



War came to Holt early in August 1914 with the arrival of soldiers hastily posted to the Norfolk coast to counter the possibility of invasion in particular around Weybourne where there was deep water right up to the shingle beach. As the old local rhyme had it:

*He who would old England win
Must at Weybourne Hope begin*

Holt became almost a garrison town.



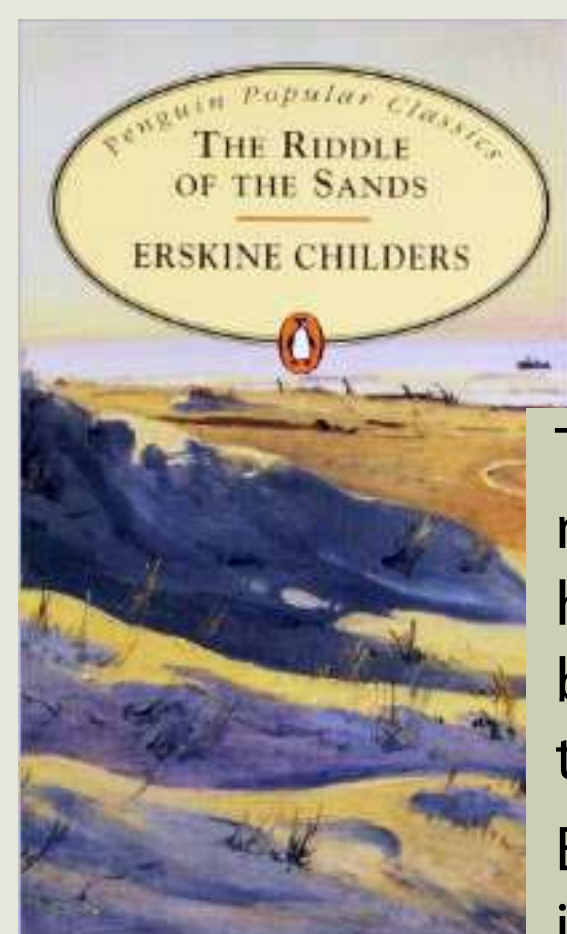
ZEPPELIN RAID

On the night of 19th January 1915 two German Zeppelins crossed the North Sea. The intended target was the Humber but bad weather and uncertain navigation brought them over the Norfolk coast.

Zeppelin L4 dropped the first two bombs ever to fall on British soil on Sheringham - but only one exploded. The airship then followed a meandering path westwards passing over Holt where the young Kemys Bagnall-Oakeley (Dick's brother) was startled witless when the hitherto unseen Zeppelin started its engines directly over his head.

Several bombs fell around a farmhouse at Bayfield Brecks, killing one or two sheep and a turkey. The following day, boys from Gresham's Junior School visited the site to collect bomb fragments.

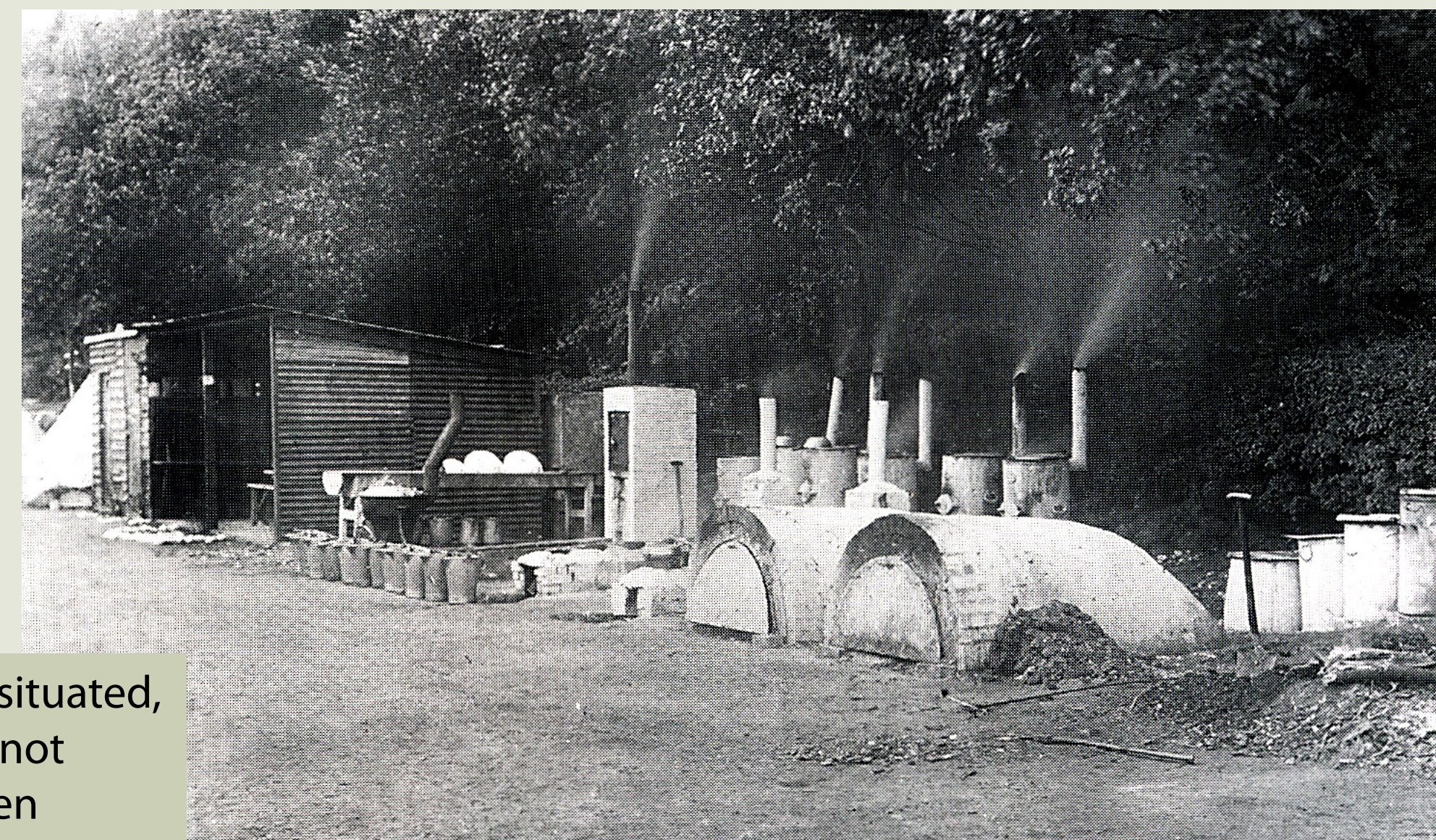
L4 continued west to King's Lynn where its bombs killed two civilians, while its sister ship, L3, killed two more in Great Yarmouth than night.



The danger of invasion on the north Norfolk coast had been highlighted early in the century by Erskine Childers in his spy thriller *The Riddle of the Sands*. Erskine Childers was executed in 1922 at which time his son also called Erskine, and later to become President of Ireland, was a pupil at Gresham's School.



Exactly where this camp was situated, with its ovens and buglers, is not known but may well have been Gresham's School playing fields.



"Soldiers flooded into Holt and those who had room had to have them. I think our three were Wlsh, as they called themselves "Taffy". After one week they went to the front and later my mother was crying. She said all those boys had been killed."

Edith Pontin. *Holt: An Illustrated History Vol 1*



A Battalion of the Sussex Regiment arrived by a fleet of taxis and soon tented camps appeared in fields and open spaces near the town where training took place. Reservists and Yeomanry followed.

The Holt Lowes heathland was put out of bounds to civilians so that grenade practice and shooting-ranges could be established.

Holt Camp.

THERE'S an isolated, desolated spot I'd like to mention, Where all you hear is "Stand at Ease," "Slope Arms," "Quick March," "Attention," It's miles away from anywhere, by Gad, it is a rum'un, A chap lived there for fifty years and never saw a woman. There's only two lamps in the place, so tell it to your mother, The postman carries one, and the policeman has the other, And if you want a jolly night, and do not care a jot, You take a ride upon the car, the car they haven't got. There are lots of little huts, all dotted here and there, For those who have to live inside, I've offered many a prayer, Inside the huts, there's RATS as big as any Nanny Goat, Last night a soldier saw One Fitting on his Overcoat. For Breakfast every morning, just like Old Mother Hubbard, You Double round the bloomin' Hut and jump up at the cupboard Sometimes you get bacon, and sometimes "lively" cheese, That forms Platoon upon your plate, Orders Arms and Stands at Ease. It's sludge up to the eyebrows, you get it in your ears, But into it you've got to go without a sign of fear, And when you've had a bath of sludge, you just set to and groom, And get cleaned up for next Parade, or else it's "Orderly Room." Week in, week out, from morn till night, with full Pack and a rifle, Like Jack and Jill, you climb the hills, of course that's just a trifle, "Slope Arms," "Fix Bayonets," then "Present" they fairly put you through it. And as you stagger to your hut, the Sergeant shouts "Jump to it," There's another kind of drill, especially invented for the Army, I think they call it Swedish, and it nearly drives you barmy; This blinking drill it does you good, it makes your bones so tender You can coil yourself up like a snake and crawl beneath the fender With tunics, boots and putties off, you quickly get the habit, You gallop up and down the hills just like a blooming rabbit, "Heads Backward Bend," "Arms Upward Stretch," "Heels Raise," then "Ranks Change Places," And later on they make you put your kneecaps where your face is. Now when this War is over and we've captured Kaiser Billy, To shoot him would be merciful and absolutely silly, Just send him down to HOLT, among the rats and clay, And I'll bet it won't be long before he droops and fades away BUT WE'RE STILL "MERRY AND BRIGHT."

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Just "a line" from HOLT.

Humorous postcards were produced to help the troops put on a brave face and reassure the folks back home.



DON'T WORRY—I'm quite Comfortable at HOLT CAMP.



"We had a large attic slept in by fourteen soldiers at the outbreak of the war. Every night about ten o'clock you heard all this marching up the stairs. My mother was paid fourteen shillings for that; she thought it was riches. I don't think they stayed very long, perhaps a month, and then they were sent abroad, you see."

Eva Lord. *Holt: An Illustrated History Vol 1*

Afterwards

Peace Celebrations July 19th 1919

Dallas Wynne Willson, housemaster of the Junior House at Gresham's School gave an impassioned speech:

"For five years the Nation - the World - has been in the throes of fever and delirium. Now it is convalescent and, like all convalescents is somewhat fractious and peevish. But nurses tell us that such symptoms are signs of returning health. Still, we shall not be wholly recovered till these symptoms disappear. Let none of us throw away the patience, the brotherliness, the sanity, the unselfishness that drew the nation together till victory. Demobilise everything else but not that."



Unveiling of War Memorial 1921