

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER

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

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## SEPTEMBER 2007

### What's On

**13 Sept 2007 "A North East Suffolk Historical Miscellany" by Dr J M Blatchly** – stories of people and places in NE Suffolk – some artists, antiquarians and eccentrics will be included.

**27 Sept 2007 "A Hundred Taverns, Inns and Pubs of Beccles" by David Lindley** – since the 1450s, over 100 drinking houses, of various types, have been recorded in Beccles.

**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.

**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

I was sorry to miss the AGM, but urgent family matters called me away. However, I was home in time to join the visit to Orford Ness on 14th June. This was a very interesting outing and the weather was good too. Two weeks later, we had our annual Church evening, when we visited the Catholic Church on Gordon Road and St Margaret's Church. We were guided round by our expert, Terry Weatherley, and the visits were followed by supper at the Norman Warrior. Both these outings were most enjoyable.

Our Broad House Museum is quite busy, although the daily opening times have been cut to 1.30pm–4.30pm, as we are obliged to have two stewards on duty, which effectively halves the number of our voluntary helpers. We would welcome more help, especially when stewards are going on holiday. The Museum is open until the end of October.

**Please note:** Future Annual Reports will cover January to December. The 2006/7 issue will be published in January.

Our new autumn programme begins this evening, when Dr J M Blatchly will tell us all about *A North East Suffolk Historical Miscellany*.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

**LA&LHS – AGM: Thursday 24 May, 2007 at South Lowestoft Methodist Church**

21 members attended this year's AGM. Due to the unavoidable absence of our chairman, the chair was taken by Ron Ashman. The minutes for 2006 were agreed and the various Officers then tendered their reports for the current year. It was agreed not to raise the subscription for the new season and to change the publishing date for the Annual Report to January. The election of Officers proceeded, with all being returned to their posts, with the addition of Les Wilmot approved as Vice-Chairman. One vacancy remains on the committee and any willing member can still be co-opted for this season. Please contact Irene Ashman on 01502 586143 if you are able to fill this position.

At the AGM the following members were elected to the committee.

Chairman: Lilian Fisher Vice/chairman: Les Wilmot Secretary: Irene Ashman Treasurer: Ray Collins  
Programme Secretary: John Knowles – Committee Members: Ron Ashman, Keith Davies, Jenny Hatton,  
Don Friston (Newsletter Editor), plus one vacancy.

Several displays in the Museum were reorganised and improved during last winter. New regulations force us to have two stewards on duty at all times there now. This has reduced the level of cover and means we can only open from 1.30pm to 4.30pm each day. Can you help us by sharing some of the duties? (please speak to Lilian)

**Members are reminded subscriptions should be renewed by or at the September meeting!**

**Please make out a crossed cheque to LA&LH Society – £11 single, £17.50 couple.**

**Important:** When you renew your membership, you will be given a letter from the Committee asking for your help on determining the future of the meetings. Please study this and reply promptly to it as instructed. Thank you

### **Details of recent outings are set out overleaf**

**14 June, 2007 – Members outing to visit the National Trust site at Orford Ness – guided by Paddy Heazell.**

Over 20 members met at Orford Quay to be greeted by our guide, Paddy Heazell, who works for the National Trust. The rain held off and the ferry soon took everyone across the river Alde to the spit of land known as Orford Ness. As the peninsula site is some 16km in length, the group was carried to a selection of the most important areas by custom-built trailer, with a running commentary given by Paddy.

Since the Middle-Ages the peninsula has been used for cattle grazing, with river walls being constructed at various times to gradually exclude the salt water. Because of its remote location, the Ministry of Defence acquired the site in 1913 and by 1915 had drained two areas for operation as grass airfields. From 1914 the Central Flying School began military test flights and by 1918 there were over 600 resident personnel involved. It is hard to imagine now how basic these early tests were. Flying was in its infancy and little was known of the effects of speed in the air, the low temperatures encountered, the lack of oxygen above a certain height and how pilot and machine would perform in these conditions. Early research tests included the vulnerability of aircraft fuel tanks and whether silencers could be fitted to fighter engines, so the enemy would not hear them approach. It was concluded that the power loss caused by the silencer rendered the aircraft useless as a fighter. By taking in a large area south of the original airfields to form a bombing range, Orford was also able to test a range of armaments, bomb design and air bombing techniques, including the most effective way to attack railway lines. Photographs were taken as planes approached the range and released their bombs. From these pictures, specialists were able to plot the trajectory and learn how to improve the performance of airborne weapons. The airfield closed for 5 years at the end of WWI but the newly formed RAF worked on developments in flying from about 1924, often in secret (the Observer Corps began in 1925 on Orford Quay). Parachutes did not come into use until after WWI and it is estimated 1500–2000 pilots were lost as a result. When they were initially tested, the parachutes were not intended for aircrew but for use in dropping flares – aircrew were not issued with them until 1925.

By 1934, the British public was scared by the activities of German Zeppelins and Gotha bombers. Attempts to invent a defensive death ray came to nothing, but the following year, near Daventry, practical experiments were

started by Robert Watson Watt to show wireless signals could be affected by passing aircraft. Watts' team was encouraged to start research on radio direction finding (radar) design and development at Orford (helped by a £10–12,000 government grant) then eventually moved south a few miles to Bawdsey Manor, where the 'Chain Home' radar system was perfected. Later, airborne radar was developed, which was very successful, and to hide this from the Germans it was announced that the RAF pilots were eating carrots to improve their eyesight. This type of radar allowed U-boats to be seen when surfacing – a vital factor in winning the Battle of the Atlantic. Great interest was shown in weapons and hardware used by enemy forces during WWII. If a weapon was captured, it was thoroughly tested to determine the damage it might inflict on the equipment of the home forces, and how to counter it – if an enemy aircraft could be obtained, it was first tested for performance, then subjected to attack (using the home ordnance) to find out any weakness in construction which might later be exploited in battle. Captured enemy armaments were fired at a wide range of redundant RAF aircraft, including the Hurricane and Spitfire.

In the mid 1950s a test range was constructed to test the Blue Streak missile and to perfect its trajectory, the flight of the missile being monitored on camera as it was fired down the range. From 1953–71 the Orford site was involved in various kinds of research carried out by the AWRE (Atomic Weapons Research Establishment). The remains of several laboratory buildings are standing today, including two 'Pagodas' built to test and perfect safety features which guarded against false detonation of atomic bombs. Environmental testing included heating, freezing, vibrating with sound; also accelerating, and decelerating the firing mechanism to a high 'G' force to check that it did not malfunction. This testing finished in 1967. A series of photographs, plus a complete WE177 (depth charge) atomic bomb casing, now form part of the visitor display. From the late 1960s, the powerful Anglo-American 'Cobra Mist' over-the-horizon radar system was developed and tested at the northern end of the site. It was never really successful and the scheme was dropped in 1973. The building is now partly occupied by the BBC World Service transmitters.

With the ending of the Cold War, the site became redundant and was decommissioned and swept in an attempt to remove 70 years accumulation of (possibly live) ordnance from the ground. Buildings of major historical importance are preserved, but most have been demolished or are being deliberately allowed to decay. The National Trust acquired the site in 1993 and returned some of the land to grazing, while other parts are allowed to flood to provide a haven for wildlife. The NT allows access to visitors and ornithologists within their management plan.

### **28 June, 2007 – An evening visit to two local churches – led by Terry Weatherley.**

About 20 members collected on a fine evening at **Our Lady, Star of the Sea (*Stella Maris*) Catholic Church** in Gordon Road, Lowestoft. Building began in 1900, and a wonderful donation of £10,000 enabled the church to open for worship in 1902. Constructed by Baines and Richards in red brick and white stone, in late Gothic style, it is the only major church in the town centre. The west door, flanked by guardian angels, is to the right of the offset tower, and the first impression on entering the church is one of light and space. This is due to the high clerestory windows and the soaring arches of the nave set on eight red granite pillars, the eye being drawn to the Triple Crown and Keys of St Peter above the main arch fronting the sanctuary. The view toward the sanctuary reveals the central altar, beyond which is the high altar and the superbly sculpted, painted and gilded reredos. The apse at the east end rises above the reredos to show the finely painted sanctuary roof, depicting Christ in Majesty surrounded by English Martyrs. This was first completed in the 1930s and renovated in the 1950s after wartime damage. The beautiful clerestory glass of the apse is by Kempe. This glass suffered blast damage in the war and was repositioned, renovated and rededicated in 1952.

The parishioners have contributed generously to the upkeep and decoration of the church during the 20th century. In 1927 they marked the silver jubilee of the church by donating fourteen Stations of the Cross, positioned in the north and south aisles and carved in Arts & Crafts fashion. Among the devotional objects is a *Pieta* (a replica of Michelangelo's work) donated by the Lawrence family who were well known in East Anglia as suppliers of soft drinks; also an icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour (donated in the 1920s by a local group – the Children of Mary). Positioned above the sacristy door are beautifully painted murals of Thomas More and John Fisher, prominent English Catholic Martyrs, canonised as saints of the church in 1935.

In the Lady Chapel, to the right of the Sanctuary, the altar bears a white marble statue of the Virgin Mary and Child Jesus, donated in 1902. The ceiling of this chapel is blue and depicts angels bearing shields. To the left of the Sanctuary is the Blessed Sacrament Altar, so-called because it acts as the altar of repose each Maundy

Thursday evening. The ceiling is red with shields depicting wheat and grapes together with symbols of Christ's suffering. There is a high quality decorative screen between the chapels and sanctuary.

The tower has a room beneath and also contains the three-manual organ and the choir loft. A spiral stone staircase of about 150 steps leads to the top of the 100ft tower. An elegant Sanctus bell turret rises from the church roof. The statue of the Virgin and Child, situated outside the portico above the main door, was the gift of William Catchpole, a parishioner from a local fishing family.

Next, the group continued to **St Margaret's Church**, set in its huge graveyard on high ground to the north west of Lowestoft. Like most great Suffolk churches it contains elements from different centuries. The tower (of diminutive scale against the body of the church) dates to about 1340. It has been altered from time to time, as is shown by the blind arcading near the bell chamber, and the spire was re-clad in copper sheathing in the latter part of the 20th century. The crypt with its Gothic vaulting, which we were able to view, was constructed in the late 1300s. The large double-storey porch features superb flint flushwork and its upper storey is referred to as 'the Maid's Chamber'. The 15th-century nave with its widely spaced clerestory windows, generously proportioned aisles and numerous exterior buttresses is quite overwhelming in size. The south wall had to be rebuilt in the 19th century and is in superb condition with finely dressed flints. Before the churchyard trees were allowed to grow, visitors to the church had an unbroken view to the south, across the lower parts of the town and the inner harbour.

We entered by the Priest's door and were struck by the enormous interior space of the nave, stretching away from the chancel (there being no chancel arch), and the unbroken line of the painted and gilded roof is magnificent. To the west, the distant but superbly elegant font cover by Ninian Comper caught the eye, but the Rector admits to practical difficulties at christenings due to it being fixed in position. Close to the font, in a scale to match the church, is England's biggest stave locker. The nave floor once had many brasses but, sadly, few now remain. There are, however, a number of stone memorials in the centre aisle and on the interior walls. A partially built screen and loft features in the north aisle, above the War Memorial chapel, but for some reason has never been completed. Almost opposite is the exceptionally rare, medieval brass lectern.

At the west end, and also nearby in the north aisle, is some excellent stained glass by Christopher Whall. This was brought from the now-demolished St Peter's Church in Lowestoft. In 1819, the east window of St Margaret's was fitted with glass of a unique and unusual origin. It was painted, possibly in situ, by retired china painter Robert Allen who had been employed in the Lowestoft porcelain factory until its closure around 1800. This very rare window, painted in a curious, dated style is his only known glasswork. Fortunately, when the east window was re-glazed in the 1890s the Allen glass was reset. It remains in the south wall of the chancel. There are several memorials of interest – one is to the 17th-century puritan Samuel Pacey, responsible for the witch hunt hysteria in the 1660s, another reminds us of the Revd Bartholomew Ritson MA, who died while in the pulpit at Hopton. He left a large bequest for good works to be administered by St Margaret's, where he is buried. A brass plaque in the chancel is inscribed: *To the Glory of God and in Thanksgiving for the Safe keeping of the Church and Congregation in the Violent Thunderstorm of Sunday August 21st 1921.*

This vast church has to be kept locked, because of the risk of vandalism, so is not much visited. However, the adjacent Parish office is staffed from 9am to midday, Monday to Wednesday and will help if possible.

**A new title in the Sutton Local History series – FRONT-LINE SUFFOLK by Michael Foley – price £12.99**

This book came out in May 2007 and covers the military history of the county from Roman times to the present day. Available from all good bookshops, or direct by phone from 01963 442030 – it has 144 pages with around 150 illustrations – ISBN: 987-07509-000-0 – and it is published by [suttonpublishing.co.uk](http://suttonpublishing.co.uk) **One Line for History**

**Summer 2007 – Continued Excavation of a Wooden Causeway on Beccles Marshes, dating from the Iron Age. Member Keith Davies visited the dig and collected the following information.**

In 2006, ancient wooden stakes were discovered on Beccles Marshes during flood alleviation works adjacent to the River Waveney. This discovery led to excavations funded by BESL and carried out by a collaborative team from the University of Birmingham and Suffolk County Council to obtain as much information as possible from the threatened archaeological remains.

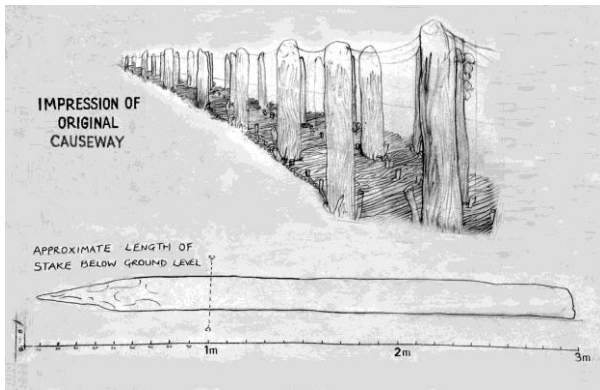
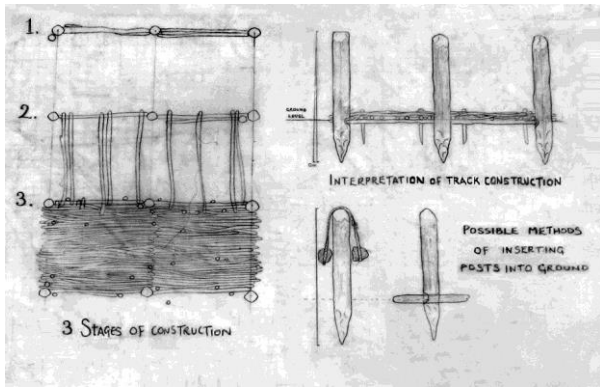
Work has continued in 2007 and the results have identified the site as a prehistoric stake causeway that has been preserved in the peat of Beccles Marshes for over 2000 years. This rare find may be of international importance and several archaeological questions remain. The public was invited to meet the team at the dig at the end of July.

The principal feature is a triple line of stakes that has been traced for 100 m. The projected alignment extends towards the Waveney to the north and the Morrisons Supermarket to the south – a distance of over a kilometre. The large oak stakes were sharpened to "pencil" points using iron axes before being driven into the peat. Some are over 1.5 m long and 30 cm in diameter and their preservation is such that every axe mark and carpentry detail is visible.

It is likely that the site was built over many years and repaired/extended at times. Dendrochronology tells us part of the alignment was constructed in spring 75 BC – the late Iron Age – but the initial work may have started several centuries earlier. Pottery fragments show the site was used well into the Roman period before it was enveloped by the marsh. Several smaller trackways have also been found, constructed of brushwood and planking, perhaps related to continued use of the site over time and allowing access across particularly wet areas of the peat.

Stake alignments, although rare, are known from other Iron Age sites in Britain. They probably had multiple uses, including religious and monumental, besides the obvious routeway function of this example that linked the dryland of Beccles to the estuarine landscape of the northern River Waveney. Further information is being gathered on how long the site was used, its exact purpose, and on variations in its construction. *Details of the site will be posted on the website: [www.ba-env.bham.ac.uk](http://www.ba-env.bham.ac.uk)*





These pictures show how the large oak stakes were inserted in three vertical rows, with three horizontal layers making the bed of the causeway. First, cross poles were set into notches cut into the main stakes (see below left); then several supports were overlaid in the direction of the causeway, and finally a crossways layer of brushwood topping added to form the footway.



Single radiocarbon date:  
360-280 and 240-60 cal BC  
Although it might be multi-phased

