Groomsport in World War 2

An Exhibition to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

Held in the Parish Halls, Groomsport on 10th and 11th May 2025.

Contents:

Those who died in World War 2 and are commemorated on the War Memorial.

Those who served in World War 2

The Royal Engineers who were based in Groomsport House from 1940 to 1943.

US Army photographers who were billeted in Groomsport House in 1944.

Photographs of Groomsport in 1944 taken by the US soldiers.

A photograph taken in Groomsport on V E Day, 1945

Those who served and died in World War 2



Eight men are commemorated on the War Memorial in Groomsport

Robert Henry Cutler

Robert was born in Belfast and his family spent the summer months in Groomsport. He was a major in the King's African Rifles in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia).

After being demobilised in 1944, he was appointed Director of Training in the demobilisation scheme of Tanganyika (now Tanzania).

He died in an RAF aeroplane crash at Eastleigh Aerodrome, Nairobi, Kenya on 12 July 1945. At the time of Robert's death his parents lived in Groomsport.

Robert Heyburn Duff



Robert was born in 1918 at Ballymacormick, Bangor. During the Second World War Leading Stoker Duff served with the Royal Navy aboard HMS *Meteor,* a Marne-class Destroyer.

He died of tuberculosis in Ards Hospital on 20 August 1946 and he was buried in Bangor Cemetery, Newtownards Road, Bangor where there is a Commonwealth War Graves headstone.

George Victor Lowry

George was born on 21 August 1919 in Groomsport. (His mother, Violet, was a Waterson.)

Before joining the Royal Navy, around 1937, George Lowry was employed by Messrs Ellis and Company in Main Street, Bangor.

Able Seaman Lowry was aged 23 when he was killed on 2 March 1944 while serving on the HMS *Stronghold*. The *Stronghold* was travelling from Java to Australia when it was attacked and sunk.

Richard Mailey

Richard was educated at Groomsport Public Elementary School and, before joining up in June 1941, he worked in the Bangor Laundry.

He joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and was promoted to sergeant.

He was one of seven crew of a Short Stirling aircraft which took off from RAF Chedburgh in Suffolk on 4 July 1943 and was lost without trace.

Richard Mailey was aged 20 when he died.

William Robert Patterson

He was born on 30 January 1910 at 75 Clifton Road, Bangor. During the Second World War William Robert Patterson served with the Royal Navy aboard HMS *Jersey*.

In 1939 he was awarded the OBE (Military Division) for his actions dealing with a fire that resulted from a torpedo attack.

He was Lieutenant Commander when, on 2 May 1941, the HMS *Jersey* sank after striking a mine off Valletta, Malta. He was aged 31.

Robert Patrick (Robin) Perceval-Maxwell



Robin was born on 9th December 1922. He was the eldest son of Major John Robert (Jock) Perceval-Maxwell, who, in 1932, inherited the Perceval-Maxwell estates.

A captain in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, Robin Perceval-Maxwell was aged 20 when he was killed in action on 5th December 1943 at Mount Camino during the Allied advance in Italy and he is buried in Cassino War Cemetery, Italy.

Alexander Arthur Fenwick Towry Steavenson



Towry was born in India in 1885. On two occasions, before and during the First World War, he served in the Royal Irish Rifles and attained the rank of Captain.

In1940 he was lived at 15 Ballymaconnell Road, Bangor.

In 1941 he was a Flying Officer in the RAF Volunteer Reserve serving with Flight Training Command, at Ronaldsway Airport, Isle of Man. He died of pneumonia in hospital in Douglas on 31 August 1941, aged 55 and was buried at Maughold Church.

Arthur Hill Coates Waterson



Arthur was born on 13 May 1903 in Groomsport. He joined the Ulster Steamship Company (Headline Shipping Company) and obtained his Master Mariner ticket at the age of 21.

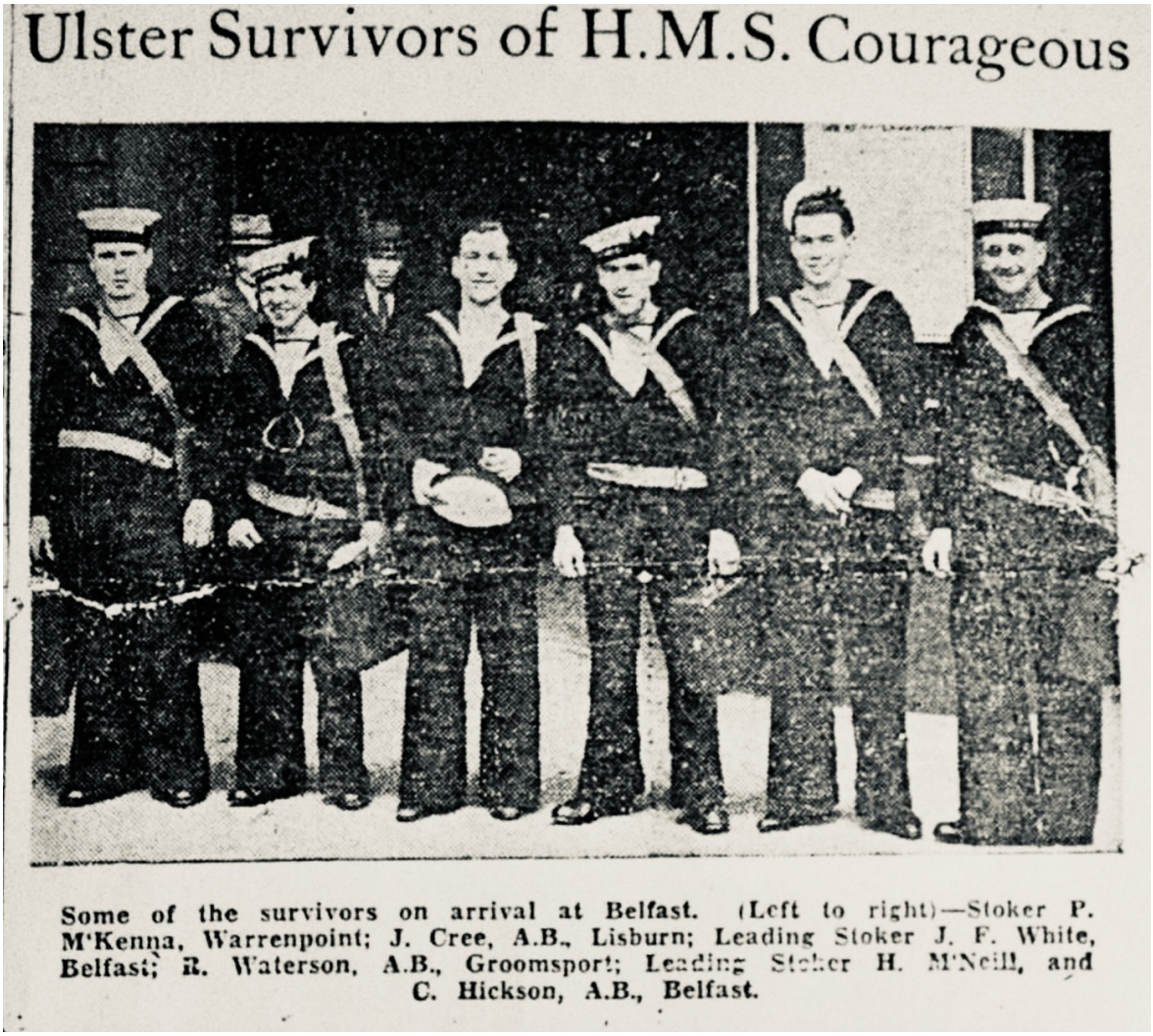
During World War 2 he served with the Merchant Navy and was reported to have played a gallant part in the Dunkirk evacuation.

In 1941 he was captain of SS *Atheltemplar*, a molasses tanker, when it was attacked by German bomber aircraft off Aberdeenshire on 1 March 1941. Captain Arthur Waterson, who was aged 37, was among those who were killed.

Those who served in World War 2

We have information about some of the people with Groomsport connections who served in World War 2.

Able Seaman Robert Waterson



Ulster Survivors of H.M.S. Courageous

Some of the survivors on arrival at Belfast. (Left to right)—Stoker P. M'Kenna, Warrenpoint; J. Cree, A.B., Lisburn; Leading Stoker J. F. White, Belfast; R. Waterson, A.B., Groomsport; Leading Stoker H. M'Neill, and C. Hickson, A.B., Belfast.

Robert Waterson (1913-1999), third from the right, served on the aircraft carrier HMS *Courageous.* It sank after being torpedoed by a German U-boat, off the south-west coast of Ireland, on 17th September 1939. 519 lives were lost.

Able Seaman Sam McDowell



Able Seaman Sam McDowell, a member of a Groomsport seafaring family, served in the merchant navy in WW2 and afterwards.

In 1953 he served on SS *Gothic* which took the young Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip on a Royal Tour of Australia and New Zealand.

Rev Launcelot MacManaway RN

Rev MacManaway, a Church of Ireland minister, served as a chaplain in the Royal Navy from 1939 to 1967.

While he was serving in World War II, his wife, Mollie (pictured) lived on The Hill with her two young daughters, one of whom, Maureen, later married Rev Dr David Irwin.





Rev MacManaway was serving in Saigon when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945. As was the custom, one of the surrendering officers gave him his sword. This now in the possession of his daughter, Maureen.

The photoraph shows Rev MacManaway's Chaplain's cap badge, uniform buttons and the epaulettes that he wore when he was appointed Chaplain to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Thomas John Anthony (Jack) Kingan



Jack Kingan, of Glenganagh, was born in 1923.

He served as a Lieutenant in the Irish Guards. On 11 August 1944, when the 3rd Battalion, Irish Guards attacked the German lines at Sourdeval, Normandy, Jack was severely wounded in the leg. It is said that his life was saved by the skill of a famous Northern Ireland surgeon, Brigadier Sir Ian Fraser, who was the officer in charge of the field hospital.

In later life, Jack Kingan was active in many organisations.

He was a long-time member of the Ulster Unionist Party and was president of the North Down Association.

He served on the Select Vestry of Groomsport Parish Church and on Diocesan and General Synods.

He was honorary treasurer of the Northern Ireland Committee of the National Trust and he gifted the Trust land at Ballymacormick Point to enable a pathway to be constructed.



A Gas Mask, dated 1939, which was issued to a member of the Kingan family.

The Royal Engineers – 515 Field Survey Company

The Royal Engineers were based in Groomsport House from 1940 to 1943.

The company's task was to produce maps of Europe to assist the forces fighting in WW2. The maps included information gathered from photographs taken by reconnaissance aircraft.

After the company left Groomsport they went to England. After taking part in the D-Day invasion of France they advanced through Belgium and Germany.

The maps drawn up in Groomsport were used by the Allied troops as they liberated Europe.



Royal Engineers' vehicles at Groomsport House, 1940



Cap badge of the Royal Engineers in the reign of George VI (1936-1952)

Wartime Romances

Five members of the Royal Engineers who were based at Groomsport House met, and married, local women and settled in the village.

Stan Williams, from Wales, married **Ellen Bryan** and they lived in West Hill.

Jimmy McCullough, form Galloway in Scotland, married **Greta Gray** and they also lived in West Hill.

Joe Carr married **Storeen Niblock** and they lived on Main Street.

Lloyd Guilbert married **Sadie Murphy** and they lived at The Point.

Arthur Moulson from Liverpool married **Betty Heyburn**.

Arthur and **Betty** were photographed sitting on the grass in front of Groomsport House at Cove Bay beach.





Arthur and Betty met in July 1941 and they were married on 1st December 1941. They later lived in Springwell Crescent and had two daughters, Susan and Deborah.

Sgt. Arthur Moulson, Royal Engineers



2

(I) SOLDIER'S NAME and DESCRIPTION on ATTESTATION.

Army Number 2182935
Surname (in capitals) MOULSON
Christian Names (in full) Arthur Robert
Date of Birth 30.6.17
Place of Birth: Parish [redacted] In or near the town of [redacted] In the county of [redacted]
Trade on Enlistment Clerk
Nationality of Father at birth [redacted]
Nationality of Mother at birth [redacted]
Religious Denomination [redacted] Presbyterian
Approved Society Prudential
Membership No. 9267794
Enlisted at Liverpool On 28-9-39
For the :—
* Regular Army. * Supplementary Reserve.
* Territorial Army. DOE * Army Reserve Section D.
* Strike out those inapplicable.
For ..... years with the Colours and ..... years in the Reserve.
Signature of Soldier Arthur R. Moulson.
Date 28/9/39.

3

FNX

DESCRIPTION ON ENLISTMENT. 147
Height 5 ft. 8½ ins. Weight [redacted] lbs.
Maximum Chest 36 ins. Complexion Fair
Eyes Grey Hair Light brown
Distinctive Marks and Minor Defects
Mole "lu" over inner border L. scapula

Python ex ck 23.1.45 - 25.6.45 Hp.
A+S Group 2 i/c Chatham Sp. Coy.
16 Det RE

CONDITI
Found fit for
Defects or Histor
enquired into if ca
Ref
Date
Initials of M.O.

Arthur's Army Service and Pay Book shows that he enlisted at Liverpool on 28th September 1939, less that a month after the war started.

A Royal Engineers Reunion

In 1981, three of the Royal Engineers who had be based in Groomsport House during WW2 had a reunion in Groomsport, 41 years after they first came to the village and were based in Groomsport House.

Arthur Moulson, **John Robilliard**, and **Stan Williams** were photographed by the County Down Spectator outside the Groomsport House which was then a hotel.



John was from Guernsey and he returned there after the war. Stan was from Wales and Arthur was from Liverpool. They both met and married local girls and settled in Groomsport.



Stan, John and Arthur are pictured
in front of the gate lodge of the Groomsport House Hotel

U S Army 166th Signal Photographic Company 1



166th Signal Photographic Company
at Camp Crowder, Missouri, 1943

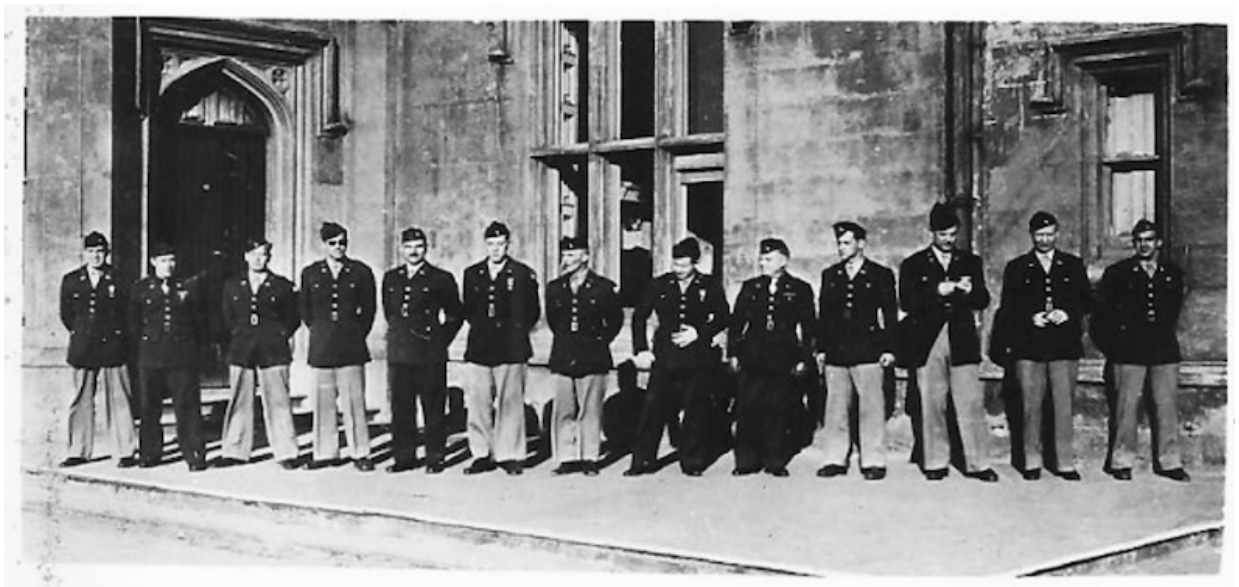
In 1942 the U S Army decided to recruit photographers and cinematographers to record the history-making events of World War 2.

Eight companies were created. The 166th became the official photo unit in General George S. Patton's Third Army.

The 166th trained at Camp Crowder in 1943.

U S Army 166th Signal Photographic Company 2

The 166th arrived in Belfast on 9th March 1944 and, for the next two months, they were billeted in Groomsport House – which they often referred to as “Maxwell House” or “Maxwell Castle”.



These Officers of the 166th Signal Photo Company were photographed at Maxwell House, Groomsport, North Ireland, in April, 1944.



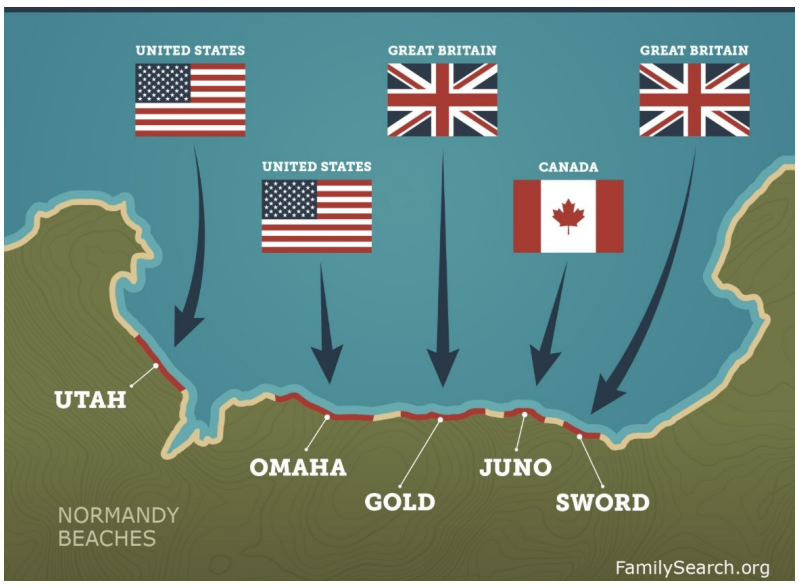
The 166th Signal Photo Company at retreat, Maxwell House, Grooms-port, North Ireland, in April, 1944.



Relaxing in Groomsport House in April 1944.
From left: John Blankenhorn, Russ Mayer, Ralph Butterfield, Charles Sumners and Lou Crabtree

U S Army 166th Signal Photographic Company 3

The 166th travelled to England in early May 1944. As part of the U S Third Army, they landed on Utah Beach in Normandy in June.



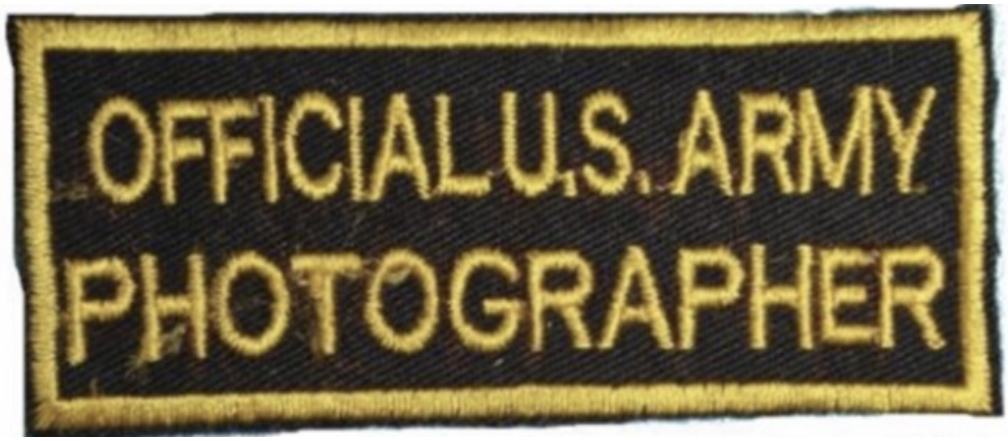
They recorded the progress of the Third Army in Europe, taking over 300,000 still photographs and an average of 20,000 feet of motion picture film a week.

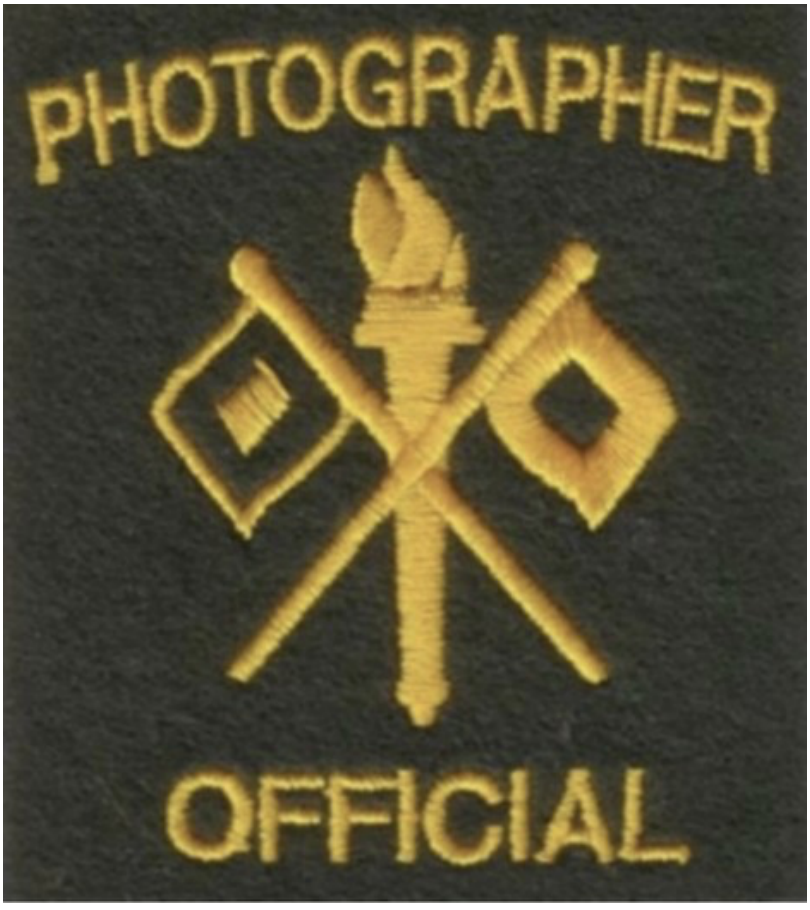
The company had the grim task of accompanying troops when they entered concentration camps, including Ohrdruf and Buchenwald. They recorded evidence of the atrocities that had been visited on thousands of prisoners who had been in the camps.



A Dodge WC used by a detachment of 166th Company in France, 1944

After the war, many of the company's veterans, such as Russ Meyer (*"Beyond the Valley of the Dolls"*), and Stanley Kramer (*"High Noon"* and *"The Caine Mutiny"*), went on to success in the world of cinema and photography.





Uniform patches for photogrpahers

(Compare to Maureen Oughton’s patch on her WRNS uniform)



Don Ornitz, Russ Mayer and John Blankenhorn at Camp Crowder during training in 1943.

Sergeant John S Blankenhorn

In this photo, taken on the edge of Cove Bay beach, Sgt Blankenhorn (without a helmet and wearing glasses) is speaking to Peter Carey, an evacuee from Guernsey, which was under German occupation.



John was befriended by Peter and his family during the 166th's short stay in Groomsport. Later, in the 1970s, John's daughter, Virginia Blankenhorn, lived in England and came to regard Peter Carey and his wife as her "second family". Peter attended John Blankenhorn's funeral in California in 1998.

Letters home

John Blankenhorn regularly wrote letters to his family in the USA. Some of his observations were not very flattering!

"We are somewhere in Northern Ireland housed in an enormous, great, cold, gloomy manor house with a facade which suggests the England of Hugh Walpole and Warwick Deeping*. What a line they must have had for the plumbing during a big house party!"*

"We had a train ride leading to our arrival here at Draftee Manor. The trains defy description, Very tiny, they are whisked around by equally small engines with soprano whistles."

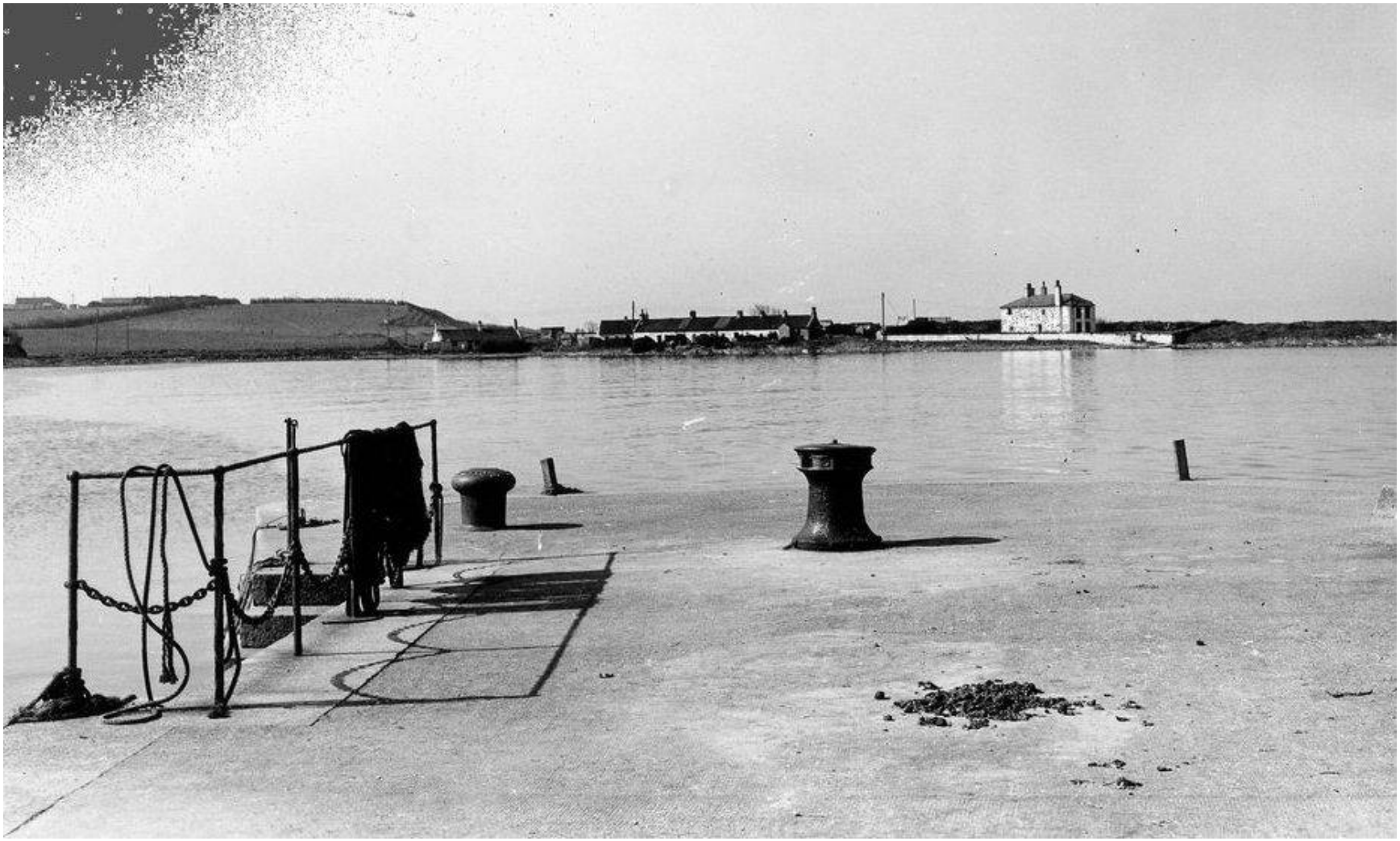
** Novelists who wrote about the English aristocracy.*

GROOMSPORT, 1944

Photographs taken by members of the 166th Signal Photographic Company



The harbour and the Boathouse



The quay and the Watch House



The old Coast Guard cottages



Main Street



Groomsport House



Groomsport House at night



Outbuildings at Groomsport House

GROOMSPORT

V E Day

1945

This is the only photograph that we have found that was taken on V E Day



Do you know who was sitting on the horse of John Murdock, the vegetable man?

Hint:

These days he prefers a bicycle!