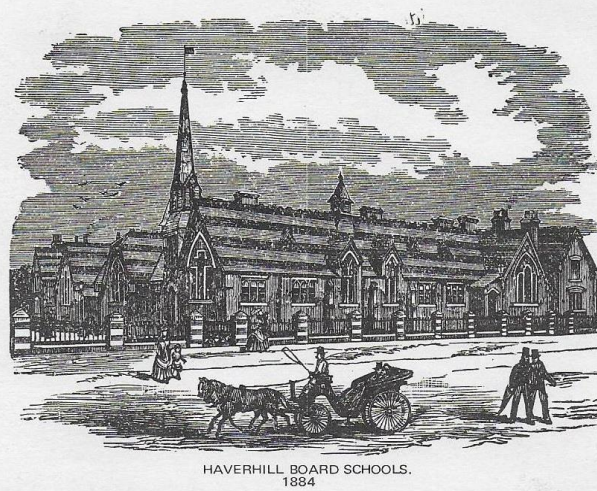




NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2025

SUFFOLK FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 1087748

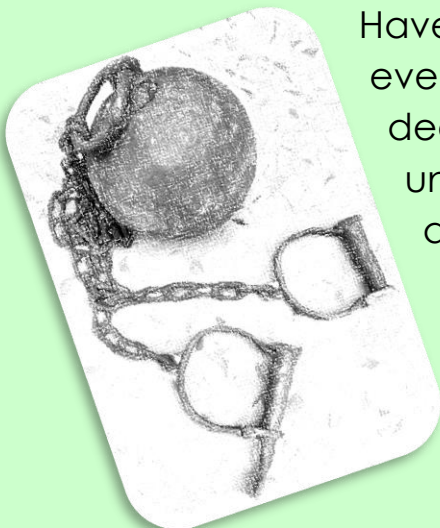
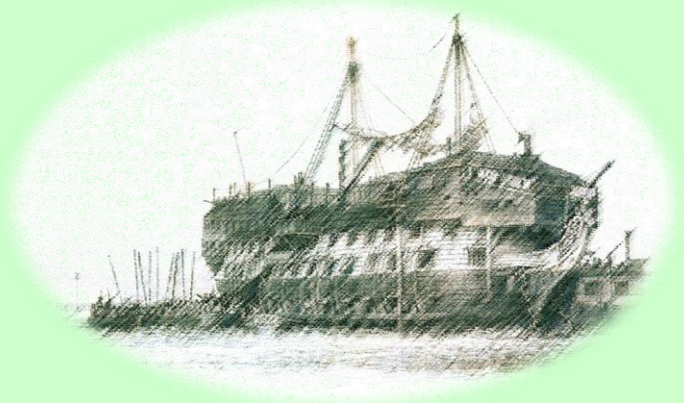
Next Meeting:

Thursday 13th March 2025 at 7.30pm

Old Independent Church Hall

Transportation and Rural Unrest

with Charmian Thompson



Have you a convict amongst your ancestors? This evening will consider the reasons why transportation was deemed to be necessary and focus on local rural unrest. During a 'visit' to the County Assizes the audience will be the jury listening to real life witness testimonies from a case held in 1850. Will the accused be found guilty or not guilty?

There is only one way to find out!

I saw this interesting piece at the Cambridge Museum

Thomas Hobson was a Cambridge based carrier and a generous benefactor who lived between 1544 and 1631.

He delivered letters between the University and London with great energy. He was also well known for hiring out his horses on a strict rota:

He made it unalterable rule...that every horse should have an equal share of rest and fatigue, and therefore would never let one out of his turn...[it was] this [horse] or none.

This system of 'this one or none' became known as '**Hobson's Choice**', meaning that customers could take the horse they were given, or go without.



Brian & Charmian Thompson recently gave a presentation to the 'Sunshine Ladies' of Haverhill. We were made most welcome and hopefully they enjoyed the talk about Nursery Rhymes.....they were shocked to hear that these innocent rhymes had a more sinister side. Their generous donation was paid in the family history group account and will help finance the Robert Roberts project.

**LINTON & DISTRICT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TUESDAY 18th MARCH 2025**



**The Curiohaus Trials
presented by Russell Kent**

Between 1945-49 the Curiohaus Hamburg held court over the trials of Nazi War Crimes.

**LINTON VILLAGE HALL
COLES LANE - 7.30 p.m.
Refreshments and Raffle**

Visitors and new members always welcome

Haverhill Local History Museum
presents

**A Kiwi in Cambridge: Lord Rutherford
the Father of Nuclear Physics**

Ernest Rutherford's scientific drive and abilities earned him a Nobel Prize, a Knighthood and a Peerage.

Neil Dickinson presents an illustrated talk which takes the listener from Rutherford's early life to his final days as the world's greatest pioneer of his subject - nuclear physics.



National Portrait Gallery, London

Everyone welcome.

Join us in the Studio, Haverhill Arts Centre on
Wednesday, 19th March 2025 at 7.30pm.

Members £2, non-members £3, (includes refreshments).



Suffolk Family History Society News:-

Membership subs 2025/26

Membership year runs **1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026**, so the March edition of Roots will be the last edition of this membership year. There will be a renewal form on the rear of the address label for those getting a postal edition. For all those renewing, please note the new rates for postal membership (£14 for all UK postal). No change to other categories. Please also note that you can now pay by direct debit, and if you are interested in taking up this option, please contact the membership secretary on membership@suffolkfhs.org.uk

Our Membership Secretary also says: "members currently receiving Suffolk Roots by post and paying by direct debit will automatically have their subscription amended to £14 to reflect the new membership fees effective for 2025/26"

Standing Orders: For those UK folks who pay by standing order for postal copy of Roots, please amend your standing order, or cancel your standing order and switch to a different method.

Checking your membership status: You can check your own membership status quite easily. When you have logged into our website, go once more to the Members Area dropdown top right, and click on your own name and that will give you your membership number, what type of membership you have and the expiry date. If you have life membership don't worry about the expiry date, its just an arbitrary one.

Zooms

Recordings of our 2 most recent Zooms now available on members pages of our website.

"AI for Family History" presented by Andrew Redfern;

"Constable, The Artist who couldn't get arrested", by Kim Smith. Both excellent presentations on very different subjects. Available until 1st March

Upcoming Zooms

- **Monday 31 March: "DNA Test Taken, Now What?"** with Mia Bennett. [This will not be recorded.](https://tinyurl.com/DNATestTaken) Please use this link to register <https://tinyurl.com/DNATestTaken>
- **Monday April 14th at 07:45 "Whispers from the Graves: Uncovering the Lives of Onehouse's Paupers"** with Julie Johnson

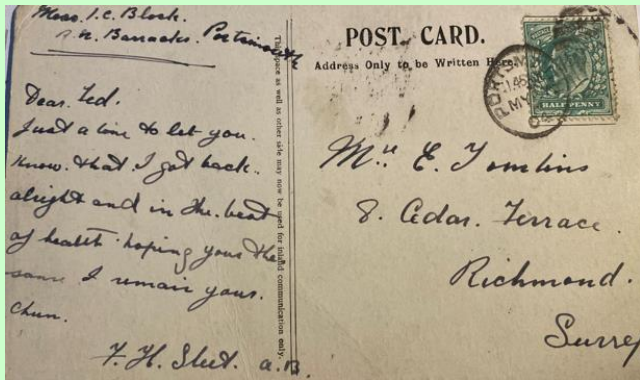
50th Anniversary

A reminder that the Society will be having a reception after our Fair on April 26th at the Hold, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary. If you have any memories and /or photos of events and people to share which we can put into Suffolk Roots or put on display at the reception please send to the Chairman, Andy Kerridge.

ONE POSTCARD, TWO TRAGEDIES

This article is down to my father. He served with the Fleet Air Arm and was often away with various squadrons on Aircraft Carriers in different parts of the world. At every destination he found himself in, he always sent home postcards and so I developed a collection, which I still add to today.

After his death he was interred in the Royal Naval Cemetery at Haslar so when I saw a postcard posted in 1904 for sale I had to buy it.



It was sent in May 1904 by Able Seaman F H Sleet whose address was Mess 1c Block, R N Barracks, Portsmouth. Nothing too special in the message at this stage - it was the photo that caught my eye.

And here is the picture (below) on the front that really caught my attention and prompted some online research.

What was the A1 disaster? Who was Lieutenant Churchill?

HMS A1 was the Royal Navy's first British-designed submarine. She was the lead ship of the first British A-class submarines and the only one to have a single bow torpedo tube.



She was an enlarged and improved Holland-class submarine. It was 40 ft (12 m) longer than the Royal Navy's five "Holland"-type boats. She was built at Vickers, Barrow-in-Furness and launched on 9 July 1902.

Here Some A1 stats:



Length: 103.25 ft (31.47m)

Beam: 11.9 ft (3.6m)

Speed: 11.5 knots (13.2 mph) surfaced
7 knots (8mph) submerged

Range: 500 nautical miles surfaced
20 nautical miles submerged

Power: 450 hp petrol engine
87 hp electric motor

Complement: 2 Officers and 9 ratings

In 1904, A1's eleven-man crew was made up of 2 officers, Lieutenant Mansergh, the captain, and **Sub Lt John Preston Churchill**, 3 Petty Officers, 2 engine room artificers, (one a chief) 2 stokers, one a chief, and 2 Able Seamen.

The submarine was destined to have a brief life. Before she even left the yard, A1 suffered from a hydrogen explosion and later while under tow to Portsmouth to join the rest of the Royal Navy's submarines, seawater managed to reach her batteries, giving off chlorine gas, and forcing the evacuation of the vessel.

However, during her short life, both King Edward VII and HRH the Prince of Wales took to sea in her.

In the early years of the Submarine Service, everything to do with boats appears to have involved risk and hardship. The Hollands had a very small conning tower, so even normal surface running in a choppy sea was a challenge. The use of a petrol engine for surface propulsion in a confined space was an accepted hazard that was considered sheer madness by most non-submariners.

Not only was the risk of fire or an explosion a very real danger, but petrol vapour had a tendency to make eyes water and to cause the most dreadful headaches.

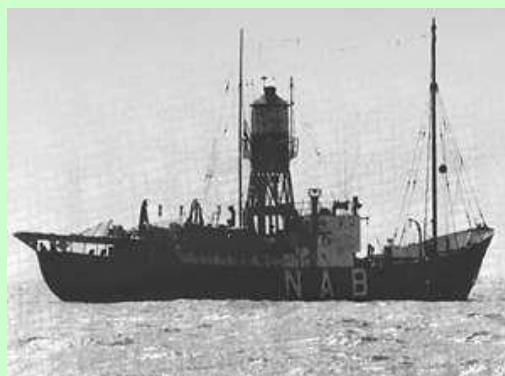
The interior was small, dank and foul smelling, crammed with noisy and temperamental machinery, and definitely no place for the faint-hearted; it took a special type of man to withstand the conditions and to perform skilled work with efficiency and with, at least, a modicum of cheerfulness.

In 1904, the Hollands and their seven-man crews had reached a standard of efficiency, which allowed them to participate in the annual Naval Manoeuvres for the first time. A1 was ordered to join them. It was during these manoeuvres that she became the first British Submarine to be lost at sea.

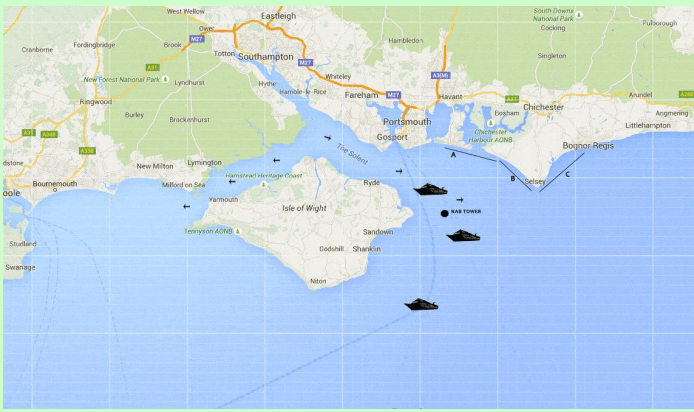


HMS Juno

On Friday 18 March, the final day of the manoeuvres, several Hollands and the A1 left harbour for an attack on the cruiser Juno, which was due to arrive at Portsmouth on completion of her part in the exercises.



In the early afternoon, the Juno was detected off the Nab Lightship steaming blissfully towards Portsmouth.



When you look at a map of the area you wonder whether this was the most sensible place to run manoeuvres of this sort. It has always been a busy stretch of water used by a wide variety of shipping.

First to attack was Holland 2. At about 1400 hrs, her captain fired a dummy torpedo which missed the target. This attempt was

followed by an attack from 400 yards by Holland 3. Another miss. Then to the dismay, and possibly surprise, of Juno's officers, Holland 5's torpedo found its mark.

Lieutenant Mansergh, the captain of A1, had been observing the mock attacks with interest. He was keen to put himself, his crew and his boat to the test. The chance he had been waiting for came: Captain Bacon, from the submarine tender Hazard, signalled A1 to join the attack.

The other officer on board A1, 21 year old Sub Lt John Preston Churchill, had been appointed 'For instruction in submarine boats' just ten weeks earlier on 1 January, so he was inexperienced.

Lieutenant Mansergh, was keen to prove that submarines had the potential to cause larger surface ships a headache. At this time, many senior Naval Officers were sceptical about their value.

The firing of a torpedo from a submarine was not easy, even in ideal conditions. One of the problems was that the periscope was pretty primitive and presented an inverted view in its lens. Aware that in these manoeuvres the Submarine Service was very much on trial, A1's captain who was using the periscope to line up his target would have been taking every possible care to make sure his torpedo would run straight and true.

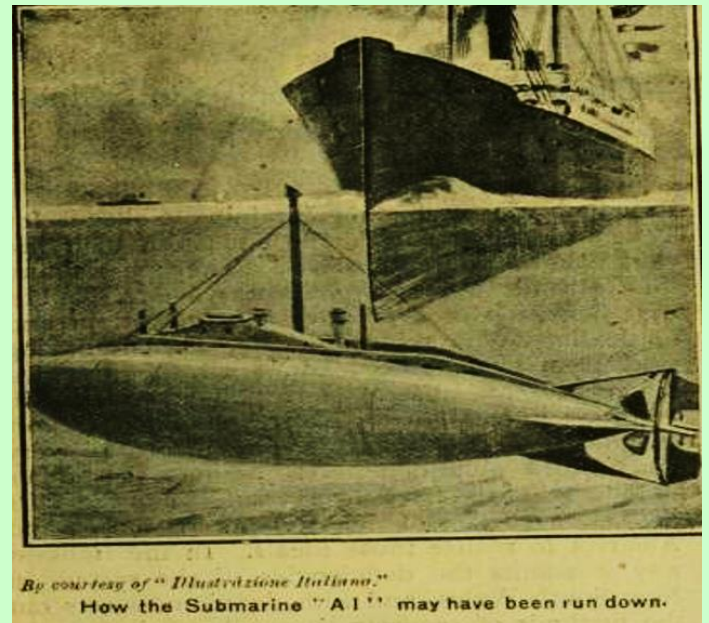
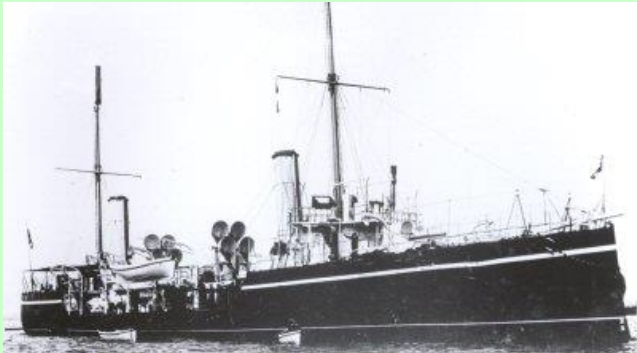
Now remember the Solent is a busy stretch of water not dedicated to use by just Royal Naval vessels.

Also near the Nab Lightship was the Castle Line steamer Berwick Castle which had sailed from Southampton en route to Hamburg. It was not aware that any submarines were operating in the area.

For the passengers of the liner the sight of a warship was probably something of a rarity so the Juno provided a certain amount of interest. On the liner's bridge the duty officers were also taking an interest in the vessels in the vicinity – the ones on the surface that is.

Intent on attacking the cruiser HMS Juno, Lt Mansergh was so engrossed that he failed to notice the Castle Line steamer Berwick Castle bearing down upon them. The Berwick Castle hit the conning tower of A1 and the submarine sank immediately in only 39ft of water. The boat flooded and the entire crew drowned.

The master of the Berwick Castle assumed that he had been struck by a practice torpedo and sent a signal to this effect before continuing the journey to Hamburg not realising that eleven men had been sent to their death.



Even when A1 failed to return to harbour there was no immediate anxiety. It was assumed that Mansergh was putting himself and his crew through some form of drill to round off the day. However, when after several hours the submarine had still not made an appearance, Captain Bacon set out from Portsmouth onboard the tender Hazard to search for the missing boat

When Hazard eventually located the position where A1 lay on the seabed there was no doubt that some kind of dreadful accident had taken place. A large expanse of white water created by air-bubbles escaping from A1 told them that the Submarine Service had suffered its first serious accident.

There was little that Hazard could do but circle the area in hope that the submariners would somehow find a means of escape. Another gunboat (Seagull) was dispatched from Portsmouth to accompany Hazard and the watch continued throughout the night with the help of their powerful searchlights.

By the following morning (Saturday 19th) no survivors or bodies had risen to the surface. Divers put on their cumbersome suits and went to examine A1. They discovered that it had been struck on the starboard side near the conning tower and that she was lying on her port side. There was no sign of life.

The A1 was not raised until the morning of Monday 18 April, exactly one month to the day of the accident.

Sub-Lieutenant Churchill's father, a Rear Admiral, arrived to see his son's body removed to Haslar Hospital in Gosport.



When the inquest opened the following day, the plain oak coffins, draped with Union Flags, lay in two rooms at Haslar Hospital. It was stated that the body of Lieutenant Mansergh had been found in the conning tower, and that of John Churchill at the foot of the conning tower.

It was the opinion of Captain Bacon that although the conning tower had suffered damage the leak was so small that it could have easily have been stopped from inside if the crew had not been stunned. It appeared that no attempt had been made to blow any of the ballast tanks.

The captain went on to say that A1's periscope had been bent to port and a ventilator broken. As a result, all subsequent Royal Navy submarines were equipped with a watertight hatch at the bottom of the conning tower.



After the funeral procession made its way along crowd filled roads, Lieutenant Mansergh and Sub-Lieutenant Churchill were buried in adjacent graves at the Royal Naval Cemetery, Haslar.

This is Sub Lt Churchill. He was the son of Rear Admiral Orford Churchill and the family home was Moray House in Monckton Road, so close to the cemetery that from the upstairs the memorials could probably be seen.



Sadly, the story of this postcard and a connection with Haslar R N Cemetery does not end with the burial of Lt Mansergh and Sub Lt Churchill.

You may remember that the postcard had been written by Able Seaman Sleet from the RN Barracks in Portsmouth to a friend in Richmond. Being curious about the sender I discovered that he was in fact Frederick Herbert Sleet.

His RN record tells us that he was born on 1 Feb 1883 in Kingston and that at the time of his enlistment he was working as a houseboy. We know he signed on for 12 years on 1 Feb 1901. We also know he had brown hair and eyes and a fresh complexion. He had several tattoos and scars.

He served on many ships, both shore establishments and sea going vessels, including 3 years based in New South Wales on the cruiser HMS Royal Arthur. His character was VG throughout.

On 11 June 1912 he married Ada Hurst in Wandsworth. In 1913 he passed his Leading Boatman assessment. In March 1914 he was posted to Port Patrick in Scotland where he and Ada set up home. A son Ernest Leslie was born on 16 August 1914.

In March 1915 Frederick joined HMS Dolphin which had been the home of the Royal Navy Submarine Service since 1904 and was the home base of the fated A1. He was there as a leading telegraphist and presumably was undergoing submarine training.



Less than three weeks later on the 12 April, Frederick went missing. He was on the middle watch from midnight to 4am but his relief overslept and didn't wake up until 6am. Frederick was nowhere to be found and his disappearance was reported. On 26 May his body was found in Haslar Creek. The inquest heard that a rope attached to a metal pole weighing $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt was found to be tied around his body. The verdict was death by drowning.

Wireless Operator's Death.

Sir Thomas Bramson, J.P., the Portsmouth Coroner, held an inquest on Friday on the body of Frederick Henry Sleet, a Naval wireless telegraphist, whose body was found in Haslar Creek, Portsmouth Harbour, on Tuesday. The deceased was missed on April 12th, and nothing more was seen of him. So far as could be ascertained he was not in any trouble.—William Sherratt, a wireless operator, should have relieved the deceased from duty at four o'clock in the morning of April 12th. He, however, overslept himself, and did not wake up until six o'clock. The deceased could not then be found. Around the body, which was in a very decomposed state, was a rope, to which was attached an iron pipe weighing three-quarters of a hundred-weight.—Staff-surgeon Keir said all the appearances at the post-mortem examination pointed to death was due from drowning. A verdict of "Suicide by drowning" was returned. Mr. Dyke (Messrs. G. H. King and Frankeiss) watched the case on behalf of the Admiralty.

He was buried in the Royal Naval Cemetery, Haslar, a stone's throw from the A1 memorial and Sub Lt Churchill's grave... and of course, my father.

His wife Ada and son returned to England – she was awarded a pension for the duration of the war. They settled in Clare. Ernest (known as Leslie) became a teacher and married Josephine Titlow. Ada died in 1969. Her son died in 1996 and was buried in Clare.



HMS Hazard, who led the search for the A1 was a Dryad-class torpedo gunboat of the Royal Navy. She was launched in 1894 and was converted into the world's first submarine depot ship in 1901. She collided with the submarine A3 on 2 February 1912, killing 14 men.

A Tribute To Submariners

I have often looked for an opportunity of paying tribute to our submariners. There is no branch of His Majesty's Forces which in this war has suffered the same proportion of total loss as our submarine service.

It is the most dangerous of all services.

That is perhaps the reason why the First Lord tells me that the entry into it is keenly sought by Officers and Men.

I feel sure the House would wish to testify its gratitude and admiration to our Submariners for their Skill - Courage and Devotion which has proved of inestimable value to the sustenance of our country.

Winston Churchill

CHARMIAN THOMPSON

2025 Programme of Meetings & Events

Usually, 2nd Thurs of the month, **unless stated otherwise**, start 7.30 pm,

Old Independent Church Hall (**CB9 9EF**), members £1 visitors £2.50 inc. tea/coffee

NB members £2, visitors £3 from September 2024.

13 Mar 2025	Transportation and Rural Unrest	Charmian Thompson
10 Apr 2025	It happened here in Suffolk	Pip Wright
8 May 2025	AGM By George what style	Francis Saltmarsh
12 June 2025	The Mayflower	Cathy Shelbourne
July 2025	<i>Visit (TBC)</i>	<i>Must Book</i>
11 Sept 2025	History of Art	Edel Pinnock
9 Oct 2025	Borley Rectory the most haunted house in England	Bryan Thurlow
13 Nov 2025	CWGC	Mac Macdonald
11 Dec 2025	Christmas Quiz A light-hearted social evening with refreshments	Ourselves

Wednesday afternoons, help with your Research at Haverhill Library 2 - 4pm

Guided use of the Internet, especially for newcomers or those 'stuck'

telephone 01440 848095 to book your place