

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Volume 36 Number 2

February 2008

What's On in 2008

14 Feb 2008 "Decline of the Wool Trade & Rise of the Silk Trade in E Anglia" by Douglas Baker – A brief history of two trades which once contributed much wealth to a developing area.

28 Feb 2008 "Alignment and Location of Rural Medieval Churches" presented by Ian Hinton – An interesting explanation from this member of the North Cove & Barnby History Group.

13 Mar 2008 "Murder, Crime and Policing in Norfolk and Suffolk" presented by Neil Storey – Learn about changing police methods and some notorious cases

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

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

Thirty-three of our people enjoyed the evening meal at the College on Thursday 7 February. All the varied meals were delicious, and the evening very pleasant indeed.

The Museum is due to open on Monday 17 March, a few days before Good Friday. Before this I shall write to all our stewards and helpers asking them to come to a meeting in the Bowls Pavilion, opposite the Museum. I look forward to meeting all our helpers and hope this season we will be able to keep the Museum open a little longer than the 2007 opening hours of 1.30–4.30pm. Incidentally, Ray Oubridge, one of our helpers, has just redecorated the museum office and it looks very smart. We are very grateful for his hard work.

The latest annual report is available at a cost of £2 and is full of information. Tonight we welcome Douglas Baker to tell us all about the decline of the wool trade and rise of the silk trade in East Anglia.

With good wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

10 January 2008 "Suffragettes in East Anglia" How Women Got the Vote – by Terry Weatherley.

Women had been campaigning for the vote since the late 1860s and by 1884 the subject had been debated some 14 times, but without a practical outcome. An early advocate for women's suffrage was John Stuart Mill, however he had limited success and was sometimes lampooned by the popular press. Around 1897 the National Union of Women's Suffrage (NUWS) was formed and this democratic organisation elected as their leader a Mrs Millicent Fawcett. She was the second daughter of Nelson Garrett, a wealthy merchant and onetime Mayor of Aldeburgh in Suffolk. His elder daughter Elizabeth had become the first woman doctor – Elizabeth Garrett Anderson – and was also a strong supporter of women's suffrage. Millicent's husband, Henry Fawcett, who had been blinded in a shooting accident, was Liberal MP for Brighton. A rejected suitor of Elizabeth Garrett, Henry employed her sister, 14 years his junior, as his secretary and they married in 1867. The NUWS continued to hold parades, protest meetings and rallies but the parliamentarians would not be influenced. Then, in 1903, a Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst changed the scene by founding a breakaway movement in the north of the country, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Her stated aim was to secure the parliamentary vote for women ...as it is or may be granted to men.... her permanent motto was 'Deeds not Words'. Her two feisty daughters Christabel and Sylvia aided her in the campaign. Sensing that their base in Manchester was remote from parliament they moved to London. The members were shown illustrations of parades and Mrs Pankhurst addressing a rally in Trafalgar Square.

Further publicity came from 'The Suffragette', a newspaper edited by Christabel Pankhurst. After a time Christabel had to flee to France, to avoid conspiracy charges, but continued to publish and edit the paper. Above all, the WSPU were militant from when they first arrived in the capital and straight away attended public meetings, asking the question – Do You Support Votes for Women? This caused outrage as most Edwardians supported the idea that a woman's place was in the home, while the public domain including work and politics belonged to men. Many saw the suffragettes as an affront to God's plan and the sight of these banner-carrying women in their white, purple and green was beyond the pale. As one suffragette wrote ...Most of us who were married found that votes for women was of less interest to our husbands than their own dinners.

On 18 November 1910, afterwards known as 'black Friday', the women marched on parliament. They were brutally manhandled on that occasion by the Police. Mrs Pankhurst said to avoid such treatment they must do something to get immediate arrest, and one way was to chain themselves to railings. Also, in this way they gained time in which to make speeches before being taken away. Members of parliament were harassed in the streets, by women, while walking to work. A noted act of vandalism was Mary Richardson slashing the famous painting the Rokeby Venus (depicting a nude woman) with a knife. Finally, the first martyr to the cause became Emily Davidson, who was killed when she ran onto Epsom race-course and attempted to stop the King's horse.

Some militant suffragettes engaged in stone throwing. Mrs Pankhurst targeted 10 Downing Street and later the same day others attacked major West End stores with hammers, produced from beneath their clothing. To avoid being traced, many women avoided the 1911 census by staying away from home in shops that supported the suffragette cause. The women next attempted to petition the King, who refused to meet them, and a riot ensued. The campaign of bombings and arson continued and still the government would not listen. Some suffragettes went on hunger strike in prison and were force-fed. This offended public opinion so a 'cat and mouse' Act was introduced whereby the weakened prisoner was released to recover strength, then re-arrested.

In 1914 the NUT held its annual conference in Lowestoft, and a photograph was shown of a demonstration outside the WSPU tea-room (the building remains, next to what was Ford Jenkins photographer's studio) just to the north of the bascule bridge. The Lowestoft Labour Women had hung a campaign banner in the window picturing a drifter numbered LT70. (Remarkably, this banner has survived in fine condition and was shown to the members.) The week of the conference began with a service in St John's church, during which were several interruptions by suffragettes who were removed by sidesmen. Mrs Pankhurst was recovering from force-feeding and was too weak to attend.

Terry and his wife ended the talk by enacting a lively court scene from 1914. This was the trial of Hilda Birkett and Florence Tunk, two suffragettes who it seems had come to East Anglia to cause trouble. They were accused and found guilty of setting fire to and destroying the Bath Hotel in Felixstowe on 28 April, and were also suspected of being responsible for burning down the Britannia pier in Great Yarmouth the previous week, although this was never proved. A substantial amount of evidence and witness testimony was produced to uphold the verdict in the Felixstowe case. True to type, the two women persistently proclaimed their innocence and caused mayhem in court, but never admitted responsibility. They received a relatively short imprisonment.

Further notes on Terry's Suffragettes Talk – by Ray Collins

For my birthday, I was given the book by John O'Farrell, 'An Utterly Impartial History of Britain' or '2000 Years of Upper Class Idiots in Charge'. This is a very amusing book and I recommend it, I am up to the Norman Period in the section titled "The Domesday Book: 'No, you can't go ex-directory' ". So I flipped forward a few hundred years to see what the author had to say about the Suffragettes and to share some of it with you.

Quote - "Women were arrested and imprisoned, but responded by going on hunger strike. 'Oooh, I've lost five pounds in a week, soon I'll be a size double zero.' Rather wonderfully, Emily Davison sneaked into Westminster Hall and hid in a cupboard for the night of the 1911 census in order that she could give her official address as the Houses of Parliament. There is now a plaque inside that broom cupboard, although not many MPs even know the memorial is there – you'd have to be looking for a broom to come across it."

I have confirmed this story on the internet and found that Tony Benn placed the memorial in the cupboard, which he revealed on 'Songs of Praise' March 1999. The wording on Tony Benn's memorial reads:

In loving memory of Emily Wilding-Davison.

In this broom cupboard Emily Wilding-Davison hid herself, illegally, during the night of the 1911 census. She was a brave Suffragette campaigning for votes for women at a time when Parliament denied them that right. In this way she was able to record her address on the night of the census as being the House of Commons: thus making her claim to the same political rights as men. Emily Wilding-Davison died in June 1913 from injuries sustained when she threw herself under the King's horse at the Derby to draw public attention to the injustice suffered by women.

By such means was democracy won for the people of Britain.

There is another report on the internet from a policeman who discovered her in a heating duct in the House of Commons on the 3 April 1910. She was arrested and left this message in pencil on the prison window

'3rd April 1910. Patience 36 hours here. Will they ever go. I am so thirsty. Nearly 36 hours have gone and
I found water. Thank God E W Davison April 10 Rebellion against Tyrants in obedience to God.'

Check the internet for the full story. Interestingly, she is referred to as Emily Davidson in many entries.

The John O'Farrell book finishes the section with, Quote - 'Britain was relatively early among Western democracies in granting votes to women: ahead of the United States (1920), France (1944) and Italy (1945). Swiss women didn't get the vote until the 1970s and as for Saudi Arabia – well don't ask.'

In a later part of the book he tells that when women did get the vote they had to be over 30, as there would be more women voting than men. He makes the following observation, 'Otherwise the men would have had to endure the terrible prospect that all the laws would have been about remembering to take things up the stairs instead of just walking straight past them.'

24 January 2008 "The Lowestoft Fishing Industry and its effect on the town" – by John Holmes.

John Holmes began his slide show by outlining the early extent of the town (then entirely north of the river outlet) and how it had grown over the last two centuries. Also, the way in which the fishing industry developed from local, beach-based, family businesses, how it was influenced by improvements in the boats and their fittings, also by the introduction of the railway and later by the need to catch more white fish (as opposed to herring). He used many fascinating photographs of the town and its characters to bring the story to life.

John said from Anglo-Saxon times fishing in East Anglia was confined to the sea roads and channels close offshore. There was little change until the 18th century, which brought boats with better sailing qualities, and the increasing population wanted more fish. Even so, fishing from Lowestoft was confined to the beach village area, with its associated trades such as boatbuilding, net making and fish-curing/smoking. Pathways, still

remaining and now termed scores, were built to provide access from the town on top of the cliff to the beach village.

In the early 1800s high port tolls at Yarmouth prompted Alderman Crisp-Brown of Norwich to seek a new trading outlet to the sea. In 1826 he offered a bill to the House of Commons (not finally approved until 1827, due to strong opposition by Yarmouth) planning to breach the shingle bank and reopen the Waveney using a sea lock, over which was to run a cast iron bridge carrying the London to Yarmouth turnpike. The bridge components made by Seaward & Company came by sea from Limehouse and, surprisingly, were brought through Yarmouth and upriver via Somerleyton and Oulton Broad. A grand bridge opening was held on 9 June 1830 and by 1831 seagoing boats were using the inner harbour, from where wherrys provided the link to Norwich. In the ensuing years the Haddiscoe New Cut was built and dredging further improved the navigation so that, by 1833, the collier 'Luna' was able to reach Norwich.

The commercial trade continued well for a time but in the 1840s a rail link was opened between Yarmouth and Norwich. This new venture had a catastrophic effect on the river trade and Lowestoft was in dire trouble. Here, local businessmen realised the only answer was to have their own direct Lowestoft to Norwich railway. Morton Peto then came on the scene, armed with new ideas, and within the decade this outstanding and influential man had created both railway and outer harbour for Lowestoft. The town quickly expanded, with many new trades appearing, and was soon experiencing a boom period. The railway was a mixed blessing to the fishing trade, as although it took their catches to new markets across the country, it also opened up routes to their opposition – the town however benefited hugely from its service, becoming a fashionable and reachable seaside resort for the first time.

Two long piers were built to protect the harbour entrance and, besides the local fishery, Peto was able to develop sea links with the continent, including Norway and Denmark, eventually attracting a healthy cattle import trade, which also used the railway distribution network. This prosperity meant further expansion of the town and housing was in short supply. The little-used area known as the 'lamplands' on the Kirkley side of the river was then acquired by Peto for building development, resulting in the magnificent esplanade and quality terraced accommodation south of the harbour outlet.

Towards the end of the 1800s Lowestoft was firmly established as a resort – a bigger bridge had been built, the (very seasonal) herring fishery flourished and the term 'Klondike' was used to indicate the enormous size of the catches. Every autumn, many hundreds of visiting boats (mainly sailing craft) from the coastal towns and villages of Scotland and north-east England joined the Lowestoft and Yarmouth fleets. The combined fleet of up to 12,000 drifters followed the fish on their clockwise journey around the coast and it was estimated that for every person at sea there were ten working on shore. A small army of Scotch fisher-girls arrived every herring season to stay in the town's family boarding houses. These hardy souls worked, mostly in the open air, every day except Sundays, gutting and packing the fish in the harsh environment north of the fish market, surrounded by vast rows of new barrels piled several layers high. Sometimes the landings were too great and swamped the market; then fish had to be dumped, or used as fertiliser by local farmers, a dreadful waste of energy and resources.

Boats with steam-powered engines and hauling winches then appeared and the days of the slower sailing craft were numbered, as the new boats could leave port in almost any weather conditions. Also, tastes changed and white fish became popular. Steam trawlers could travel much further, even to Scandinavian waters in season in the search for prime fish. Some small, individual local firms could not afford to re-equip and merged, so bigger fishing companies appeared – Lowestoft and Yarmouth were now very successful mixed fishing ports.

After the war years, foreign vessels began to visit the fishing banks off the east coast. More efficient gear had been developed by all the fishing nations, meaning that much of the breeding stock was captured and fish became scarce. Despite government restrictions on catches, the industry declined, the herring trade stopping in the late 1950s and the white fish boats being much reduced in number. The present day has seen the harbour used by other industries, mainly involving the import and export of goods but also some marine repairs. The only fishing boats in the outer harbour now are a few near-water craft of small size, which have to abide by severe, government-set limitations on their catches. However, the small longshore vessels continue to land seasonal fresh fish on the beach at Pakefield.

During the show, John digressed to introduce his guest, the cox of the Lowestoft lifeboat, and the society members were treated to stories and slides of lifeboats, and how they and their crews were seamlessly integrated

into the life and activities of the fishing community during its heyday – these dedicated men still provide an essential lifesaving service but mostly to a very varied mixture of mariners and pleasure sailors, and only occasionally fishermen.

.....
...

John was recently involved in the preservation of a ‘time capsule’ recovered during the demolition of St Matthews church in Kirkley. He has kindly given us permission to include the following extracts from his own notes.

If any members have items of interest we will always try to include them – Please contact Don Friston at meetings.