

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Volume 35 Number 10

OCTOBER 2007

What's On

11 Oct 2007 "Far Pavilions part 1: Lowestoft Theatre & Music Halls" by Michael Mills – discover how our forbears were entertained and amused between 1790 and 1939.

25 Oct 2007 "Winston Churchill's Secret Army" by John and Ann Warwicker – the East Anglian connection explained, involving Parham Airfield. A fascinating presentation on the British Civilian Resistance Army (part of the British Secret Service) in WWII.

8 Nov 2007 "Lewis Price: A Pakefield Vicar" by Trudie Jackson – the story of this fearsome Welsh clergyman, who administered Pakefield over the last quarter of the 19th century.

22 Nov 2007 "A Brief History of Witchcraft in East Anglia" by Ivan Bunn – Curious tales from Ivan Bunn, local researcher and historian.

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

Our new season of programmes started on 13th September with a talk by Dr. J.M. Blatchly, on a *North East Suffolk Historical Miscellany*, which I was sorry to miss. Then, on 27th September, David Lindley came to tell us all about

A Hundred Taverns, Inns and Pubs of Beccles.

Our Broad House Museum will be closing on Sunday, 28 October for the winter months, then on Saturday 3rd November all our helpers will be invited to come along to the Bowls Pavilion opposite the museum, at 11am, for our annual get-together, with refreshments, and to discuss how we can improve the running of the museum. Letters will be sent to everyone concerned and I shall be glad to meet you all.

Tonight our talk is by Michael Mills, who will tell us about Far Pavilions part 1: covering the Lowestoft Theatre and Music Halls 1790–1939.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Committee Meeting

Committee Members are reminded that the next meeting will be held
at the usual place and time on Wednesday 17 October

Details of recent talks are set out below:

13 Sept, 2007 – "A North East Suffolk Historical Miscellany – by Dr J M Blatchly.

The Society's new season started with a lively talk by Dr J M Blatchly, President of the Suffolk Record Society and one-time head of Ipswich School. He has a particular interest in the collection of early books within the Ipswich Library. A regular contributor of historical articles to the East Anglian Daily Times, Dr Blatchly drew on several of these to produce 'A North-East Suffolk Historical Miscellany'. This very interesting series of descriptions brought into sharp focus people ranging from antiquarians, artists and writers to the very eccentric.

Dr Blatchly's relaxed but authoritative delivery gave the attentive, and frequently amused, members a series of word pictures that brought these historic characters to life. A ghost story came first, followed by a wide selection of curious tales, some dealing with sea battles, searches for sea-shore treasure and the effects of shifting coastlines; others telling of personal achievements and travels from earlier centuries. Thomas Gardener was sent from his parents' far off and severely overcrowded household to be cared for by an uncle in Southwold. Thomas, a competent writer, ended up as the Southwold salt officer. Members were shown a book by Isaac Johnson (1754–1835) who was a surveyor and artist of exceptional talent. He produced illustrated books, by hand, using a manuscript style of such perfection that readers believed they were printed. Thomas Fella (born at Bramfield near Halesworth) was a successful merchant who traded through the port of Dunwich in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Fella was another enthusiastic writer and artist who has left two historically important manuscripts with unique and fascinating illustrations of long-gone local features. One manuscript is deposited in the Lowestoft Record Office and the other is in America.

Members were reminded that a new edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Biography is now available on line and covers local writers of note. The vote of thanks was given by Don Friston.

27 Sept, 2007 – "A Hundred Taverns, Inns and Pubs of Beccles – by David Lindley.

The Society welcomed David Lindley, who presented a slide show and talk on the history of Taverns, Inns and Pubs in Beccles from the 1450s until the present day. In those early days Beccles was in the top four important towns in Suffolk and larger than Lowestoft. Members were astonished to hear that over 100 drinking establishments of various types had been recorded. In the 15th and 16th centuries tea and coffee were extremely expensive, highly

taxed luxuries. The average person drank beer, normally of home or local brew, of a low alcohol level (small beer) with their meals – even at breakfast. It was common for brewers and local shops (particularly bakers) to sell beer with other foodstuffs, some proprietors having a social room where the purchaser could enjoy a glass before leaving. Some of these shops developed into alehouses and also inns, the latter extending their hospitality to include meals and accommodation for travellers. Inns were essential in that most of the water sources up and down the country were polluted and undrinkable, even being risky for animals. As the main transport was horse drawn, coaching inns were obliged to offer stabling and overnight feed and care for horses and mules. In the 1630s, the well-documented White Lion, of Beccles new market flourished, this large building had one and a half acres of land adjoining for this purpose.

The White Lion, owned by the Rector of Gillingham, soon grew in importance and was upgraded in Georgian times to include a parlour, hall, kitchen and buttery. It was sold in 1720 and from then the manager allowed a number of functions, including legal business, retail of choice goods, auctions, masonic and other meetings in the assembly rooms, and a farrier service (run by a man from Shipmeadow). Also in the new market area was the popular King's Head, another large establishment. It was mentioned by Parson Woodforde as having the finest oysters he ever tasted – it had 8 acres of ground for horse care out on the Ringsfield Road. The King's Head landlord was allowed to put up two adjoining extensions in the 19th century. These matched the style of the main inn and are still in use today. Other inns in Beccles catered for freemasonry, bowling and hunting, and the Falcon had a cockpit (this was later moved to the White Horse, an inn which was frequented by a number of local clubs). At various times many other pub games flourished including skittles, shove-ha'penny dice, cards, quoits and, of course, darts.

In the early 1700s, only Taverns were allowed to sell wine. Drinking wine (usually imported) had become very fashionable with upper class tradesmen who combined this with a business lunch. The fashion was not to last and by 1770 wine consumption fell by one third, the taverns being mainly replaced by alehouses which attracted a matching lower class of trading. Ten years later many pubs were being closed as they were considered to be dangerous meeting places for anti-establishment conspirators. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and before long the pub was restored to favour. Trading was not always good and one early landlord of The Fleece operated a coaching and carrier's business during the daytime, attending to his pub at night. Just as well 'breathalysers' were not in use!

Mr Lindley ended by showing numerous slides of lost examples, and the remaining Beccles pubs and inns as they are today, most, but not all, now put to a variety of business and private use.

The vote of thanks was given by Vice-chairman, Les Wilmot.