

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER

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

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### May 2008

#### What's On in 2008

**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.**

**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 22 May at the AGM. Myra Kestner

*Please ring bell if the door is locked*

#### Chairman's Column

I have been away for almost two weeks and unfortunately missed the talk on "Ipswich waterfront" by Rhodri Gardner. I shall also miss tonight's talk by Les Cole on Captain Manby and his Mortar Lifesaving Apparatus, which again should be very good.

The Museum has been keeping reasonably busy during our shorter opening hours and I should be on duty there this coming Saturday. We would still welcome more voluntary help, particularly as we are obliged to have two on duty at all times. Please contact a committee member, or the museum, if you can help.

Our AGM takes place on 22 May and I hope you will all be able to attend. Then, on 12 June, there is to be a walk led by Ivan Bunn to see the original buildings in the High Street – we meet at 7.30 outside "The Crossing" opposite the top of Old Nelson Street. On 26 June, Terry will lead the final outing before the summer break, details of which are given above.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

**Details of recent talks:**

**10 April 2008**

**"Church Archaeology" – by Alan Greening.**

Alan Greening spoke of his career as an architect involved (mainly in above-ground work) over many years in the repair and renovation of churches and wood framed buildings. Before undertaking each job it is essential that the architect and selected builder and/or mason discover as much as possible of the history behind the structure. Also no professional would risk attempting to repair a listed building without an in-depth knowledge of the materials used for the original build and, where possible, an accurate estimate of its age. Members were shown drawings of the main window styles used for churches from Norman times through the centuries, including round, the narrower lancet, decorated and perpendicular. The Victorians were very skilled craftsmen and this can cause confusion where their work seeks to replicate earlier building styles – careful study by investigators usually shows the Victorian work to be too perfect, in some cases due to their use of machine tools. Restorations require the architect to have a broad understanding of construction techniques that might have been used from medieval up to comparatively recent times. In addition, there may well be remains (sometimes human) to be examined and dealt with by specialists. Alan's work has taken him to several counties and covered some very interesting projects, both large and small. He has studied and worked on churches and buildings in Suffolk, including Southwold and Blythburgh, and he gave some fascinating details of the restoration project in which he is currently involved.

The first thing to do once a contract is awarded is to develop a conservation plan. A visual examination of the building to be repaired can often give a guide to its relative age, but this is not always reliable. Where very ancient or famous buildings are to be renovated a search for evidence is usually made in the owner's deeds or in public records. Books on architectural style by past experts such as Sir Nikolaus Pevsner can frequently reveal illustrative and written clues to a building's past – where wood is involved the dendrologist may provide help on dating and source. The conservation plan will set out the extent of the repairs and the materials to be used. For instance it is not always required or desirable to restore interior decoration or wall paintings to their original condition. The removal of poor quality earlier restoration and layers of overpainting, followed by stabilisation of the remaining original work may be sufficient. Weak structural components will probably be replaced in the long term interest and safety of the building – here the skill of the architect and mason will be tested to secure the closest match to the original wood or stone and any fixings.

Alan explained some of the ways early craftsmen could work out the ground plan for a building using the simplest of devices, sometimes as basic as a cord with a few knots tied at regular intervals. By extending this, with the help of a colleague, a plan could be marked out on the ground or transferred to building materials. The same cord might be attached to a central peg and used to draw arcs and circles, which when repeated could precisely fix the position of pillars, arches and doorways. Builders also had carefully made stone or carpenter's squares with which to accurately mark off angles on stone or wood components.

**24 April 2008**

**"Recent Archaeological Discoveries on the Ipswich Waterfront" – presented by Rhodri Gardner.**

At the society's meeting on 24 April, Suffolk County Council archaeologist Rhodri Gardner spoke about excavations carried out between 2003 and 2007 along the Ipswich quayside on the River Orwell. Fast development here has meant the archaeologists have been very busy between Orwell Road and East Stoke Bridge with virtually the whole of the medieval settlement now examined. This area, formerly occupied by flour mills and maltings is being redeveloped as a waterside residential site, with blocks of modern flats and some supporting services. The early history is interesting with the remains of some Saxon wooden revetments of hurdle construction being uncovered. These were probably put in place to prevent strong currents carrying away the river silt and denuding the banks. Some black peat of Roman date was also found in the channel along the waterfront. The River Orwell formed the southern boundary of the early town while a tributary channel joined the north bank at an angle, close to what is now St Paul's wharf, and formed the approximate eastern boundary. Excavation has revealed at least three stages of foreshore reclamation between the tenth and seventeenth centuries, achieved by inserting further wooden revetments, with artificial building up by hand and by reclamation dumping. This process gradually raised the level of the quay and assisted the passage of trading vessels to what was at one time one of the most important ports in Britain.

Rhodri showed a comprehensive set of photographs covering the three main sections of the excavations and explained the findings at each stage. A well-preserved late medieval building was found immediately below the foundations of the Cranfield Flour Mill. This was first cleared of the demolished remains of Victorian buildings, then cleaned of old rendering, revealing that it was built of septarian mudstone. The local supply of this quite hard material had been monopolised in the Ipswich area by the Black Friars. (It may also be found in other major structures in Suffolk, including Framlingham Castle.) Detailed inspection of the Cranfield Mill area and surrounding sites, uncovered a variety of Ipswich ware and other common local pottery plus remains of leather shoes – these and some wooden structures remain to be precisely dated. Some barrel wells contained 15th-century pottery but the overburden on the site, in some places over 2 metres deep, contained a random mixture of reclamation dumping and has proved difficult to date accurately. Further excavations of the long neglected area to the north of College Street are now planned, including a large graveyard and an adjoining Quaker burial site, prior to development.

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