

INVASION !

England had been in danger of invasion twice in recent history before the Great War.

This was by the Spanish Armada in 1588 and again during the Napoleonic Wars in 1805. This was in addition to three failed attempts by the French between 1744 and 1783.

In all these instances England had neither a standing home army sufficient to repel invaders or fortifications strong enough to protect major cities and ports. It was our “wooden walls” ie the navy which provided the security needed.

Preparations were made during the Napoleonic era in case the enemy did land - including detailed mapping of likely areas, a network of signal beacons and semaphore stations and also primitive coastal defences in vulnerable areas.

It was thought that any invasion would be in the Kent and East Sussex areas and the strategy agreed was to try and slow the enemy down until they reached a fortified defensive perimeter round London.

Norfolk was not considered to be an initial target except as a diversionary tactic. If this happened then the plan was to march troops up from Colchester to repel any invaders.

1914

In 1914 invasion was considered again to be a real possibility however this time it was the Norfolk coast that was thought to be the likely target as most of the French ports facing England were inaccessible due to the stalemate on the Western Front.

Troops were therefore rushed to the Norfolk area and the cyclists of the 2/6th battalion of the Norfolk Regiment patrolled the area. Over time more permanent defences such as “pill boxes” were built and there was also an armoured train running from North Walsham.

It was understood however that such a large area was difficult to defend and that the civilian population would need to be evacuated in the event of an invasion.

Plans at national level remained secret and would only be disclosed if the invasion happened however they included the decision to defend London from an invasion through Norfolk by setting up the ‘Chelmsford Line’ of defences - a combination of natural and railway line defences.

Norfolk and Suffolk populations would be expected to retreat at least 10 miles from the coast assisted by troops, militia and local volunteers. To this effect evacuation instructions were issued at County level by the Chief Constable and Lord Lieutenant and filtered down to districts, towns and parishes.

Neatishead

To assisting the process two individuals were appointed for each locality - one to act as an Observer to report any suspicious activity or actual invasion - the other to help oversee the evacuation process. For the Neatishead area the Observer was W.J. Neave and the Special Constable W. Ling.

Constable Ling's family discovered the Evacuation instructions (*see next page*) and map (*see photo below*) at the bottom of a drawer! His grandson Tony Ling kindly allowed us to make copies for our records.

These documents and others at the Norfolk Record Office are an important part of our village heritage just as the pill boxes still visible today are examples of the physical heritage here in Norfolk.



X1 District Neatishead Lower Street – Evacuation Map

EVACUATION INSTRUCTIONS + a transcript

Neatishead Lower Street – No 11 District

On receipt of white card marked "Act"

Strap on badges and take identification card in pocket.

Warn all cottagers to be ready to move on 2nd

Summons.

Warn farmers to have horses at home or near house.

Be ready to break all wheels of vehicles not to be taken away.

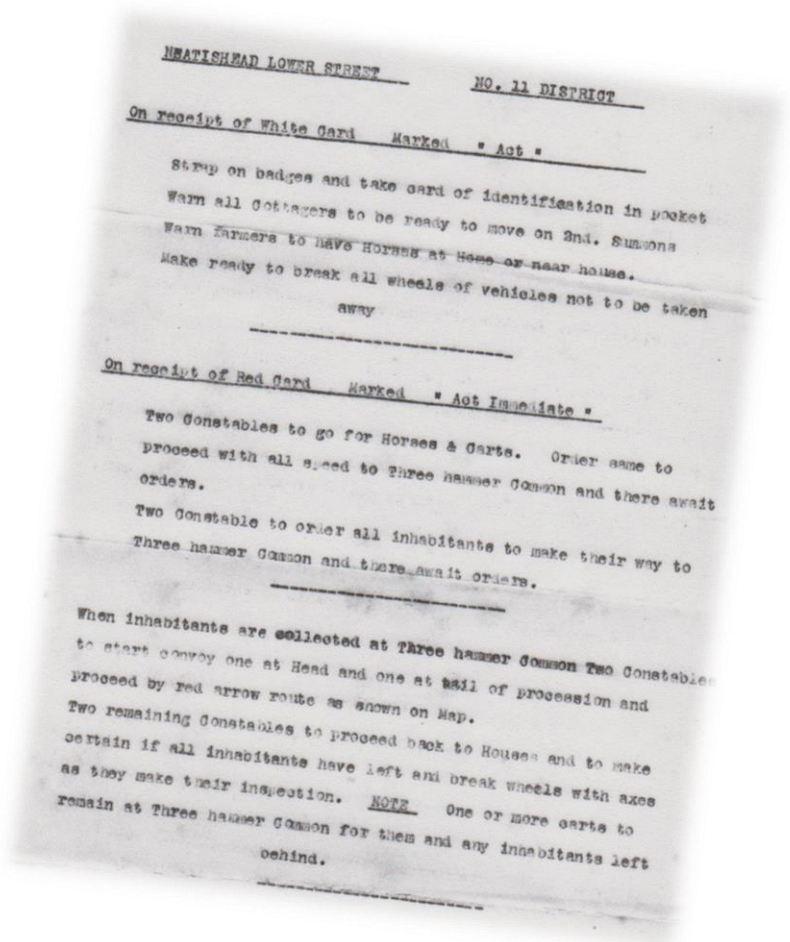
On receipt of red card marked "Act Immediate"

Two Constables to go for horses and carts. Order same to proceed with all speed to Three Hammer Common and there await orders.

Two Constables to order all inhabitants to make their way to Three Hammer Common and there await orders.

When inhabitants are collected at Three Hammer Common two Constables to start convoy one at head and one at tail of procession and proceed by red arrow route as show on map.

Two remaining Constables to proceed back to houses and to make certain that all inhabitants have left and break wheels with axes as they make their inspection. NOTE One or more carts to remain at Three Hammer Common for them and any inhabitants left behind. "



We do not know whether it ever had to be put to the test!

Gareth Pritchard, NIBCHG, August 2015

With thanks to Mr Tony Ling for the loan of these artefacts.