

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Volume 36 Number 4

April 2008

What's On in 2008

10 Apr 2008 "Church Archaeology" presented by Alan Greening – based on the speaker's experience as an architect involved in church renovation/restoration.

24 Apr 2008 "Recent Archaeological Discoveries on the Ipswich Waterfront" presented by Rhodri Gardner – new information on the foreshore, from Roman and later periods.

8 May 2008 "Captain Manby and the Manby Mortar Lifesaving Apparatus" presented by Les Cole – the story of this East Anglian invention which helped save many lives.

22 May 2008 The Archaeological Society's AGM – Please make every effort to attend.

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Church Outing/Supper on 26 June – Terry will meet us at Frostenden church at 7 pm and later we go on to Wrentham church. There is no need to book for visiting these two churches, but if you would like to join us for a meal afterwards at the Five Bells, Wrentham, please reserve your place(s) using the list provided at Society meetings. The menu is now available, offering 2 courses for £11 or 3 courses for £14. Final date to confirm your choice is 22 May at the AGM..

Myra Kestner

Chairman's Column

At our last meeting, I told of the unhappy loss of members who had been with us for many years, and who had done a lot to help us. These were, Bill Goode, who died peacefully in the James Paget Hospital on 28 January. He wrote an interesting book on Round Tower Churches, which has sold well; also Jeanne Julings, who died on 17 November. Jeanne did a lot of work in the Museum office to keep all the records in order. Then Nancy Carter, who used to live in the flat above our Museum, died on 8 February. She would often bring cups of tea and coffee for those on duty. We will miss all these friends very much indeed and appreciate all their good work and past companionship.

Unfortunately, about 10 days ago someone tried, late at night, to break into the Museum. Whoever it was did not manage to open the door, but the lock was damaged and has now been changed.

We have had some very interesting talks. Our last, by Neil Storey on 13 March, concerned Murder, Crime and Policing in Norfolk and Suffolk. This evening we welcome Alan Greening to tell us about Church Archaeology, based on his own work experience.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

13 March 2008 "Murder, Crime and Policing in Norfolk and Suffolk" – by Neil Storey.

Given by a specialist bursting with knowledge of his subject this was a lively and enthusiastic presentation, at times verging on the gruesome, but very well received. Neil Storey explained that some early penalties, such as the stocks and whipping post, had come to England with the Normans. Later, some horrific punishments were applied in this country in the 16th and 17th centuries for apparently trivial offences (such as salacious speaking) including branding, tongue piercing and cutting off the unlucky miscreant's ears. Scold bridles could be fitted and public immersion in water, using ducking stools, was well documented. In those early days there were over 200 capital offences which might be committed, some of which now seem very minor, e.g. driving sheep over London Bridge earned a hanging, as did stealing goods above the value of three shillings. Executions were widely advertised in printed broadsheets and, it seems, made a good day's entertainment for the public who might travel some distance to attend. The executions of murderers and those convicted of other sensational crimes brought huge crowds and often the corpse would be passed to the anatomists for dissection later the same day. A ghoulish public were also allowed to witness the latter. If the families were swift, or could pay a bribe, the bodies might miss the surgeon and be retrieved in one piece for burial, although the body snatchers would sometimes follow up the case later.

Local magistrates generally allocated the range of punishments for minor offenders – birching (perhaps for stealing something worth less than 1/-), walking around the town tied to a cart, or a day in the stocks (for cheats and traders who short-changed their customers this could mean the pillory). The stocks and pillory were installed in most towns, often in the market place, to prevent them being downgraded to hamlets with consequent loss of commercial standing. They were much used to control the number of drunks, noisy persons, prostitutes and pickpockets. At that time the male householder was responsible for his family and all employees. Before the Reform Bills of the early 1800s there was no established policy on keeping the law. Those with large estates wielded considerable power but did not always use it wisely, and this was the cause of much suffering and bad treatment to employees of lower rank. Neil then spoke about some well-known hangmen and their craft. The longest serving individual chief executioner was William Calcraft, although the Pierpoint family served for two and a half generations. Hangmen were kept busy and a number of prisons had multiple gallows (Newgate had 19 installed). Victims were always hanged in their own clothes, which would then supplement the income of the hangman. 1869 saw the end of public hanging in our area.

Conditions in early prisons were dreadful, as was the food and some of the methods of employing their long-term inmates, ranging from pointlessly turning a handle in the cell thousands of times a day to working the treadmill. Bury was one of the cleaner, forward thinking gaols and, like Brixton, used a treadmill designed by William Cubitt from East Anglia. Neil went on to recount the histories of a number of East Anglian murderers. Some, like William Corder, who killed Maria Martin in the Red Barn at Polstead, were well known, others less so but no less dreadful, and often involved accomplices in their crimes. The final story (from 1900) was of Mrs Hood (or Bennett) who left her child at lodgings in one of the Yarmouth Rows and soon after was discovered dead on the beach, strangled with a bootlace. Early detective work involving a laundry mark, photograph and a necklace were used to convict her husband who, after a trial at the Old Bailey, was executed in Norwich for her murder. Twelve years later another female corpse was found on Yarmouth beach, strangled with a bootlace... tied in exactly the same special way!

THE TERRACOTTA WARRIORS

Last week Don Friston joined the eager throng of visitors to the unique exhibition at the British Museum to view some of the wonderfully crafted pottery figures excavated from the tomb area of China's first Emperor, Ying Zheng. Born over 2,000 years ago, in 259 BC, he was made King of Qin at the tender age of 13. (Qin, pronounced 'chin', was one of seven main states then at war, competing for overall power in China). Under his leadership, and by using newly developed weaponry and military strategy, Qin won total control within two decades and the King declared himself Divine Emperor of a unified China. In governing his empire he introduced many reforms and enforced strict laws. He used walls from conquered states to create a great wall, and built new roads and canals. Other innovative ideas were to standardize weights, measures and currency throughout his empire to improve and simplify its trading; also to develop a universal writing script, to replace the many local ones, thus allowing him to rule more easily.

In keeping with Chinese tradition, as soon as he became King work started on the construction of Ying Zheng's tomb. This work was to continue for thirty years with the tomb forming the centre of a great palace complex, as the First Emperor pursued his aims of living and governing forever. The scale of the complex is vast, measuring 56 km square, with the central tomb mound (as yet unopened) being 350 m x 350 m. In 1974, a farmer digging a well found a terracotta head, which eventually triggered what has become one of the foremost archaeological excavations in the world. Around, 7,000 terracotta soldiers have been found buried in three pits situated close to the tomb. Many other pits are in the area and those opened to date contain a wide variety of artefacts, including pottery horses, civil officials and acrobats, plus two magnificent half-size bronze carriages each pulled by four horses. There are also 46 bronze birds – cranes, geese and swans – with 15 pottery attendants, once part of a water garden. Due to the 2,000-year time lapse, and the plundering of the tomb site in antiquity, the majority of the excavated objects are broken. The on-site specialists have, however, achieved a miracle (the two carriages alone took nine years to conserve). Who knows what treasures will be revealed in the future, as the site will not be fully explored for perhaps generations.



The London exhibition had a representative group of the priceless restored figures, horses and bronze birds, a copy of one of the carriages, and many supporting pottery items, including fragments from the palace buildings; there was a sample of the protective armoured cape (formed from small rectangular limestone plates linked by copper wire so as to be flexible when worn); also rare gold and bronze items such as pots, coins, measures, bells, engraved notices, and weaponry. Items were very well displayed and could be seen at close range. The exhibition closed on 6 April.

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