

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER

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

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### June 2008

#### What's On in 2008

**22 May 2008** The Lowestoft Archaeological Society's Annual General Meeting.

**12 June 2008 "Evening Walk in Lowestoft High Street" led by Ivan Bunn, starting at 7.30 pm.**

We meet at "The Crossing". Ivan will outline the story of the earliest part of the town and point out some of the buildings that remain today, though often disguised.

**26 June – Church Outing/Supper** – Terry Weatherley 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 tonight at the AGM. Myra Kestner

**11 Sept 2008 "Lowestoft Then and Now" presented by Chris Brooks** – a photographic record of the changes that our town has undergone.

**25 Sept 2008 "East Anglian Monasteries" by Tim Pestell.**

*Please ring bell if the door is locked*

#### Chairman's Column

The Museum has been keeping reasonably busy, but the hours have been reduced to enable two of our voluntary helpers to be on duty together. The shortened opening time has caused a drop in the number of visitors calling in to the museum.

Our AGM tonight will, I hope, be well attended and I look forward to meeting you all.

On 12 June there is to be an evening walk along Lowestoft High Street, the oldest part of the town, led by Ivan Bunn; this should be an interesting outing. The final event before our summer break is the church outing on 26 June that is described above. Note: If you are joining us for the meal afterwards, tonight is the last date for confirming your menu selection.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

## Details of recent talks:

2 May 2008

### "The Wenhaston Doom Painting" – an ITV programme in preparation.

Members of the Society were invited to attend at Wenhaston church, when ITV filmed one of the opening sequences for a programme in the series "Faith in the Frame" to be broadcast later this year. The series is to focus on ten paintings in which religious faith plays a significant role. In these Sunday evening half-hour programmes Melvyn Bragg will chair a discussion with three expert panellists. It is hoped the short introductory sequence will show some of our members enjoying a short talk about the painting at Wenhaston.

#### A remarkable survival of medieval painting in East Suffolk

It is easy to blame the Victorians for destroying medieval features; but, in many cases, it was the Victorians who rescued and restored them. Many of the medieval objects in our churches today would no longer exist if it were not for the Victorians. And yet, perhaps the most significant medieval art object in the county of Suffolk exists by a supreme irony; if it had not been for an act of gross Victorian carelessness, it might not have survived at all. If they had been efficient, the decaying wooden tympanum taken down from above the chancel arch at Wenhaston during restoration work in the summer of 1892 would have been stripped, repaired and painted. Instead, it lay out in the churchyard waiting for someone to do something with it, while the restoration continued inside. That night, it rained. The overall covering of whitewash, applied centuries before, dissolved and when the workmen arrived on site the following day they saw wonderful things. What the rain revealed is essentially a [doom](#) painting, although there is a little more to it than that. A [doom](#) shows the final judgement of souls after death; each person comes equally before the throne of God, and is selected to go to Heaven or to Hell. Probably, all churches had them. The nearest other local one at North Cove happens to be on the north [chancel](#) wall, but ordinarily the [doom](#) was above the chancel arch, usually painted directly on to the plaster, as survives at [Earl Stonham](#) and [Cowlinge](#). Where there was no chancel arch, or the chancel was not sufficiently lower than the nave to allow for a wall painting, the top of the arch might be infilled with a wooden [tympanum](#), as is the case here.

Why is the Wenhaston Doom so significant? Although few dooms survive in Suffolk, there are quite a few elsewhere in the country. But the Wenhaston Doom is special for two reasons. Firstly, in front of the chancel arch stood the great [rood](#), a feature of every medieval church; Christ crucified, flanked by his mother and St John. The rood was normally supported on a [rood beam](#), or suspended from the ceiling, above the [roof loft](#) and [rood screen](#). Every single [rood](#) in England was destroyed by Cranmer's cronies; not one survives. In the Wenhaston painting the rood group was actually attached to the tympanum before the doom painting was completed; although it was ripped off in the 1540s, the outlines of the crucifix and flanking figures survive, like ghosts of lost Catholic England, and may be seen in the photograph below. The other reason that the Wenhaston Doom is significant is that its colours are so bright, and its details so vivid; there's nothing else like it in the country. When was it built? Wills specialist Simon Cotton has found that in 1480 there was a bequest towards a new screen. Since the tympanum would normally have coincided with the construction of the screen and rood, then a date in the 1500-1520 period for the Doom seems likely. So it was completed only about 25 years before it was covered over with whitewash, the latter helping to protect it from light fading.

#### The story within the painting

The last trump is sounded and the dead rise from their graves. Christ sits on a rainbow, overseeing everything that is going on. His mother and St John the Baptist bring forward intercessory prayers for the souls of the dead. But the real battle is between St Michael and the Devil, who use the scales to weigh each soul against its unreconciled sins. St Peter is seen receiving nobility – we can tell from their headgear that they include members of the Royal family, a Bishop and a Cardinal. However, they are otherwise naked, to signify that all are equal before God – to the left, souls are received into Heaven, while those on the right are marched off to Hell.

Why was this amazing art object not removed? Simply, the order was that roods were to be replaced with coats of arms, to remind congregations that the State was in charge. The tympanum provided the best way of displaying the coat of arms as it had the rood. Fear God and Honour the King was the new phrase; but at

Wenhaston, more was felt necessary. Along the bottom of the tympanum (and thus below the coat of arms) was added from the Bible: *Let every soule submyt him selfe unto the authoritye of the hygher powers for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordeyned of God, but they that reseat or are agaynste the ordinance of God shall receyve to them selves utter damnacion. For rulers are not fearefull to them that do good but to them that do evyll for he is the mynister of God.* Thus, a quotation from scripture was used to enforce the new regime and remains in place today.

When Mary I ascended the throne, the English Church restored its connections with the European Church, and the coats of arms were removed. Officially, the roods were to be replaced; but this doesn't seem to have happened in many places. A few survived, and Wenhaston's Doom painting is simply one of the most beautiful.

The text above incorporates information from the Wenhaston page of the [www.suffolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk) website which we thoroughly recommend to members seeking more information.

**8 May 2008**

### **"Captain Manby and the Manby Lifesaving Apparatus – presented by Les Cole.**

Local historian Les Cole related the history of Norfolk's George William Manby, inventor of the Manby mortar lifesaving apparatus. Born in 1765 in Denver, West Norfolk, he was the eldest son of Matthew Pepper Manby. Due to the grandfather having been a customs officer in Yorkshire the family were comfortably situated in Denver Hall. At the time, customs men tended to be paid by smugglers in addition to their normal wage. The family moved to Wood Hall, Hilgay and George, aged 5, was sent to school at Downham Market. As his inventive nature developed it included a series of boasts of his being at school with Nelson but this was not true. Not much of note occurred during his early years (he had married Jane Preston) but when he was 27 his father died, leaving them the hall and the family fortune. In just five years the couple lost everything and fled to Wales in an attempt to escape creditors. More problems arrived when Jane formed a relationship with a man named Pogson – George eventually went to debtor's prison. Ashamed of the situation his brother John, who was a naval captain, got him the post of chaplain on his ship. On the first voyage the ship was driven aground in rough weather but managed to get free and took shelter at Plymouth. George had seen at first hand how vulnerable the sailors were and this sparked his lifelong interest in lifesaving.

At this time George was being treated for a shotgun injury to the back of his head sustained during an argument sometime earlier. Although not well he was bundled aboard his brother's ship and they sailed for the Azores. He had improved by their return to Plymouth but his life lacked the rewards he craved. Ever the self-publicist, he petitioned parliament in 1801 to suggest he be allowed to assassinate Napoleon who was proving troublesome. The petition was thrown out but a contact found him a job as master of the army barracks at Great Yarmouth with the rank of captain. Parading troops and entertaining dignitaries did not satisfy his aims and he was soon spending more time than ever on inventions. In 1805 he befriended Dawson Turner, a man 10 years his junior, who was later destined to rescue Manby from a number of financial scrapes. A short time after this a serious shipwreck occurred and many bodies came ashore rekindling his ideas for a lifesaving mortar apparatus, intended to project a line from shore to ship. After several experiments he overcame the tendency for the projectile to part company with the line and in 1807 successful trials were carried out from the beach at Lowestoft. The following year several lives were saved using the mortar at Great Yarmouth but still no orders resulted from this success. (His apparatus was approved, much later, by the government who planned to set up 1,000 coastal stations. By 1815, only 45 had appeared and few rescues took place outside Norfolk.)

Another idea was to fix buoyancy aids (sealed casks) inside a boat to make it unsinkable but the local beachmen, who made part of their living from rescues, deliberately sabotaged the trials and Manby, who could not swim, barely escaped to shore with his life when the boat was overturned. Then followed designs for a portable chemical fire extinguisher and, in 1821, trials in the Arctic of a harpoon gun for whaling – this latter was also sabotaged by traditional harpooners and Manby frustrated once more. Two years later he petitioned the House of Commons for a £2,000 grant to develop the mortar but again without result. Finally in 1828, through a family connection, he was invited to demonstrate it in France and this time was awarded a gold medal. More years

followed with constant rejection of his schemes and now a rival appeared. John Dennant had invented a rocket lifesaving apparatus and challenged Manby to an efficiency contest in 1835. The rocket proved almost impossible to control and had a limited range but the mortar reached the mark every time. Still Manby failed to secure orders despite printing fine quality pictures of dramatic sea rescues which he was able to send to Queen Victoria. She did award him the Coronation medal but not the title he most desired. At this point (possibly because he travelled so much to promote his inventions) after 40 years his post at the barracks was rescinded and he retired to live in Gorleston. In 1842 the ageing inventor built his own memorial commemorating the first rescues using the mortar and erected it in his garden. George Manby died in 1854, just short of his 89th birthday. His personal collection of Nelson memorabilia was given to King's Lynn museum and his original mortar now resides in the Great Yarmouth Time and Tide museum.

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