

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

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What's On in 2008–09

- 13 Nov 2008** “The Garrett Family Business (to 1923)” by **Frank Huxley** – a story of steam engine specialists who traded from the (now preserved) Longshop building in Leiston.
- 27 Nov 2008** “Suffolk Archaeological Service” by **Jon Newman** – Jon will be describing recent archaeological work carried out by this group.
- 8 Jan 2009** “John owes me sixpence!” by **Terry Weatherley** – revelations from a diary of 1912 – another quite different topic presented by this familiar local speaker.
- 22 Jan 2009** “How did that get there?” and “Not many people know that!” by **Ron Ashman** – two items of local history from in and around Lowestoft.

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

At our last meeting we had an interesting talk by Margaret Griffiths, former guide at Bletchley Park, who told us of its role during the war.

Our museum, Broad House closed for the winter months on 30 October. Then on 1 November all the stewards were invited to a get-together in the Bowls Pavilion opposite the museum. Paul Durbidge came to tell us about the ancient discoveries made along Pakefield Cliffs, and Mike Chester spoke to us about the latest additions to the porcelain collection in our museum. Refreshments were provided and enjoyed by all those attending.

The booking of a meal at Lowestoft College is on Thursday, 5 February next year, and the College needs to know how many of us will be attending. Also, we need to arrive in good time, ready for the meal to be served at 7.30 pm. Please put your name(s) on the list at the next meeting.

On 13 November we welcome Frank Huxley, who will tell us about the Garrett Family Business.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

9 October 2008

“The Changing Face of Kessingland Through the Ages” – a talk by Maureen Long.

Maureen, from the Kessingland Mask shop, gave a very informal talk on some changes in Kessingland village. A self-taught historian, she dipped into events from prehistory to the present, inviting questions from the members as the evening developed. Originally the area around the present village would have been rural coastland with, possibly, small settlements (a stone age site has been found in the area housing the wild-life park) and there was an inlet from the sea, mirroring the situation at its near neighbour, Frostenden. As time progressed the sea inlets became ports and were visited by Continental invaders, evidenced by the Viking campsite at Frostenden. Much later the inlets were to serve as fishing and sea-trading centres – Latymere dam was Kessingland’s harbour – until changing land and sea levels brought this to a close some 400 years ago.

In Domesday, Kessingland is listed with a fair and market, and at the time of the Conquest was credited with a population of approximately 8,000 (remarkable when measured against today’s 4,200). The early village was divided into ‘the beach’ and ‘the high road area’ with some rivalry in trade and interpersonal relationships. This rivalry eventually disappeared due to building and infilling between the two areas. Geographically the village remained isolated from the larger part of East Anglia until the turnpike roads linking Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft to Ipswich and London were put in place in the late 1700s. For some time after this, a large part of the populace was employed, with a seasonal overlap, in the local farming and fishing industries. There were a number of boat-builders and owners living locally and some, after 1831, traded from the newly built harbour at Lowestoft, while the long-shore fleet continued to work off Kessingland beach. The leading players in the fishing industry earned good money and built substantial houses along Church Road. An interesting side development from the fishing fleet was the use of local boats to salvage crews and contents from vessels wrecked in bad weather. This was prior to the start of the RNLI. Sea erosion caused the loss of several buildings along the beach in the late 1930s and a sea wall was constructed in 1938 to prevent the loss of the remaining beach village.

Better road links in the 1800s allowed some tourism to develop and visitors were soon taking advantage of the sea air. A bus link from Lowestoft Railway Station operated from 1904, which enabled people to travel from London and the Midlands. Once several holiday camps were in operation, including an annual ‘London Boys’ camp and another for underprivileged children at the north end of the village. The holiday trade reached a peak after World War 2 and still survives in a reduced and modified form. St Edmunds Church tower dates back 500 years, but in 1668 the church roof fell in. The Nuns of St Clare, who had a nunnery in Whites Lane, built a much smaller replacement church onto the old tower some 25 years later. Overseer’s accounts give fascinating glimpses of the contrasting ‘rags and riches’ life in this early period. The late Peter Cherry, a local journalist collected a wonderful record of the village from those sources. Maureen, and her colleagues, ensured these are to be preserved by publishing them in a series of books, locally still available. Probably the most famous Kessingland resident was Rider Haggard, author of *King Solomon’s Mines*; he bought a cliff-top summer home north of the village in 1897 where he used to entertain his old friend Rudyard Kipling. Another character was eccentric inventor, Evered Wigg, who cobbled together his own bizarre cinema (the Kinnodrome) using any materials that came to hand,

including corrugated iron and old bedsteads. The ramshackle affair was painted in rainbow colours and is well remembered as it remained by the main road until 1976.

23 October 2008

“Bletchley Park” – by Margaret Griffiths.

On 23 October, Margaret Griffiths (former guide at Bletchley Park) provided a fascinating insight into the workings of the brilliant wartime cipher and code-breaking team, gathered in secret by the government, just south of what is now Milton Keynes. The marvel is that the location of this unit so vital in unlocking the complex messages of the five-year war was never made public. Even long after the end of hostilities, those who worked at BP (as it was known) kept their faith and did not disclose the nature of their work even to near relatives. Housed in a Victorian style building (the Mansion), compulsorily purchased by MI6 at the start of the World War 2, Commander Alastair Deniston began with 200 of the finest mathematical brains from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. This team was built up over three years to number over 10,000, a very difficult number to hide within the local community of under 2,000. In addition to the analysts and language experts was a vital support team mainly formed from the WRNS who carried out less complex, but equally important, day-to-day administration work.

The German forces had various models of the Enigma machine, which they believed capable of producing unbreakable coded messages, with odds of 158 million million million to one if reset on a daily basis. If the operators had all used it as instructed it would have been almost foolproof, but gradually they became less careful and the code-breakers stronger. A famous name among the latter was Alan Turing, a remarkable thinker whose ideas eventually led to the invention of the first computer system, to be developed into the ‘Colossus’. An electronic counter known as the Turing Bombe was designed, and used in multiples to speed the sorting of codes. These machines were destroyed at the end of the war to hide the evidence from outside interests, but both types have been rebuilt in recent times and are now on public display.

A vast throng of people attended Bletchley all day, every day, and a series of huts were built to accommodate them after the original buildings were filled to capacity. These huts and their extensions were numbered and each housed a different team. All three armed forces were involved, plus specialist civilians with many and varying skills, all being constantly fed with information garnered by a countrywide network of listeners and watchers. Undoubtedly, due to their efforts Churchill’s secret captains theoretically ended up looking over the shoulders of their opponents across the Channel. Most parts of the Park are open to visitors all year – for recorded details ring: 01908 640404.

‘Time Team’ visit the site of Blythburgh Priory

Television presenter Tony Robinson, with Mick Aston and Phil Harding from his team, came to north Suffolk in mid October, for a three-day dig in the ancient grounds of The Priory at Blythburgh. The dig was at the invitation of owners Nick and Susan Haward after Mr Haward, a builder, discovered bones while digging in the garden to lay a new patio. Although there were some wall ruins in the garden no previous excavation had been done, and Time Team were keen to discover more about the site. The dig was fairly complicated, but as light was failing on the third day they managed to locate the east wall of the abbey, and from there

were able to map the rest of the site. Philip Clarke, Time Team's executive producer said: "The abbey was much bigger than we expected and although when it was dissolved it was poor, it was clear from what we discovered that at one time it had been very wealthy. "It was a challenging dig, but this was more than made up for by the fascinating location," Some local residents were given a tour of the site and viewed the finds including a skull, a skeleton and the ruined walls. The programme will appear on Channel 4 in March 2009.

Another good read! John Warwicker (who last October told us about Churchill's secret army) has very recently published a comprehensive history of these World War II Auxiliary Units. This 320-page hard-back book titled **Churchill's Underground Army** (ISBN: 9781848325159 – at RRP of £25.00) is currently available through Frontline Books, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, S Yorkshire S70 2AS. For ordering details (in time for Christmas), and postal rate, please ring **01226 734555** – or visit: **www.frontline-books.com**

ANNUAL REPORT: Please provide any items you have for inclusion in the report to Ray Collins at Society meetings or by post. These may be in typed or handwritten form. It would help production if the text could be prepared in electronic form (ideally a Word file), but this is not essential. Articles can be mailed direct to Ray93@talktalk.net. Deadline is Christmas for typed items, if handwritten, a bit earlier please.