

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Newsletter

Volume 34 Number 3

NOVEMBER 2005

What's On

10 November 2005 "Aviation Archaeology – The Search for East Anglia's Missing Warplanes"
by **Bob Collis** (Lowestoft War Memorial Museum)

24 November 2005 "Landmarks in Movie History" by **Mark Mitchels** The story of a wonderful invention, with extracts from many important moments. **Please note** – this is an extended meeting with film show (1.5 hr programme)

12 January 2006 "What William Butterfield did for us" by **Terry Weatherley**
The story of William Butterfield, Ringsfield Church and its restoration

26 January 2006 "Howard Hollingsworth – Lowestoft's First Freeman" by **Colin Dixon**
How a London businessman came to visit, and benefit, Lowestoft

2 February 2006 Annual Dinner at *Le Plaisir Restaurant* at Lowestoft College (7pm for 7.15pm)
Further details and prices will be confirmed shortly by our chairman, Lilian Fisher

9 February 2006 "The Landscape History of the Somerleyton Estate" by **Tom Williamson**
A chance to learn more about our neighbouring stately home

All meetings are held in the SOUTH LOWESTOFT METHODIST CHURCH HALL, at the corner of LONDON ROAD SOUTH and CARLTON ROAD, at 7.30 pm (Entry via LONDON ROAD SOUTH)

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

David Lindley's talk made me look at Beccles with new eyes. What an interesting place it is. At the 27 October meeting our museum curatorial adviser Lyn Gash showed us, in a thoroughly entertaining way, the new system of 'Suffolk Museums Working Together'.

Our Museum closed for the winter on 30 October and will re-open next Easter, for which time we shall certainly need some more stewards. Please let us know if you can take on even a couple of sessions each week in season – our regular stewards will give assistance and show you what it entails. Our aim is always to have two stewards in attendance.

The end of season get-together and buffet for museum helpers was held on 6 November in the Bowls Pavilion. On that occasion we all gave best wishes and thanks to Nancy, who is shortly to leave her flat above the museum. We will miss her greatly and now have to re-plan our arrangements for access to the museum for next season. Sadly, we are also losing two long-standing Museum Organisers – Jon Reed and Arthur Middleton. We are grateful to them for all they have done over the years and their absence will leave a gap not easy to fill.

As you know the annual evening meal has been booked for 2 February, 2006 but I am still awaiting a menu and price list from the College. More news on this as soon as we have it.

Tonight we welcome Bob Collis, who will tell us of the search for East Anglia's missing warplanes – a stirring topic.

With good wishes **Lilian Fisher**

Society Web Site: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Please give any items you have for inclusion in the Newsletter to Don Friston, at Society meetings.

Don't worry if spelling is not your strong point, we can help out.

Details of recent talks appear overleaf

13 October 2005, "500 years of shopping in Beccles" – by David Lindley

This well-illustrated talk was given on 13 October. David explained how markets were evident in most country towns from the 1400s. In those days, there were, in general, no stalls and goods were brought in and sold direct from baskets or bags. The majority of customers walked in from surrounding villages or farms and would have bought cloth, shoes, hats, implements for the home or work and, of course, a good deal of foodstuff. A bell would be rung to signal the start time, so everyone was given a fair chance. Despite this, there were instances recorded of 'sharp' traders intercepting people en route to Beccles, buying their goods and reselling them at a profit later in the day. At one time, money was short in Beccles so the town minted £10 worth of farthings. The dies from which these were struck may be seen in the town museum. Nothing is recorded of the original market, although its open area still remains north of the town centre.

Beccles 'new market' developed in the late 17th century. At this time, more shops and houses began to appear and eventually surrounded the market square. A number of these early buildings remain but their jettied fronts are disguised by 'modernised' fascias applied during the 20th century. A look inside often repays the shopper with a view of wonderful old beams and woodwork. Early Beccles traders included bootmakers (known locally as 'snobs'), druggists, printers, coopers, wheelwrights, cabinet-makers, gunsmiths, saddlers, dressmakers and jewellers. All of these provided essential services, and were known personally by their customers.

As the town grew and traders came from further afield, using horses to transport goods, the market offered more variety. Luxury items were brought in from abroad, including silks, velvets, linen, pottery, spices and wines. Craft goods and locally made furniture were also for sale, small animals and fowls and many types of ironmongery and tools. By the early 1800s there were over 80 stalls and dairymen, butchers, bakers, fish merchants, drapers and grocers

flourished. Three fairs were now held annually, attracting many extra people to the town. One fair allowed servants to be hired. By the mid-1800s, as well as traders and pedlars, fairs included a variety of entertainment with musicians, jugglers and actors. Many stalls sold sweets or food and public houses catered for the revellers. Latterly the fun got rather out of hand and, in 1872, the fairs were abolished 'to avoid vice and debauchery'.

The buildings surrounding the market now carried signs with well-known local family names. However, big branded stores were slowly appearing, and mail-order companies also, all eroding the profits of the local shops. In the 1870s, CO-OP stores spread across the country, many having a reading room and library (as did the Beccles branch). Stead & Simpson opened in Beccles in 1891. The 1900s brought mixed fortunes in commerce. Two World Wars meant shortages in many shops but luckily no bomb damage was caused, and the streets of Beccles remain substantially unaltered. On the debit side, shopping today, with a few exceptions, has become somewhat hurried and lacks the personal touch.

27 October 2005, "Suffolk Museums Working Together" – by Lyn Gash

Hiding behind what sounded a rather dry title was a really entertaining view of Suffolk museums. Lyn's present job is to help museums communicate with each other and, eventually, to increase visitor numbers. Suffolk is blessed with a rich variety, ranging from very small private museums up to the two large local authority ones at Ipswich and Bury. Transport history is particularly well covered in this county (road, rail air and water), along with many local crafts and trades, including the now severely reduced commercial fisheries remembered with some affection by older generations.

Suffolk, like many counties, experienced a reaction to change, in the 1960s and 70s. People realized how fast their familiar lifestyle and manufacturing methods were disappearing and some began to collect mementos. Interest built up and collecting became very popular, with a huge range of artefacts to choose from. These formed the basis of a number of small museums, often with limited opening times and run purely by volunteers. More publicity came from television programmes, such as 'Bygones', where forgotten crafts and tools were shown and occasionally demonstrated. Collectors were keen to visit museums, so it is not surprising that many new ones were opened at that time.

Lyn Gash acts as adviser to many of the 40 plus museums in Suffolk, helping them understand the benefits of working in groups to become more efficient, using funds to best effect and sharing expertise and knowledge, thereby overcoming isolation. A vital part of their effort is to preserve and conserve the rare and irreplaceable objects in their collections. Sometimes this is just making sure their building is weatherproof but often specialist services are required. A Suffolk Museums Partnership has been formed to help with this and some county-funded training is available, 61 museum staff having been accredited to date. A small number of museums are now able to employ professionally trained staff and additional funding may be available for improving displays and for conservation. The Internet is having an effect, with more people accessing information and even viewing digital records of exhibits on line. Efforts are also made to involve people who cannot visit museums in person. Some curators have put together loan boxes containing artefacts which represent their museums. These are taken to suitable centres and handed round among, for example, the visually impaired, people with mobility problems, or Alzheimer sufferers. The latter may be supported by reminiscence workers. These successes and improvements in facilities point to a bright future for our museums.

