

## THE WAKERING GUN

M.F. CHRISTOPHERS

At the edge of Great Wakering common there stood for many years a 1st World War German field gun. Real "Blaremites", born before about 1935, will recall the rusting relic standing silent guard at the junction of Common Road and the track to Mill Barn.

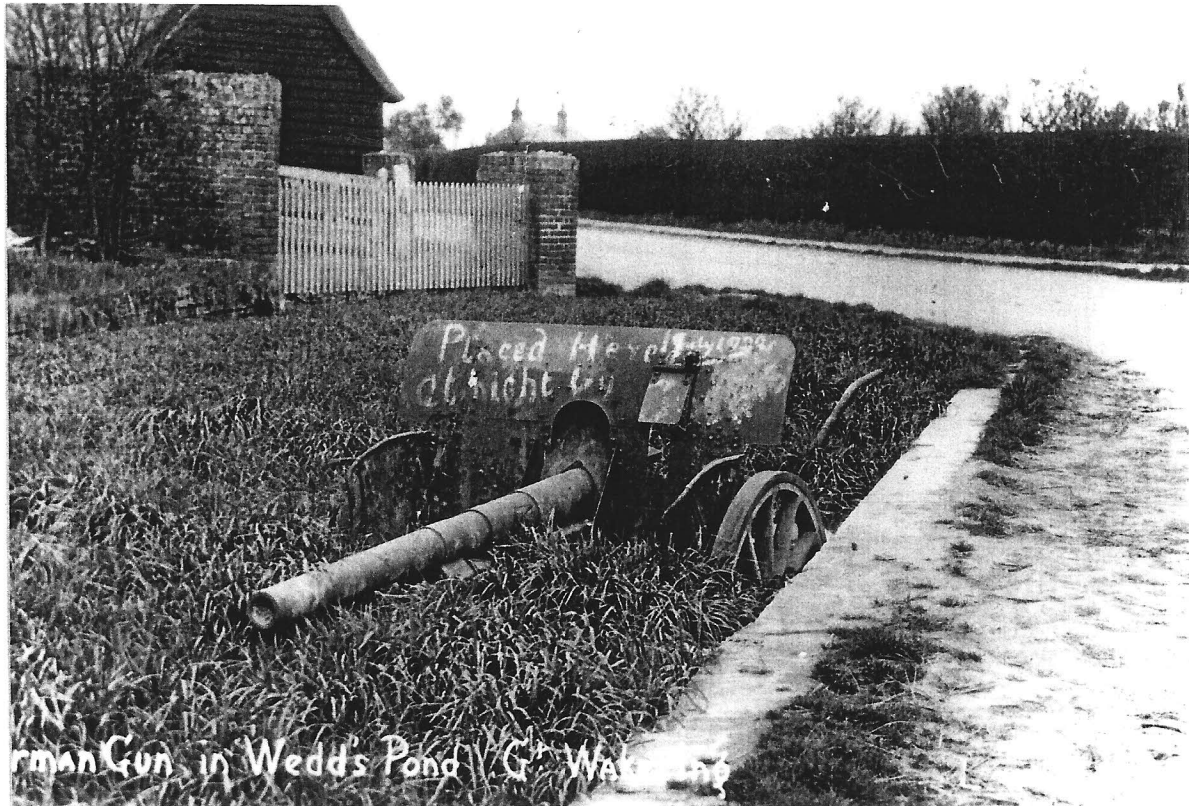
How, one might ask, did a German field gun come to be in this quiet Essex backwater?

The "Southend Standard" of July 29th 1920 carried the following report:-

### Wakering's Reception of German Gun.

A German gun applied for some months ago by Great Wakering Parish Council, arrived on Saturday morning and has found a temporary resting place in the pond adjoining the residence of Mr E A Wedd J.P. (WHITEHALL, now demolished). Delivered at about 11 o'clock by the military authorities the trophy was placed in the High Street on the ground where the Memorial Recreation Hall is just approaching completion. Some twelve hours after, parishioners in that part of the street (which is but a few hundred feet from the church) were roused by the creaking and rumbling of the village gun being propelled by about a score of residents, not entirely male, to the accompaniment of much laughter. The marauders nocturnal energies were only equal to placing the gun at the side of the pond, where it was left until the following morning. By the afternoon, however, a further combined effort resulted in its establishment in the desired spot where it can now be seen with mud reaching above the axles. The authorities seem disposed to let it remain there for the present. "In any case", said the village constable, "four or five horses will be needed to drag it out." Asked by our representative as to why it was removed, a man who ought to know replied "Just for a bit of devilment." Others state that the gun is not wanted, that nothing German is wanted in Wakering. Who was responsible?

No one will say. Perhaps the blame should be laid at the door of Wakering's neighbours across the Crouch, who set the example by meting out similar treatment to a gun allocated to Burnham. One reason for criticism is that the wheels of Wakering's gun are not a pair, a contributory factor, no doubt, to the noise occasioned by its removal."



GUN IN POND — LEGEND ON GUN — "PLACED HERE AT NIGHT JULY 1920."

Well, well, what goings-on!!

What is the story behind this story? The following, based on extracts from the Great Wakering Parish Council Minute Books and recollections of some of the older local residents, is a light-hearted attempt to tell the strange, and at the time, controversial story of the Wakering Gun.

The saga of the gun began on 16 January 1920 when the Great Wakering Parish Council, under the heading of "War Trophies",

resolved:

"that a letter be addressed to the War Office asking that a German Field Gun may be placed in Great Wakering".

Some might consider this to be a somewhat strange request - and what prompted it? Perhaps the Council felt that the village should have a small share of the war booty!

The letter evoked no immediate response from the War Office, but the Council worthies stuck to their guns (no pun intended) and decided on 16th April 1920:

" - to again write to the War Office asking that a German Field Gun may be presented to the parish."

The War Office acceded to this second request and the hardware was duly delivered to Great Wakering on the morning of Saturday July 24th, 1920. It was parked close to the nearly completed Village or Memorial Hall where, allegedly, it was intended to be positioned as a permanent frontal display.

The gun did not remain there very long - in fact for no more than twelve hours.

The Parish Council had apparently failed to interpret correctly the local feelings, for many of the parishioners objected to having a German gun in the village - a sentiment particularly echoed by village men who had recently returned from the 1914-18 war and probably had seen or heard enough of German guns to last them a lifetime.

So - ! on that evening of the gun's arrival, after pub closing time, some of the locals, prominent amongst whom, it was said, were public bar customers from the 'Anchor', removed the

gun from its parking place.

It was trundled eastward along the High Street towards the Church. One can imagine the group of shadowy figures in the early darkness of that summer evening (public street lighting had not yet arrived in Great Wakering), grunting, sweating and cursing as they moved the offending "trophy".

At the Church they veered left into Common Road. However, the slight downward slope, plus possibly the effects of the evening's drink, proved a little too much for our stalwart band and, it is said, the gun "got away with 'em". Imagine if you can this unlikely scene of a German Field Gun careering out of control down Common Road!

Local talk suggests that the gun ended up that evening in the duck pond (then known as Wedd's Pond), although the Southend Standard reported a slightly different version, but certainly that weekend the unwanted gun did find a watery parking place in the village pond.

Having created this controversial situation, the Parish Council now seems to have kept its head down, for the gun is not mentioned again in the Council Minutes for 18 months. At the Parish Council meeting on October 18th, 1921 it was resolved:

"that the Clerk ask the Commandant at Shoeburyness to undertake the removal of the gun from the pond by the Church. The parishioners are hostile to this gun being placed in Wakering and the Council will be glad of the assistance of the military authorities in having it removed."

Now this might seem to be a reasonable suggestion. The Parish Council appears to have awoken to the local feeling regarding the gun and disposal of the offending "trophy" would seem to be an acceptable course of action.

However! - the Council Minutes dated November 18th, 1921 record that the "Officer Commanding Troops, Shoeburyness wrote to the effect that he would not undertake the removal of this gun."

Presumably, he thought "You wanted the gun - you got the gun - now you keep it!"

It seems that the gun remained in the pond for two years or so, eventually being removed and placed at the edge of the Common, providing an unusual play facility for the local children.

Some semblance of calm then seems to have returned to the village, for more than five years pass before the Council Minutes record any further mention of that gun:

March 19th, 1927 " - letter from the Adjutant Shoeburyness, asking if the Council wished to retain the gun, as, if it was not required he would have it removed to Shoeburyness."

It was decided to adjourn the matter to the next meeting and in the meantime send a copy of the letter to the Ratepayers Association "ask for their observations thereon".

So, suddenly the military authorities offer to take the gun away and the Parish Council didn't know what to do so they seemed to ask anyone who would listen.

In the Council Minutes of 22nd April, 1927 it is stated that:

" - the question of a suitable site being found for the gun was being brought before the British Legion."

Not surprisingly, no reply from the British Legion is recorded.

The Ratepayers Association, however, did respond - in a somewhat surprising way.

Council Minutes, dated 24th June, 1927 record this:

"Gun on Common

Read letter from the Ratepayers Association that they recommend the Council retain possession of the old gun on the Common and take steps for the same to be placed near the Village Hall. The letter further stated that members of the Association have volunteered to prepare a bed upon which the gun may rest. - It was resolved to ask the Secretary of the Public Hall for permission to place the gun in front of that property."

Good heavens! volunteers indeed!! It is interesting to note that although the gun had only been in the village for seven years, it is being referred to as "old". Familiarity breeding contempt perhaps?

At the July 1927 Council Meeting it was minuted:

"that the (Hall) Management Committee agree to the proposal to place this gun in front of the hall - and it was carried that the Council have the gun removed and placed on the above mentioned site. A Committee consisting of the whole Council was formed in connection with this, with powers to act."

Great! A decision! Action at last! Actually, nothing happened immediately, but of course these things do take time. Three months or so passed and at the Council meeting on November 4th, 1927 another Committee of three members.

"was appointed with power to act to deal with the removal of this gun to the new site."

Another Committee? What happened to the other one? Indeed what became of this second Committee, because it seems no one ever actually acted!

No further mention of the gun appears in the Great Wakering Parish Council Minutes. No plinth was ever prepared and the gun remained on the edge of the Common, slowly rusting and burying itself into the ground.

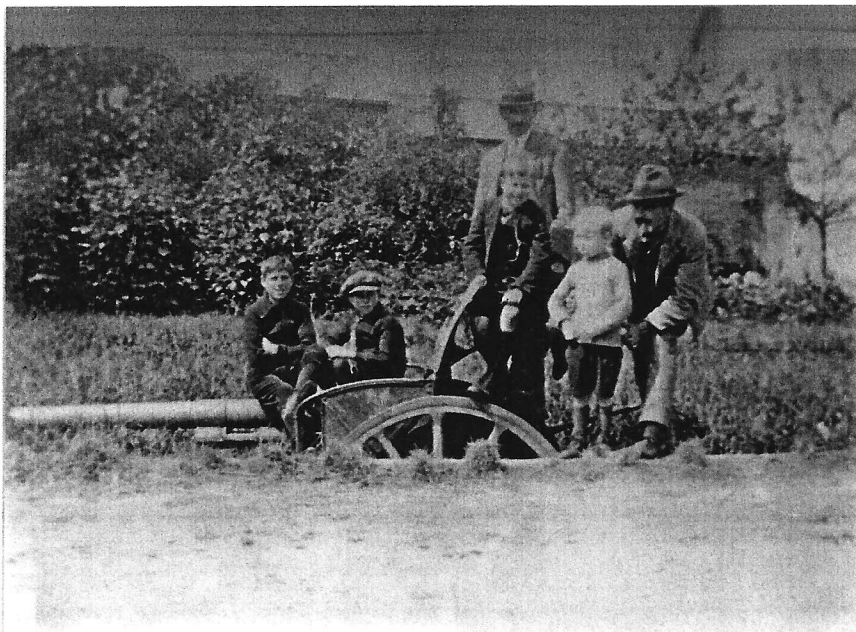
It was eventually removed by the authorities during the 2nd World War, along with iron garden railings etc and reclaimed for the war effort.

It is possible, perhaps, that that gun, the cause of so much local discontent, in some other shape or form was finally

returned to whence it came - a fitting end perhaps, to the saga of the Wakering Gun.

REFERENCES:

1. SOUTHEND STANDARD, 29.7.1920.
2. GREAT WAKERING PARISH COUNCIL MINUTE BOOKS. (E.R.O. REF: D/P3650/30).



JACK      JOHN      ROBERT      ALF  
DEEKS    WHALE      HILLS      BRIDGE  
CYRIL    ALF      BRIGHT    BURLES