

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Volume 36 Number 3

March 2008

What's On in 2008

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.

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

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Church Outing Supper – There is no need to book for the Church Outing itself, but if you would like to join us for a meal afterwards at the Five Bells, Wrentham, please enter your name on the list at the Society Meetings. The menu will not be available until May, so if you might not be at the AGM, please also leave your telephone number or email address and I will contact you for your choices.

Myra Kestner

Chairman's Column

Our Museum, Broad House, in Nicholas Everitt Park will open every day throughout the season from Monday 17 March, a few days before Good Friday. The opening hours will have to remain as last year – 1.30–4.20pm – with two stewards on duty together. At our recent meeting, in the Bowls Pavilion, we warmly welcomed two new voluntary helpers, who plan to become stewards, and who will take up their duties in the new season.

Tonight we welcome Neil Storey to tell us about Murder, Crime and Policing in Norfolk and Suffolk.

With good wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

14 February 2008 "Decline of the Wool Trade & Rise of the Silk Trade in East Anglia" – by Douglas Baker.

Douglas spoke mainly on the 18th and 19th centuries. After outlining the earlier history, he explained how these trades made our area the richest part of the country next to London (evidenced by its huge 'wool' churches and fine Tudor buildings). Woollen cloth was made and traded in East Anglia by the Cistercian monks as early as

the 14th century. Later, Henry VII used taxes on exports of wool and cloth to raise revenue. Even today the chancellor sits on the woolsack. In the 1560s when Elizabeth was on the throne, the Spanish had sacked Antwerp, as a result of which cloth trading moved to London. Wool products accounted for up to 78% of English exports in this period bringing metal, wines, ceramics and exotic foods in return. By the 1700s Lavenham had become the centre of the wool market with Thomas Spring, merchant, as its leader. Despite new competition from the West Yorkshire cotton trade, wool still made up 70% of exports. Norfolk was involved in cloth manufacture and 20,000 workers were employed around Norwich, about one quarter of them coming from abroad.

New and finer forms of woollen cloth were produced in the 17th and 18th centuries. Due to many purchasers coming from religious environments the most popular colour was black. Weavers were now key operatives and each had up to nine spinners and helpers working with them. Times changed and the 18th century was plagued by wars. Although Defoe saw ...*the face of diligence spread all over East Anglia*... trade was reduced, not helped by the emigration of skilled tradespeople from this area to America. The American War of Independence caused further cuts in trade but the worst decline came with the onset of the Napoleonic wars. This 20-year conflict and the Navy's demand for pressed men did major damage from which the industry in Essex could not recover. Norwich still carried some trade into the 1820s and the local manufacture of worsted survived. West Yorkshire provided coarser, hardwearing woollens mainly used for military uniforms but the cotton age had started and this cheap, strong, but light material began to take over.

John Savill, a prosperous wool merchant of Braintree, was busy in the mid 1700s building his business while purchasing various amounts of land and farms in Essex. Douglas read extracts of Savill's day-to-day life, which showed how it was affected by the general economy. He traded wool with Suffolk and sheep were important as food for the rapidly increasing population of London. Not all went well though, and militant women sometimes interfered with trade by attacking food supply chains, forcing the sale of crops at well below market prices. Weavers now had a very hard time and Savill had large stocks of rolled cloth (bays) for which he had no market. However, as a man of means, he continued to buy property and enjoy a good life along with his son, now working in the family business.

The art of twisting (throwing) silk came originally from China some 2,500 years ago. James I, in the 17th century, tried to encourage the English production of silk, and mulberry trees were planted in some numbers. However, the growers put in white mulberry rather than the black variety, which forms the specialist food of the silkworm, so the scheme was not successful and raw silk remained cheaper to import. George Courtauld was the 5th or 6th son of the family who, after being apprenticed to the silk trade, went to America. On his return, he rented a mill at Pebmarsh in Essex and started a silk throwing business from where he traded with London. In 1819, the Savills from Braintree sold land at nearby Bocking to Sam Courtauld for £2,500. This was the start of the Courtauld empire initially built on silk throwing and weaving.

The family firm prospered and before long had 30 steam-powered looms in Halstead, where their main line was the production of crepe with a specially patterned weave which other companies could not match. This crepe was used by the royal family and became extremely popular, making Courtaulds a fortune. Although silk making provided employment, because of mechanisation it only used about 10% of the workforce required by the earlier wool trade, and this meant fierce competition for jobs and low wages. A rival company named Grouts now discovered the secret pattern for crepe and began manufacturing in Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Oulton Broad and Ditchingham. By the 1850s a silk substitute called Rayon had appeared, the first of the synthetic fibres, which led to the production of artificial (art) silk. Much later, other very cheap to produce synthetics called viscose and nylon were to substantially affect the clothing industry. The Courtauld link with weaving ended with the forced sale of their American viscose plant, as a result of wartime trading regulations, but the family name lives on in other commercial enterprises. Warner's silk museum can be visited in Braintree, a town that benefited from the Courtauld family funding their splendid Town Hall. As to the Savills – they went into, and remain in, property trading in the eastern region.

Douglas Baker compared the Savills with another family, the Castles, who lived in Coggeshall in the 1800s. John Castle was born in 1819, son of a chimney sweep. His father died in 1824, aged 27, leaving his pregnant widow with John and his two young sisters. The destitute family walked 75 miles to the father's birthplace at Soulbury, then walked back to Coggeshall accompanied by their grandmother. One month later a brother for John was born and the Coggeshall Poors Trust provided the family with 7s per week subsistence – the two sisters died subsequently and John's mother went to work as a nurse. At eight years old John got employment at Beckwith's silk factory where he cleaned a Jacquard loom for one of the weavers. One day he took advantage of

the weaver's absence to try operating the loom himself but was told off by the foreman. Later the same foreman asked John to clean his loom and before long gave him a job as a weaver. Sadly Beckwith's business failed and 100 workers were stood off. John was out of work for a time and went eventually to the workhouse at Witham. He must have used his time and talents well, as despite having no formal schooling he learnt to read and write with great skill, completing the story of his hard early life in beautiful handwriting and virtually without spelling errors.

28 February 2008 "Alignment and Location of Rural Medieval Churches" – by Ian Hinton.

Ian Hinton began by exploding the myth that all churches face east. Most of them conform, more or less, which is probably because the sun always rises in the east and that is also the predicted direction of the Second Coming. However, there are many churches that are differently aligned and Ian put forward several possible explanations. Some may face sunrise on the day of the saint to whom they are dedicated, others might be linked to Easter, or to the time of year when the church building began; others (but not in East Anglia) may face Jerusalem or be linked to an equinoctial feast day. Yet another theory, now falling out of favour, is that they were built according to magnetic north, the movement of which varies considerably, thus giving a range of alignment depending on the construction year. The sun rises exactly east at the spring equinox but due to its varying elevation as the year progresses, through each of the solstices, will be seen earlier or later at any one location. Churches measured in the east of the country commonly face east, but the further west their location the more these buildings are angled towards the south.

In his ongoing studies Ian has checked the orientation of churches in many counties across this country. His local church at Barnby in Suffolk, faces slightly north of east, at 81°, while the next nearest, North Cove, is angled 23° further to the south. No definite reason can be given for this amount of variation, which in some cases can be as much as 45° from true east, but it is clear that the point of sunrise is harder to measure at sites further from the coast. Rural churches often face nearer to east than urban ones, probably because they were constructed on larger sites, not affected by the close proximity of roads and other buildings, and may predate their local town or village. One curious statistic is that groups of churches dedicated to one saint often seem to share the same orientation – this orientation may vary from saint to saint by a substantial amount. However, research shows that over 30% of churches have been re-dedicated at some time so this may not long hold up to scrutiny.

Many Christian churches were built on the site of earlier pagan ones. Quite often the sites were chosen because of their links to old customs and centres of occupation or ritual, including important wells or springs, or for their spectacular position and scenic quality. The builders were sometimes faced with construction problems due to hills, to sloping land, or the presence of streams and had then to adopt special platform or raised foundations. Urban churches, particularly of later date, had to fit into the available space and this controlled their design and orientation. As time progressed, many churches were extended, and the chancel areas of some built at a slight angle to the nave. This is believed to have been an attempt to achieve a closer alignment to the east and it occurs in about 75% of the recorded examples. Ian Hinton closed the talk by mentioning the unexplained cases where more than one church has been constructed in the same churchyard. There are nine instances of the latter in East Anglia.

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