

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

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What's On in 2008

- 9 Oct 2008** **“The Changing Face of Kessingland Through the Ages” by Maureen Long**
– a well-known local historian and author of several books on Kessingland.
- 23 Oct 2008** **“Bletchley Park” by Margaret Griffiths** – as a qualified tour leader, Margaret will explain some of the secrets of this wartime code-breaking centre to us.
- 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.

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

We had a very well attended and interesting talk on 25 September, by Tim Pestell, who told us all about East Anglian Monasteries.

Recently, our Broad House Museum has been reasonably busy, considering we only open from 1.30–4.30 each day. We shall close down on 30 October, and a meeting for helpers and stewards will be held at 11.00 am on Saturday 1 November, followed by a buffet lunch. I shall soon be sending out invitations for this.

I have made a booking with the Lowestoft College, for Thursday 5 February, for our Society's annual meal. Please reserve your place(s) early for this popular evening and note we need to arrive from 7.00 pm for a 7.30 start.

Tonight we welcome Maureen Long to tell us about 'The Changing Face of Kessingland Through the ages'.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

11 September 2008

“Lowestoft Then and Now” – by Chris Brooks.

To start the Society’s autumn season, Chris Brooks (Chairman of the Jack Rose Old Lowestoft Society) entertained members with a wide variety of photographs and drawings. The first selection outlined the early limits of the town, and Chris showed a map that covered the development of the original High Street from the Lighthouse down to Battery Green. At that stage, London Road North, the harbour and docks had not been planned or constructed – the fishing and boat-building activities being carried out from the beach area – and the main routes into town ran from the Beccles Road, past the ancient settlement site of Akethorpe and its church (later to develop into St Margarets) to join the High Street, near the Town Hall. Chris then projected ancient images of the outskirts of the early town that many present found very difficult to identify, including a windmill near St Margarets Road, the Denes and various lighthouses; Oulton Broad before the lock was built, and the sparsely populated areas of Kirkley and Pakefield. Those early times saw much of the town’s trade carried out from the beach, which was used as a workplace by many fishermen, boat-builders and sea-going traders. The latter were bringing a wide range of goods to Lowestoft, including wood and coal, and exporting farm produce and fish to UK coastal towns and across to the Continent. No hard standing quays were employed, the shallow-draught boats being beached along the area of Lowestoft Ness or anchored offshore with smaller craft ferrying the cargoes.

Next came Samuel Morton Peto’s contribution. This was covered with marvellous photographs of the early harbour and the fish docks; also the railway and river links that he constructed to link Lowestoft to Norwich and London, which brought additional prosperity through the large increase in trade and leisure activities. However, the most popular part of the evening was devoted to late 19th- and early 20th-century pictures of well-known streets, mostly in the northern part of town. These allowed comparison of local building styles and also the huge changes that took place due to the war and the later road development. Some members had opinions on which was more beneficial. The biggest shift was the decline in public services and small shops, the latter being once seen on almost every corner away from the Street – this was the local name given to London Road North and was a source of confusion to many visitors over the years.

Many of the pictures reminded the audience of the Lowestoft tram, bus and rail services and the era of the bicycle, when a ‘bridger’ would be marked by workers, jockeying for position, ready to be first away when the barriers lifted. In 1928, one bus service even offered rides along the apron of an earlier sea wall. The power of the sea was demonstrated in photos of various storms and the resulting damage. A huge loss of income was caused by the decline of the herring fishing trade, for many years the largest provider of employment in the area. Members were also amazed to see the number of visiting boats, particularly from Scottish ports. Other photographic themes covered local characters, education and religious buildings, but when ‘time’ was called the appreciative audience was left wanting more of what is now a huge archive of the Town’s history.

25 September 2008

“East Anglian Monasteries” – by Tim Pestell.

At our second meeting, Tim Pestell, curator of archaeology, Norwich Castle Museum, spoke with authority about the history of monasteries and monastic life in East Anglia. He explained that East Anglia was originally isolated from the surrounding mainland by the Fens, and by high ground (the latter divided by a series of ditches) to the west of Ipswich. Among the monastic ruins are some well-known stars, such as Castle Acre, St Benets, and Bromholm priories. Many of the original buildings in East Anglia were of cruciform construction with central tower and transepts. Out of seventy-one listed sites dating from the time of the Conquest up to 1200 AD, when a number of Friaries started to appear, Sibton, near Yoxford, was the only known Cistercian monastery. Tim’s map of these sites showed three main clusters of occupation, probably linked to the controlling families who provided land and donations to help support the monks in the formative period. Many monasteries were built on high ground, but some sites, like Iken (a pre-conquest settlement in east Suffolk) and Bawsey, in west Norfolk, were positioned on a peninsula so as to provide some measure of natural defence, although additional walls and earthworks were sometimes constructed and can be seen today. Iken retains its waterside situation but Bawsey, a rich site, has merged with surrounding land due to the lowering of the sea level and drainage of the area close to the Wash. Tim’s superb photographs included some aerial views to demonstrate how crop marks can show the early roadways, banks and ditches with remarkable clarity.

Some wonderful examples of pottery, coinage and decorative jewellery have been retrieved over the centuries, some by ploughing and building work, others by field-walking and, more recently, by specialists using modern metal detecting equipment. Many such artefacts reside now in museum collections and help us understand the richness of talent and the amount of trade which existed in this area during those early centuries. Tim showed some slides of these, including a superb whalebone plaque from Blythburgh, some fine Anglo Saxon coins (sceattas) from Bawsey and six magnificent disc brooches from Pentney. He also showed how maps revealing the distribution of pottery and coins found by field-walking teach us about the changing life of the earlier inhabitants.

Have a look at the Society’s New Improved Website! – The address is still the same – see front of Newsletter.

Terry Weatherley has done a fine job in upgrading and re-presenting the Society’s website. The new-look site is user-friendly and more colourful. In addition to the current Newsletter, the website now incorporates a very useful archive section, where Society members and the public may access editions from previous years. Other useful links are provided to help members locate websites with historical and related themes.

Our Chairman has made arrangements with Lowestoft College for the Society’s Annual meal.

This will be held on Thursday 5 February at 7.00 pm for a 7.30 start. From past experience, this venue offers extremely good value and competitive rates for excellent fare. There is usually a very good attendance, so please make an early reservation with Lilian if you would

like to attend. The cost and menu will not be available until nearer the time – details of these will be published in the Society's Newsletter.

Note: the suggested evening visit to Lowestoft Records Office has been provisionally booked for 19 March.

This is extra to our published programme, with a limited number of places to be made available at £2 each. The theme will be '*Exploring Lowestoft's history in the archives*'. Further details will be given later and a reservation list opened at the Society meeting on 8 January 2008. Reservations will be on a first-come first-served basis.

A very good read! David Butcher (local historian, and well known to our Society) had his superb book "*Lowestoft 1550–1750*", launched at the Lowestoft Record Office last month. This top quality publication gives a well-written, detailed history of Lowestoft, its society, economy and topography, and should be on the shelf of all members. It would make a perfect Christmas present for those with an interest in the history of our town. The hard-back book contains a variety of maps, drawings and photographs, along with clear statistical tables. Its price reflects the thorough and very high standard of the lengthy research, also the professional presentation and printing by the specialist Boydell Press. It is currently available in Lowestoft through Waterstones or Panda Books.

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