

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

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What's On in 2008

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| 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 – this talk sheds light on our view of the archaeology of monasteries and monastic life in East Anglia. |
| 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. |

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

We are looking forward to our new programme that begins tonight with Chris Brooks giving a lively talk on *Lowestoft Then and Now*. We had two interesting outings in June – the first was a walk around the oldest part of Lowestoft, the High Street, the second took us into both Frostenden and Wrentham churches, after which fourteen of the group enjoyed a meal at the Five Bells, Wrentham.

Our Broad House Museum has been quite busy all season and we do not close down until Sunday 26 October. I shall soon be sending out letters inviting all of our helpers to our end of season meeting in the Bowls Pavilion opposite the Museum. This will be held at 11am on Saturday 1 November – there will be refreshments and we shall welcome any new ideas and suggestions to help improve the Museum.

With good wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of summer outings:

12 June 2008

“Evening Walk in Lowestoft High Street” – led by **Ivan Bunn**.

Members of the Society gathered outside The Crossing during a ten-minute shower, but thereafter enjoyed an uninterrupted and pleasant journey with Ivan through the oldest surviving part of the Town. Our expert guide pointed out some of the ancient houses (the oldest now remaining date from c.1500) still hiding within their modified frontages, most of which are shops. No. 36 High Street is probably the oldest remaining and has

superb timber framing with a jettied upper storey, a feature also seen in Nos. 102–4. Further examples are No. 27 (now the Royal Falcon) built 1550, and No. 80 (Flint House) dated 1586, which was once home to the Wilde family.

The town began near what we know today as Cemetery Corner, close to the small manor of Akethorpe, and started to relocate during the 14th century to the north end of the cliff, opposite the Hemplands. To make the area habitable, the cliff face had first to be terraced, giving space for gardens and outbuildings, plus the commercial trappings required by the local merchants. This terracing stretched south as far as the present Police Station and may still be traced at some points. Ivan's talk gave real life to the early buildings as he described many of the families who lived in them and explained their occupations and relationships through family, trade and religion.

Some of the town's early development can be worked out from the remaining street names and through the many unique reference documents in the Lowestoft Record Office. The town was indivisibly linked to the sea and many fish merchants lived in the better quality houses on the east side of the High Street, but there were also brewers, bakers, butchers and publicans. Development spread steadily south along the cliff, and also on the west side which was divided by the two main routes into town from Beccles direction. These met the High Street near the present Town Hall and Crown Street junctions. In the early centuries the Turnpike Road (now London Road North) did not exist, the river entrance was obstructed and what much later became the harbour was a large fresh-water fishery.

Ivan Bunn has assisted David Butcher (another local historian well known to our Society) with several aspects of the latter's superb book "Lowestoft 1550–1750", launched at the Lowestoft Record Office last month. This top quality publication, which gives a well-written, detailed history of Lowestoft, its society, economy and topography should be on the shelf of all members and will make a perfect present for those with an interest in the town's history. 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.

26 June 2008

"Annual Churches Outing and Supper" – led by Terry Weatherley.

About twenty members met in the quiet lane outside All Saints Church, Frostenden, on a warm June evening. The spacious churchyard was set aside for wildlife conservation and there was little opportunity to see the monuments, so Terry took us direct to look at the tower, which had been restored in the 1980s. Curiously, the lower (almost certainly Saxon) section has two mortars or querns built into the wall about 1 metre from the ground, possibly for decoration – the upper part has 13th century windows. The 14th-century groined porch had also been restored fairly recently, along with the aisle roof. The corbels of the ribs in the porch roof feature small animals and the centre boss a Pelican in piety. A considerable amount of graffiti (including the ragged staff of the Earl of Warwick, some dates and chalices) much of it centuries old and difficult to decipher, festoons both porch and nave doorway.

Inside the medieval nave door is a stoup within an arch. An altar cupboard incorporates 14th-century panels reused from a pulpit and the font, of similar period and partially defaced, has a 15th-century cover which, from its very small size, may have been cut down from its original proportions. The arcaded south aisle has sturdy benches and contains two inscribed biers – that given in 1925 has wheels and removed the need to bring coffins from a distance by cart. The remains of stairs that once led to the rood loft are embedded in the angle of the south wall and the stump of the rood beam is visible on the opposite wall. There are some excellent monuments in the chancel, including some for members of the Glover family. The touchstone tablet has decorative coloured armorials above and below. Little early glass has survived – the side windows in the chancel are late 19th-century work by Moore, who also provided the oak reredos, with its tracery, in 1916. There are pamment floors throughout and the panelled wagon roofs to nave and chancel were renewed in 1936.

Members then proceeded to Wrentham, St Nicholas, set at the old crossroads that was in the centre of the village until construction of the Turnpike (now A12) in the 18th century caused the residents to migrate further east. The ancient Guildhall, now a private house, is opposite the church and about 100 yards beyond is the village pound.

St Nicholas is set in a wooded churchyard that has one of the best collections of headstones in the area, created by skilled masons. These include a rare cast iron specimen and a vault cover of granite. The very grand 15th-century tower has an extensive base course of alternating shields and lozenges, with sacred hearts and roses, within wreaths. Three set-offs with drip courses add character to the tower and vaulted niches flank its large west doorway – there is a late perpendicular window taking up most of the wall above. The sound holes are decorated with shields and quatrefoils and a stair turret reaches the flushwork battlements on the north side. A north aisle was added in 1853 using Perpendicular and Decorated windows taken from the old north wall of the nave. Several tall flying buttresses of brick were added in the 1900s, to give support to the side walls, and the priest's door has been blocked up.

The exterior of the 15th-century porch is not in the best condition – a stoup survives within. The church is very spacious inside, with broad nave and chancel having neither arch nor screen. A rood stair (with new lancet) fits the corner between chancel and south aisle. All the roofs were restored in the 1830s, with hammerbeams in the nave and chancel. A 12ft stave locker, minus door, is alongside the main entrance and two fine hatchments (used in funerals of two members of the Brewster family in the 1700s) hang to the left of the tower arch. To the right of this arch is a particularly fine, 10ft stained glass panel of Christ carrying his cross. The panel was supplied by Royal William Lilly (born in Wrentham in 1806, who worked in the village as a painter, plumber and glazier for most of his life) and originally formed the centre of the high altar reredos installed by the rector Stephen Clissold in 1850. .

A 19th-century font is at the west end but its 15th-century predecessor, found in the rectory garden in the 1930s, is now at the east end of the north aisle. A fine 15th-century-glass depiction of St Nicholas, made up with medieval fragments into a centre panel, appears nearby and below it is a well-painted head. This part of the church forms a memorial to the Clissold family and also has superb quality glass from the 1850s, created by Hardman. Additional fine 1850s glass, possibly by Edward Baillie, appears in the tracery of the south aisle side windows. A brass of Ele Bowet who died in 1400 lies to the north side of the chancel, the earliest effigy of a lady in Suffolk. Another brass, on the north sanctuary wall, commemorates Humphrey Brewster, who died 1593, and whose family were Lords of the Manor from the time of Edward VI. Several other fine memorials are positioned in the chancel.

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

We owe a real vote of thanks to Terry Weatherley for the fine job he has done 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, Terry has incorporated 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.

Please note arrangements are being discussed for a visit to Lowestoft Records Office – probably in March.

This is an extra outing, with a strictly limited number of places to be made available, at £2 each, in the New Year.