

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER

Society website: [www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk](http://www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk)

Volume 35 Number 3

NOVEMBER 2006

### What's On 2006

9 November "Bombs, beams and boffins – the secret site at Orford Ness" by Paddy Heazell

23 November "The History of the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Marine Society" by Peter Parker

5 December (Tuesday) Christmas Social, to be held at the Yacht Club.

### What's On 2007

11 January "That's Odd! The story of Rushmere Church" by Terry Weatherley

25 January "Gorleston and the National Coast Watch" by Bill Richmond & Jack Wells

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

Tickets are now available for the Buffet at the Yacht Club on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December, (7.00p.m for 7.30p.m). The catering will be by Andy Willows, as it was at our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. We shall be having a raffle and if anyone has a prize to donate, we shall be very grateful.

The Museum closed for the winter months on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October, and we had quite a busy afternoon. The attendance figures for the year were up by 3,000 on last year. Monday mornings throughout the winter will still be busy times re-arranging the exhibits, arranging new ones and tidying all the rooms. Then the Museum will re-open next spring. We are still awaiting a decision from the Council about the future of Nancy's empty flat. Will it become part of our Museum? We hope to hear before too long. On Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, there was

a meeting of all the stewards and helpers in the Bowls Pavilion opposite the Museum, with refreshments. This was a farewell to the summer season and an opportunity to thank all our helpers and hope to see them all next season.

Our speaker this evening is Paddy Heazell to tell us about Bombs, Beams and Boffins – the secret site at Orford Ness.

With good wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

### **History Courses.**

Book now for a weekend course at Belstead House, near Ipswich, on 27 to 29 April 2007. The title is "Archaeology in Suffolk from Prehistory to the Normans" and can be booked by telephoning the Suffolk Local History Council office on 01473 242540

**Please hand in any items you have for inclusion in the Newsletter at the Society meetings.**

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

### **12 October 2006, "Suffolk's Ancient Woodland" by Simon Leatherdale, from the Forestry Commission.**

Simon Leatherdale started his talk with the history of the Forestry Commission and how its role has changed from its creation in 1919 up to the present day. The Commission had been set up as a direct result of the German submarine blockade during the first world war. The military had a requirement for quantities of timber which could not be supplied from this country. Hence in 1919 the commission was set up to supply timber for military purposes and to supply pit props.

Ancient woodland is woodland which has existed continuously since 1600. This cut-off point was reached as woods were not mapped prior to this date.

In our part of Suffolk there are only a few small woods that are ancient, such as one near Southwold. The forest at Dunwich is not ancient, but there had been a Dunwich forest a long time ago. This was situated near the old coastguard cottages.

Boundaries to these woods are not straight and are usually surrounded by a ditch and bank. Parish boundaries often follow the woodland boundary. Other indicators are the presence of bluebells, small leaf limes (those not planted in straight lines), wild service (chequers) trees, plants such as yellow archangel, oxslips and the early purple orchid. Broadleaf trees allow spring light to get through allowing bluebells and other woodland plants to flourish before the leaves grow on the trees. Conifers are evergreen and cut out the light to the ground throughout the year, therefore, plants tend not to grow there.

Trees are often coppiced or pollarded. The coppiced tree is cut off low down, whereas the pollarded tree is cut off at head height to prevent the stock eating the shoots. In its natural state a tree can attain an age of 200 to 300 years, whereas a coppiced, or pollarded, tree can reach up to 1,000 years.

These old woods contain many archaeological features as earthworks and trackways survive as the woodland is undisturbed.

Forests suffer considerable damage from deer and the deer population is higher now than at any time in the past. Deer perform an important function but too many cause a problem, therefore, they and the woodland have to be carefully controlled. The situation is not helped by farmers planting large amounts of winter barley and wheat, as these offer the deer a good feed crop of nice green shoots after they germinate. Types of deer found include Fallow, Red, Roe, Muntjac and Chinese Water deer.

The Dunwich forest will be changed over the coming years from fast growing pine trees to native species of trees. It is also planned to bring a natural predator, the sea eagle, here. The land is sympathetic to these changes as there are many rabbits to provide food. Sea eagles were here in Saxon times.

### **26 October 2006 The Optical Telegraph, London to Great Yarmouth. by Bernard Ambrose**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this country was involved in the Napoleonic Wars. The Admiralty had a need to convey messages around the country to the fleet commanders, but at that time the fastest method was by a rider on horseback. This could take a long time and the Admiralty looked at a way of speeding up the process. A semaphore system had been designed by Claude Chappe, a Frenchman, and was in use in that country. The Admiralty decided to use a 'shutter' system. This consisted of a hut over which stood a frame consisting of six 3 feet square panels, two panels wide by three panels high. Each panel contained shutters that could be opened or closed by the team in the hut. These huts were placed about 10 miles apart in a continuous line from the Admiralty building in London to Deal, Portsmouth and Great Yarmouth. The line to Portsmouth was later extended to Plymouth. Mr Ambrose showed a working model he had built of a shutter station which helped to explain the way in which they operated. The system used the Murray Shutter Telegraph Code which was based on a code for each letter of the alphabet, similar to morse code. The message was sent from one station to the next along the line. Each station was under the command of a disabled Naval officer. When a message was being transmitted the first would open the appropriate shutter(s) corresponding to the code for that letter. At the second station a man using a telescope would read this and put that letter code on their shutters. A second man would use a telescope to check that the third station had received the code and had subsequently set their shutters accordingly. This was repeated along the line. The line to Gt Yarmouth was completed in 1808 with the first message being sent on 24 August, stating, 'Calypso ready for sea'. This line did not follow the coast but went up through St Albans to Norwich, then to Gt Yarmouth where the station was situated on top of the Town wall South Tower. The coastal route was not used due to sea mists and fog. This system required clear visibility between stations. At one location a wood stood between two stations. To overcome this a wide track was cut through the wood that still remains today.

The telegraph ceased to operate in 1814 following the end of the War with France.

Mr Ambrose has followed the route and has identified many of the station sites, as nothing remains of the buildings or shutters. Place names such as Telegraph Hill, Telegraph Plantation, Telegraph Lane and Telegraph Farm give valuable clues as to where these stations were located.