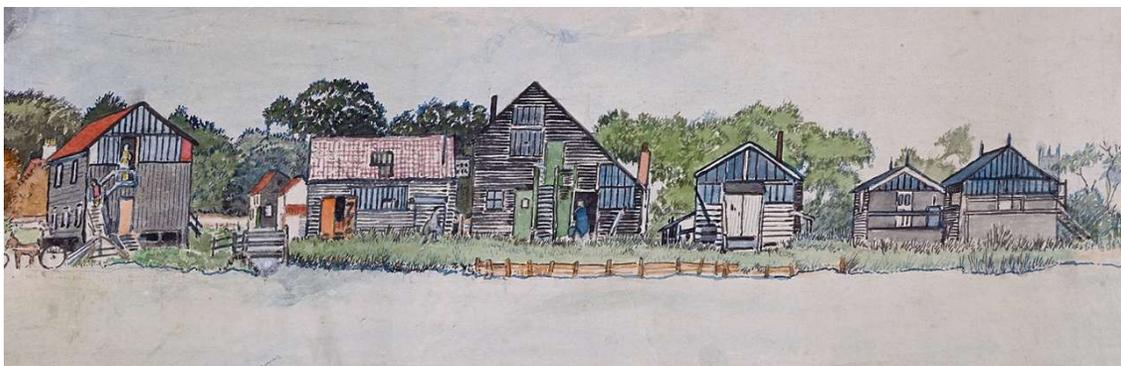
This article is dedicated to my wife Nicole, the great granddaughter of Fra Newbery, who first got me interested in this fascinating period of Walberswick history



F.H. Newbery *Waterfront Building, Walberswick, Suffolk* c1910 oil on canvas 51 x 43.2 cm. Glasgow School of Art, destroyed in the 2014 fire. Jessie stands at the foot of the steps up to the studio with their dog Billy. The hut was called Blyth View.

The painting was in the possession of Sir Harry Jefferson Barnes before he gifted it to the School of Art. Barnes had trained under Randolph Schwabe at the Slade (and married his daughter) and as Deputy Director succeeded Douglas Bliss as Head of the Glasgow School of Art in 1964. He oversaw the building of the Newbery Tower and was also centrally involved in setting up the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society

During the Edwardian period, the Newbery family were all happily living every summer at *Roofree* in Walberswick. But for painting, the house was impractical. Fra Newbery established a suitable studio space, which may have been shared with Jessie, in the top floor of *Blyth View*, one of the wooden fishing huts along the Blyth estuary, less than 100 m upstream from the chain ferry. He later painted the distinctive and substantial green studio building but, from the structural details in the various paintings that he made from his studio it seems very likely that he rented more than one hut as a studio, depending on what was available each year. There is one hut, *End Hut*, a few further upstream, that was almost certainly used as well. The studio in the fresh, direct painting, *Waterfront Building, Walberswick, Suffolk*, was certainly there on the shore for many years as it is recorded in other paintings and postcards over the years. The painting was in the collection of the Glasgow School of Art but was reduced to ashes in the first fire.



More than twenty years later, the fishermen's huts used as studios can all still be seen in this detail from the 1931/2 Walberswick scroll by Camden Town Group artist, J. Doman Turner. Blyth View, used by Fra Newbery, can be seen in the centre of the painting. The lower floor of the hut to the left was used by Charles Rennie Mackintosh during 1914/15, after which it was occupied by Alan Davidson RA and Bertram Priestman RA took the upper floor. End Hut to the far right here was also probably used by Fra Newbery at some point. In the 1953 floods, all of these structures were washed clean away. (photo courtesy of Walberswick Parish Council)

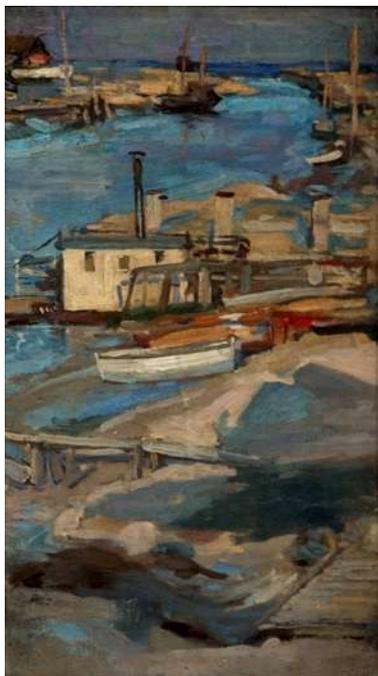


The steam-powered chain ferry in 1904. The chain is visible to the right in this Newbery family photograph

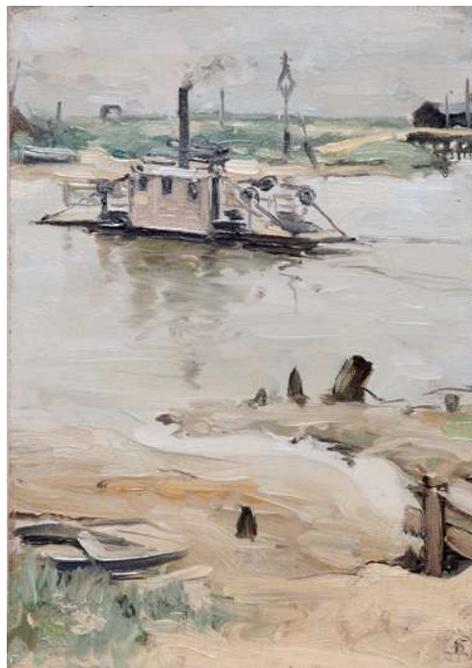
Walberswick is less than a mile away from Southwold across the river, and to get there you have two options. The first is to travel inland by road to Blythburgh, to the first crossing over the Blyth, and then drive back along the north shore to the town, a trip of around 8 miles. Or, as generations have done since the Middle Ages, you can simply cross the river by ferry. To carry more traffic, the original simple rowing boat was replaced in 1886 by a manually cranked pontoon chain ferry. Later, in 1899, this was mechanised by introducing a steam engine onto the pontoon so that vehicles and livestock could cross along with people (and their bicycles).

This arrangement lasted until its demise in 1942, when the Lord of the Manor, Sir Ralph B. M. Blois, who historically owned the franchise for the ferry, declined to renew the lease. Since then, and continuing to this day, we all again rely on a rowing boat, and the aptly named Cross family and their descendants, to convey us to the other side. During the period of the chain ferry, however, the picturesque sight became a firm favourite for postcards and for artists. Fra Newbery was not immune, and from his studio he painted a series of light, loose and impressionist paintings featuring the ferry, that together constitute some of his best and most 'modern' paintings. My feeling looking at them now is that these are the mature products of a truly relaxed and happy man, work that he really enjoyed making.

This arrangement lasted until its demise in 1942, when the Lord of the Manor, Sir Ralph B. M. Blois,



F.H. Newbery *Walberswick Ferry* 1905
Oil on board, 46 x 26 cm (private collection)



F.H. Newbery *The Ferry on the Blyth* 1905 Oil on canvas, 34.5 x 24.5 cm (private collection)

In the first two paintings, the ferry takes centre stage. In *Walberswick Ferry 1905* the artist has constructed an unusually high viewpoint, looking out past the moored ferry to the harbour mouth. The sky remains a dark narrow strip at the top of the painting. Its rapid and vertical construction uses

the brown base colour of the board to set off a series of orange, red and purple brushstrokes. In contrast, in *The Ferry on the Blyth* the view is from the riverside, possibly from his studio itself,

with the ferry midway across. Both paintings have a high horizon and fast, fluid, gestural brushwork, but here the palette is muted not exaggerated, the composition is grounded, and the impressionist feel gives us a real sense of the silted water, grey skies and the muddy shore. The same view of the ferry also appears in *A Cord*, a more ambitious composition that includes figures.

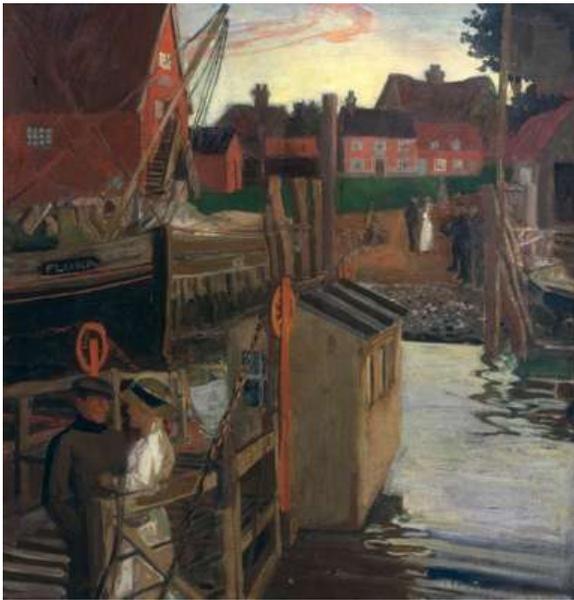


F.H. Newbery *A Cord* c.1911 Oil on canvas 32.5 x 40 cm
Glasgow School of Art, lost in the fire in 2014

George Rawson described this work in helpful detail, 'a small oil . . . depicts a group of four women in large hats, two men and a dog on the southern shore of the river, is grey-green in colour with a tone similar to that preferred by Bastien-Lepage and his followers. Its impressionistic representation of figures, boats and buildings silhouetted against sky and water, and Newbery's liberal use of black to describe the figures whose hats create strong forms against the freely brushed grey of the river is

heavily Whistlerian in feel and bears comparison with Wilson Steer's Walberswick painting *The Bridge*, which also uses silhouettes against water. In Newbery's painting, as in Steer's, the horizon is very high. Newbery's strip of almost white sky is the highest-toned part of his picture and is brushed in with broad square strokes. Beneath it is a strip of green fluid paint which acts as the opposite shore. The sky is cleverly punctuated at the left-hand side of the canvas by a black rectangle which describes a building but also anchors the picture and acts as a reference point for the black figures in the foreground, as well as for the white rectangle which represents the ferry boat. The high horizon also emphasises the two-dimensionality of the picture. This, together with Newbery's schematic forms, which are as much areas of paint as depictions of people, boats and buildings, enables the work to be enjoyed for its abstract painterly qualities.'

It was a popular motif. In 1890 Alexander Mann had visited Walberswick, along with fellow Glasgow Boy Arthur Melville, when he also painted the steam ferry in tones similar to Newbery's, but perhaps the most remarkable painting of the Walberswick steam ferry was made by the close friend and colleague of Fra Newbery, Maurice Greiffenhagen. Trained at the Royal Academy Schools, he had been appointed by Newbery in 1906 (on the recommendation of Sir John Lavery) to succeed Jean Delville as the Life Professor at the Glasgow School of Art. Greiffenhagen visited Suffolk often, in part because he was great friends with the writer H. Rider Haggard, who lived partly in Bungay and partly in a terrace on the cliff top in Kessingland. Many of his romantic and highly popular novels were illustrated by Greiffenhagen and such visits provided convenient occasions to visit his new friend in Walberswick a few miles to the South.



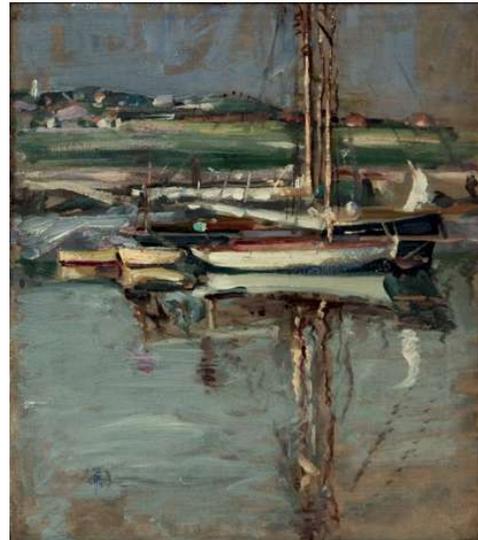
Maurice Greiffenhagen *Walberswick* c.1905 oil on canvas
66 x 63.5 cm The Fleming Collection

The year before his appointment he stayed with the Newberys and while there he painted his own take on the steam ferry. The viewpoint is remarkable—the central engine house and the red chains crossing it are imagined from a position hovering high above the ferry looking down on it, the Yacht Yard and the Bell Hotel in the background and an unlikely couple chatting on the pontoon platform, the yellow sky reflected in the river. The palette is dark with deep browns, reds and pinks the dominant colours, somewhat reminiscent of the high viewpoint and tonal range of Newbery's own painting, *The Steam Ferry*, of the same year.

Many of Newbery's paintings were generously gifted to friends and family and *A Cord* was gifted to his close friend, James Mavor, a keen promoter of the arts. Then, through his daughter-in-law, the work was donated to the Glasgow School of Art, where it was finally consumed by the flames of the first of the great fires in 2014.



F.H. Newbery *Walberswick* 1905 Oil on canvas 31 x 37 cm
(private collection)



F.H. Newbery *Boats on the Blythe* c.1905 Oil on canvas 40.4 x 35 cm (private collection)

The moored boats around the ferry were also noted carefully by Fra and used as motifs in several swiftly painted studies. *Boats on the Blythe* is a wonderful impressionistic work with liquid light-blue brushstrokes standing in for sky and water and the exposed brownish ground providing shadow under the lightning flicks of the reflections. A splash of thick white impasto does service for both the lighthouse in the distance and the hulls and sails of the boats. A similar use of colour and brushwork, this time with a black ground, can be seen in *Walberswick*, painted around the same time. Close up the ensemble of single flat brush strokes, yellows, browns, pinks, greens and greys, make up an almost abstract pattern that only resolves from a distance, buoyed by the thick

white of the hull and a singular punctum, a splash of red. In March of the following year, Fra Newbery gave this painting as a wedding gift to Charles MacDonald, the brother of the two MacDonald sisters, who with Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair had been encouraged by Newbery five years earlier to become ‘The Four’.



F.H. Newbery *Looking Towards Southwold from Walberswick* Oil on board 24.2 x 34.3 cm
(private collection)
Date unknown - c.1905-1910

Newbery’s interest in rural labour ensured that he would have been aware, not just of its scenic interest but also of the working life of the harbour. Looking northeast from his studio towards Southwold, and the newly refurbished harbour mouth, another small painting documents this interest and the *raison d’être* for the harbour. A Lowestoft registered fishing vessel in the foreground contrasts with the newly built plant in the distance for processing the Autumn catch of herring. This, the taller building in the painting, was known locally as the ‘Kipperdrome’. The buildings to its left were used for curing herring, the fish market, and its associated offices — the bulk of the cured herring exported in barrels to Germany.

In contrast to the artists in some other contemporary sister colonies, St Ives, Newlyn and Staithes, Fra Newbery did not record the active working fishermen and sailors of Walberswick. Instead, as with his paintings of the fen reeve (see WLHG newsletter no. 79, October 2025), he seemed more interested in the dignity of rural age and experience, captured well in *Tales of the Sea*. Two ancient mariners sit on the sunny riverbank, their work-worn hands reflecting their time at sea. The boats, including the paddle steamer Pendennis are behind them on Blackshore as a reminder. It was exhibited in Newcastle and at Paisley Art Institute but is now unlocated. *Cronies* is a similar painting, exhibited at the Royal Glasgow Institute, but sadly also unlocated. The same two locals are now with a long-bearded colleague in the local pub a few years earlier. Rawson suggests, ‘There



F.H. Newbery *Tales of the Sea* c.1914 (untraced)



F.H. Newbery *Cronies* c.1910 (untraced)

is an intimacy about both paintings which suggests Newbery's personal acquaintance, friendship even, with his sitters. In these works, there is no sentiment, just factual reporting.'

Fra painted many other works inside his riverside studio, looking out across the Blyth towards Southwold. 1912 was a bumper year for them. *Phyllis* (in Rawson's draft list of paintings this is its original title) has more recently come to light again, retitled *Daydreaming*, clearly not its original title since his model is looking straight at us. With its companion, *Day Dreams*, these two paintings provide an intriguing contrast in style, which may well have been deliberate. Both also display Newbery's obsession, shared with Jessie, for loose and patterned clothing and its depiction. The same table appears in both works, together with bare wooden boards, forming the wall in one case and the floor in the other. In *Phyllis*, it is a sunny day, with a view of the fishing vessels through the window, and the model is perched on the table facing the artist/viewer. This contrasts with its counterpart, *Day Dreams*, that Rawson says references, "the sombre peasant interiors of the Hague School". Here the same model is seated with an air of melancholy, looking quietly away from the viewer with just a hint of sentimentality.



F.H. Newbery *Phyllis* 1912 Oil on canvas 76 x 102 cm (RSA 1912) Around 1918 Fra donated *Phyllis* to Greenock, originally to be hung in their council chamber, but it went missing sometime that century.



F.H. Newbery *Day Dreams*, 1912, oil on canvas, 105 x 134 cm

In both paintings, the models have identical green bows in their dark hair, and their dresses are a counterpoint in red and green. Both works contain artfully constructed and carefully colour-balanced still-life elements. In one, a blue vase, wreathed in green fronds with red berries, contains red and white flowers that all echo those on the green dress that itself has an echo in the green of the boat outside the hut. In the other a green pot with red and green apples again mirrors the pattern of the dress. This interest in loose-flowing dresses aligns with Jessie's firm views on the unrestricted, practical 'rational dress' movement, and she probably made the dresses for the model to wear.



F.H. Newbery Left: *Doreen* c.1912 oil on canvas
63 x 38 cm (private collection)



F.H. Newbery *Walberswick, on the Waterfront* 1912 Oil on
canvas 60 x 44 cm (Ellis Campbell Collection)

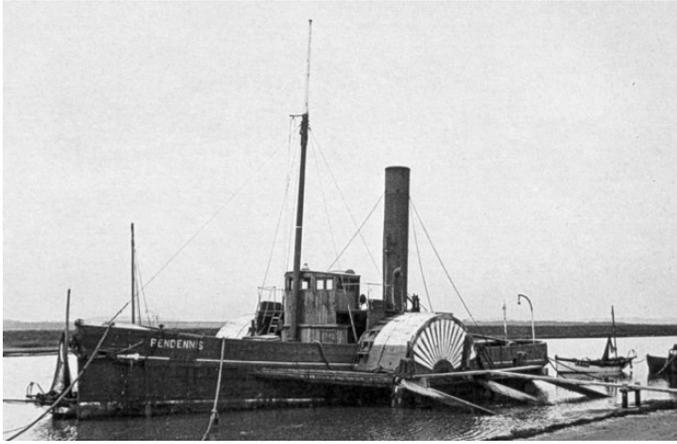
This was exhibited in the Bourne Fine Art exhibition, *Scottish Impressionism and Post Impressionism: McTaggart to Fergusson*, at the Edinburgh Festival in 1988

A similar dress is seen in *Doreen*, Fra's full-length portrait of a young girl on the river's edge by the studio, with a paddle steamer behind her on the Southwold side. The same steamer is seen in the swiftly painted and impressionist *Walberswick, on the Waterfront*, where the earlier model, still with the green bows in her hair, is now leaning on the balcony in front of the studio. *Pendennis*, the paddle steamer, with its carefully painted, fenestrated paddle covers, was regularly used as a tug, both while the harbour was being reconstructed and later, to tow the large unmotorised fishing vessels and coastal trading ketches out to sea. *Doreen*, like many of Newbery's paintings, was gifted to one of his many friends and colleagues, in this case the dedication on the reverse says, 'To my old friend and colleague Alexander Proudfoot'. Proudfoot was a sculptor who trained at the Glasgow School of Art and in 1912 was appointed by Fra Newbery as his head of modelling and sculpture. An active member and President of the Glasgow Art Club, he was elected as an Academician in 1932.



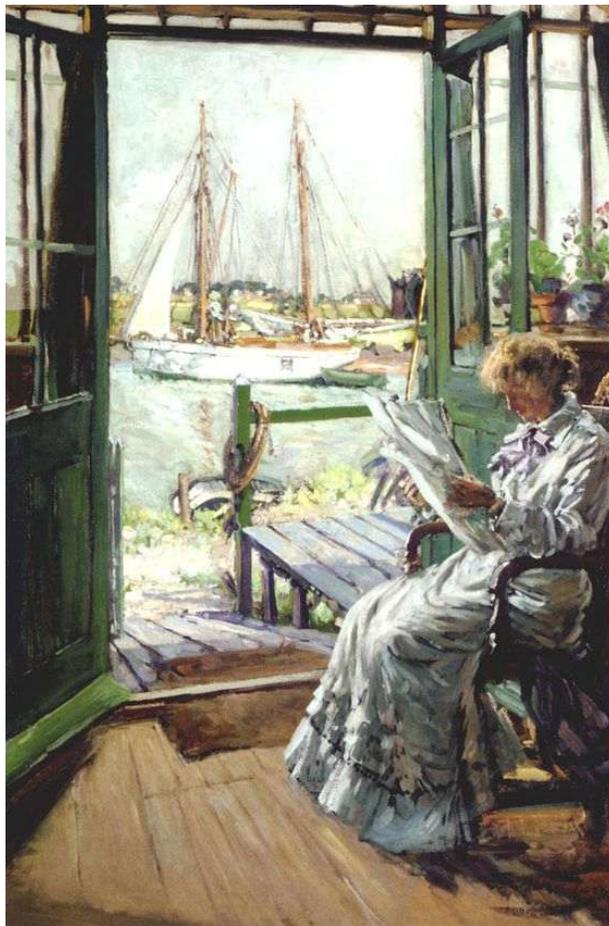
Marion Seward *The Steam Ferry* 1912 Watercolour
(private collection).

This painting by the Newberys' friend and next-door neighbour shows the chain ferry, a fishing ketch and the *Pendennis*, the paddle steamer featured in the Newbery paintings above



The Pendennis paddle steamer tug, moored up on the Southwold side of the harbour. Courtesy of Walberswick Local History Group.

Fra Newbery also used his family as models. *By the Blyth* is another painting from his studio, its green doors wide open, with his wife Jessie sitting inside in an elaborately decorated dress, snatching time to read the newspaper.



F.H. Newbery *By the Blyth* c.1912 Oil on canvas