

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

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What's On in 2008

10 Jan 2008 "Suffragettes – How Women Got the Vote in This Country" by Terry Weatherley – A very different topic this time, from one of our regular speakers.

24 Jan 2008 "The Lowestoft Fishing Industry" by John Holmes – Slide presentation, giving some of the history of one of the town's major traditional trades, sadly, now fast disappearing.

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.

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

Winter Meal: I have booked for us to go to the College on Thursday 7 February 2008, at 7.30 pm, for the Society's evening meal. The cost will be £16.50 per person, to be paid on the night (sorry, the original price I was given was a mistake as it was for a lunch-time menu). We have to let the College know the numbers attending, and your choice of menu, by Friday 25 January – note menus are available here tonight. Our next meeting is on 24 January and I will bring my reservations list. Already there are thirty names recorded and we would, of course, welcome more.

Museum: The museum will re-open just before Easter and we shall need two stewards on duty at all times, as last year. We should welcome more volunteers, for if we have enough stewards we could open for a longer period than the present 1.30pm to 4pm, and the increase in visitors would help boost our sales. I was pleased to meet many of the stewards at our end-of-season meeting.

The Annual Report: Thanks to all who contributed to this informative publication. The full record of the Society's progress during 2007, including the last meeting, has now been produced by Ray and is available at tonight's meeting. This Report is modestly priced at £2.00 so please support the Society by adding it to your bookshelf.

Tonight we welcome Terry Weatherley to tell us how women of this country got the vote – The Suffragettes.

Good wishes for the New Year, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

8 November, 2007 "Lewis Price: A Pakefield Vicar" – by Trudie Jackson.

The Reverend Lewis Price was a fiery vicar who administered at Pakefield church for thirty years, retiring at the end of the 19th century. This extraordinary man, born in 1819 – the son of a Welsh farmer, decided early on to go into the church. At this time, Lampeter college, where he became a student, was promoting the Church of Wales in a bid to outdo the newly-popular nonconformists. Price and another fervid graduate named Henry James Prince became close friends and decided to start the Lampeter brethren. Price stayed in Wales for a time after college but Prince took a post in Somerset where he soon made his mark as a forceful speaker, noted for his ability to attract numbers of women to his preaching, which did not endear him to the local males. Due to Prince's odd reputation, the Bishop of Bath and Wells revoked his clerical licence and it was some time before he found a new position at Stoke-by-Clare in Suffolk. He was not taken seriously there and became short of funds but decided, with the help of his brother-in-law, to start his own sect. The group, based in Spraxton, became known as the Agapemonites and they were firmly under the leadership of Henry Prince. In 1856, Prince told his flock that he had been told to choose a bride for himself from the unmarried followers of Agapemone. Astonishingly, a 16-year-old was picked and the so-called 'Holy' marriage consummated in church in front of the sect. Contrary to his declared intention the girl became pregnant, but he excused this by saying it was the work of the devil.

In 1860, Lewis Price left the Agapemonites but his wife, Harriet, decided to stay, causing them marriage problems. Price first tried a court summons to get her out of the sect then made two unsuccessful kidnap attempts. He captured her later and they moved to Bridgewater in Somerset (her county of birth) where he set about reinventing his career as an evangelical curate. At this time he was introduced to Edward Ball who was married to one of Harriet's sisters and lived at Borley Rectory, in Suffolk (of haunting fame). In 1871, aged 52, Price came to Pakefield as rector where he began berating parishioners for not observing the Sabbath, and for their so-called idolatries.

During his stay, Price at times crossed swords with a range of locals. One occasion concerned improper land lease sales, when Price and his churchwardens were found to be at fault. He also caused a war between the crews of the Lowestoft and Pakefield lifeboats over rescue rights (as lifeboat organiser, he had formed illegal rules which benefited Pakefield). In 1886 he showed another side by setting up a soup kitchen to help those suffering at a downturn in the fishing industry. Two years later he was incensed by the Mayor of Lowestoft's plan to hold a ball near Christmas-time and in January 1888 sent a damning letter to the Press. The result was a public demonstration in support of the Mayor, when a torch-lit procession carried an effigy of Price from the town centre to Pakefield, where it was to be burned. Over 3,000 residents joined in and they heartily cheered the Mayor before seeing the effigy consumed by the flames. Price had kept out of sight on that occasion and continued his stormy work undaunted.

A window was dedicated to him in Pakefield church in 1896, and he retired in 1901. Stather Hunt, a later Rector, suggested Price had succeeded in emptying his church by his strong personality and rigid doctrines, and there was a noticeable increase in the congregation after his retirement. Price retired to Staple Fitzpaine, in Somerset – Harriet had already died – but he was brought back to Pakefield for his funeral in 1906.

22 November, 2007

"A Brief History of Witchcraft in East Anglia" – by Ivan Bunn.

In East Anglia, as in the whole country, the widespread belief in spells, charms and the practice of witchcraft was held mostly between the 16th and 18th centuries. During this period prayers were offered to the Devil as well as to God and almost every town and village contained at least one person who dabbled in the occult. Even the Queen had an appointed wizard, named John Dee. After that time the scientific view dominated, also the introduction of lighting in houses and public places removed the fear bred of darkness.

To strengthen the potency of their brews and spells, some witches would offer sacrifices. These were commonly of small animals or reptiles including cats and dogs, mice, frogs, lizards and toads. As an antidote, mummified cats have been found walled up in lofts or foundations of houses in the belief they would protect the owners from evil witchcraft. Salt-glazed wine jars called Bellarmine containing personal items relating to the witch such as hair and nail clippings (plus urine if it could be obtained) were also used for this purpose. There were not many physicians

at the time and home remedies and potions produced by witches and wizards were common, many containing ingredients guaranteed to turn the strongest stomach. A Norwich wizard named John Hall published such a leaflet

of charms and spells in the mid 1600s which has never been completely deciphered.

In 1542 a Bill was introduced by Henry VIII to forbid "Practising Conjuration and Witchcraft" which allowed action to be taken against offenders, but this was repealed in January 1547 when the boy King Edward VI came to the throne. In the first quarter of the 17th century, John Stearne became an active prosecutor of witches. The first trials took place in Essex (when 121 persons gave evidence against 9 accused) and persecutions spread rapidly across England.

East Anglia remained a hotbed of accusations and staunch Protestant Matthew Hopkins came to the fore, covering most of the area. He was soon termed Witchfinder General (although it seems he may have used the title 'Witchfinder in general') he followed a system of giving advice to locals as to how they might prosecute witches. He took a fee for this advice and it seems was hardly ever held responsible for the outcome of the cases. Indirectly he sent many poor and ill-educated persons to an early death, as in the hangings at Chelmsford and Manningtree. Perhaps fate then played a hand as he was himself to die aged about 26. He justified his belief by quoting Exodus ...*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live*. His advice to the public was to first search for black witches, then offer evidence to a magistrate, aiming to get a warrant raised. Once a warrant appeared a trial was mandatory, the end idea being to get a confession. Torture was forbidden but was got round by 'swimming' the suspect in a river or deep pond (the moat of Framlingham Castle was used at times). If the victim sank all was well – apart from the danger of them drowning – but if they floated the water had rejected them and they were guilty. It was an evil choice either way. Suffolk judges banned this cruel practice in 1645.

Hopkins professed to charge £20 per town but recorded evidence reveals this was often greatly exceeded and all others involved, such as hangmen and bailiffs were paid for their services. The 1645/6 accounts for Aldeburgh reveal a string of fees paid to Hopkins and others. These charges were usually levied against the rates but were discontinued after 1720. Not many trials were recorded for Norwich, but in Great Yarmouth (who along with Aldeburgh and King's Lynn held a charter for the purpose) 15 were hanged after being tried in the Toll House. There were 14 indictments against witches in Lowestoft, and 19 hanged in one day at Bury St Edmunds. Witches were denied the last rites and buried in unconsecrated ground, sometimes pegged down in the grave with iron staples or stakes, some of which have been found by archaeologists.

In later times, witchcraft still continued at a lower level, but was not considered illegal unless charged for. In 1951, when the 'Fraudulent Mediums Act' replaced the 1736 Act, the scene finally changed and the term 'witchcraft' was dropped in prosecutions.

Don't forget to get your menu and book tonight for the Society's winter meal to be held on 7 February!