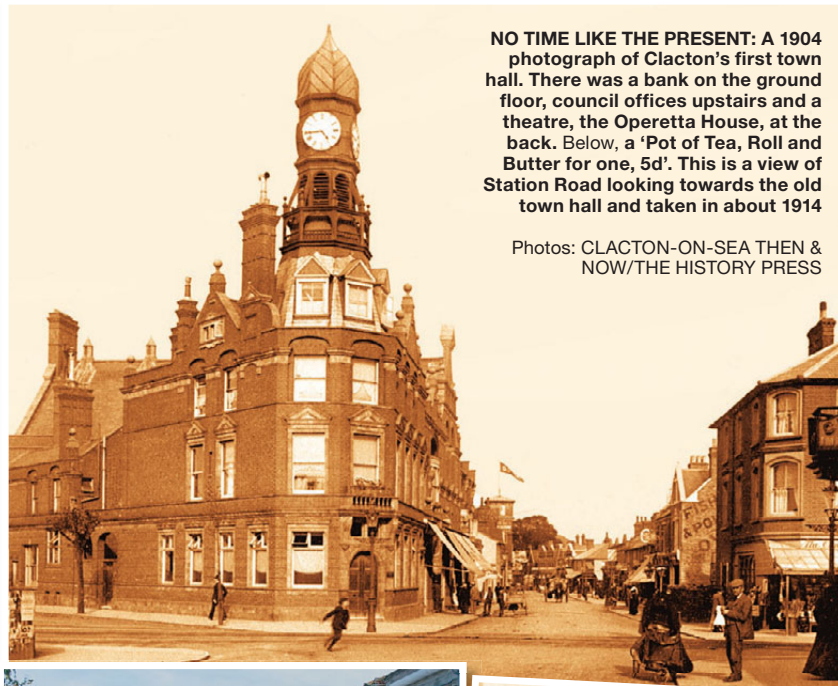


genuine labour of love



NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT: A 1904 photograph of Clacton's first town hall. There was a bank on the ground floor, council offices upstairs and a theatre, the Operetta House, at the back. Below, a 'Pot of Tea, Roll and Butter for one, 5d'. This is a view of Station Road looking towards the old town hall and taken in about 1914

Photos: CLACTON-ON-SEA THEN & NOW/THE HISTORY PRESS



CHANGE: A modern view of Pier Avenue, showing the site on the left where the Public Hall used to stand

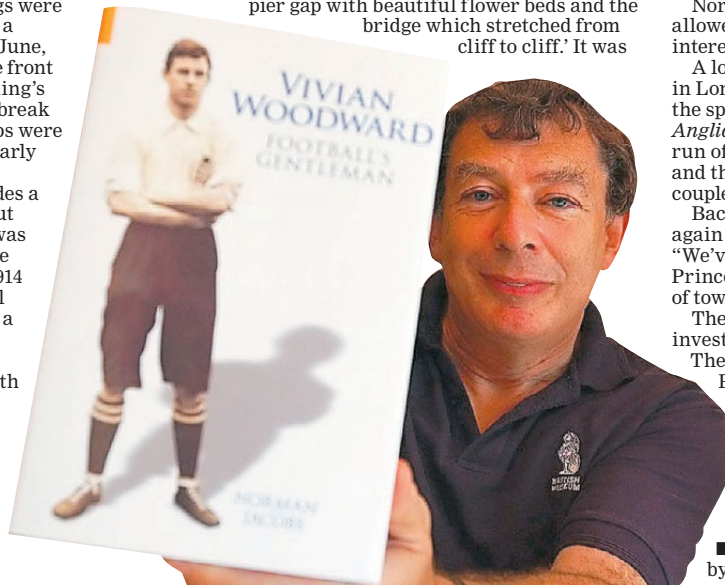
Photo: LINDA JACOBS

supermarket – and, competing with Green Shield Stamps – giving away one S&H Pink Stamp for every 6d spent, to be exchanged later for prizes. The land is now home to Peacocks.

The town's pioneers built the Public Hall in Pier Avenue in 1877. It and most of the surrounding buildings were destroyed in a fire on a Sunday afternoon in June, 1939. It dominated the front page of the next morning's *Daily Mirror*. The outbreak of war meant the shops were not rebuilt until the early 1950s.

Norman also includes a photograph from about 1890, when Pier Gap was lined by shops. "These were swept away in 1914 when Clacton Council decided to implement a 'general beautifying programme' and replaced the shops with gardens and the Venetian bridge. A

ONE I WROTE EARLIER: Norman Jacobs in 2005 with his book about amateur footballer Vivian Woodward



grand ceremony was laid on in 1914 to declare the Venetian bridge officially open. One of the specially invited guests, the Mayor of West Ham, congratulated Clacton Council for carrying out the work by direct labour and for 'replacing the winkle and eelie shops previously down either side of the pier gap with beautiful flower beds and the bridge which stretched from cliff to cliff.' It was

the last major work carried out in Clacton before the First World War and contributed to Clacton's status as one of the country's leading seaside resorts in the 1920s and '30s, as the bridge was to become – and still is – one of Clacton's major landmarks."

By the late 1930s the resort was welcoming more than 100,000 visitors a week, had the largest pier in the country, Butlin's camp, half a dozen cinemas and 10 theatres. Sadly, in common with most British seaside, the 1960s brought a decline, as many newly-affluent folk widened their horizons and looked to holiday abroad.

Butlin's closed in 1983. Coupled with a nationwide recession, it saw local unemployment rise frighteningly.

The story of the town is addictive for a curious soul like Norman. He was always interested in history, though after school went to teacher-training college in Norwich. "I did two teaching practices and thought 'I can't stand this!'" he admits.

"History was always my great passion. I saw an advert in the paper for The British Museum. I wrote on spec, really, because the advert was for gallery warders, which I didn't want to do. But I asked them what else they had going and got a job, and I was there for 37 years."

Norman joined in 1967 and was generally in administrative roles. His employment coincided with a period of great change at Great Russell Street and he was involved in some of

the key decisions and projects, such as the building of the £100m lottery-backed Great Court and the controversy about free admission.

He wrote about his time there in a 2010 book called *Behind the Colonnade* – an affectionate peek behind the scenes at some of the characters and amusing incidents that added colour over the years.

Norman had assisted first with people wanting to use the reading room, but spent most time in medieval and late antiquities – which was what he really wanted to do: helping with

exhibitions and cataloguing. He finished as senior human resources manager.

"I was also works office manager for a while, which my wife thought was a great joke, because my skills as a do-it-yourselfer...well...! Of course, I didn't actually have to do anything; I just had to tell other people what to do!"

Norman took early retirement in 2004, which allowed him to devote more time to his other interests, including writing.

A long-time speedway fan from his childhood in London, he's written about a dozen books on the sport's history. One, *Speedway in East Anglia*, is his best-selling title. Its initial print run of 1,200 copies sold out within two weeks and the book was reprinted three times over a couple of months.

Back to Clacton: he believes its fortunes are again on the rise after the nadir of the 1980s. "We've still got the West Cliff Theatre and the Princes Theatre; we've still got a cinema. A lot of towns our size don't have anything."

There are encouraging signs, such as the investment in, and work done on, the pier and The Pavilion by the Ball family and Billy Peake respectively.

"It's a seaside town and we live or die by that, really. There are more people coming to the seaside for days and weekends, and generally holidays have picked up, now that folk aren't going abroad so much. Now, if the weather could stay reasonable for the summer...!"

■ *Clacton-on-Sea Then & Now* is published by The History Press at £12.99

WRITING WRONGS

with EADT editor **TERRY HUNT**

A good week for Murphy's Law

I WILL begin with a warning about bad language in the following column. I have to say, it's very mild, compared to what you might hear on the street or on TV, but nonetheless I feel I have to warn you...

You may recall that last week I discussed Murphy's Law - in other words, what can go wrong will go wrong. I said that the same meaning could be applied to (here goes) Sod's Law. Reader Terry Mott has pulled me up sharply on this. He agrees with my definition of Murphy's Law, but says that Sod's Law actually means when something goes wrong, it has the worst outcome.

For example, says Mr Mott, Murphy's Law says that, sooner or later, you will drop your breakfast toast on the floor. According to him, Sod's Law says that, when this happens, it will inevitably land butter side down. One good definition of Sod's Law which I found was "being mocked by fate." So, when you next drop your toast, and it leaves a great butter and marmalade mess on your best carpet, regard it as being mocked by fate!

The Writing Wrongs postbag has been positively bulging this week, which I'm afraid means we haven't had the best few days when it comes to errors. Let's start with a letter from Valerie Upson, who drew my attention to a sub-heading in Tuesday's paper: "No respite for battered Briton." As Valerie quite correctly pointed out: "I think the bad weather affected most of the country, not just one person!"

I also heard from Amanda Arrowsmith, former boss of Suffolk's libraries, who returned me to the editor's dreaded subject of "doubles" - identical, or very similar, stories appearing in the same edition of the paper. Amanda said: "Imagine my amusement when today (Tuesday) we heard about Sudbury's mayor encouraging volunteers on both page 11 and page 19..."

Anne Carter also got in touch, about us calling the Woolpit Festival the "Woopit" Festival. She said: "As a relative newcomer to the area, I seek enlightenment as to the nature of a Woopit; could it be where people make hay while the sun shines?" Anne then added, in forgiving fashion, I hope: "Truly, there's no such thing as bad publicity."

And there's more... Mrs Eddie Prior spotted a headline in last Saturday's art section, which read: "Taking a premiere peak, etc." she said: "I assume this should read peek?! I was a proof reader many years ago and am used to spotting things that might pass other readers by - but this couldn't have escaped anyone's notice!"

Finally (phew) a mistake which, I have to say, opened a few eyes here. Diana Hunt contacted me to say that we had misspelled "minuscule" as "miniscule." Fairly, she says it's a common mistake. After conducting a straw poll in the newsroom, I think she's right. They know now, however. Have a good week - I'm hoping for a better one!



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