

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2009/10

12 Nov 2009 "A History of the Sparrow's Nest Theatre" by Brian Soloman – the former amenities officer for Lowestoft has a wealth of entertaining, first-hand stories on this subject.

26 Nov 2009 "The Anglo-Saxon Burials at Lakenheath" by Joanna Caruth – Joanna describes the Saxon warrior skeleton found here, with horse, as absolutely unique.

28 Jan 2010 "A Box of Delights" by Terry Weatherley – curiosities discovered in local auctions. Yet another interesting topic discovered and presented by this versatile local historian.

4 Feb 2010 "The Society's Winter Meal" – the Committee have again booked Lowestoft College for Thursday 4 February. Cost per head is £17.00 – arrive 7.00 pm for meal at 7.30 pm.

Most meetings are held in the SOUTH LOWESTOFT METHODIST CHURCH HALL, at the corner of LONDON ROAD SOUTH and CARLTON ROAD, at 7.30 pm (Entry via LONDON ROAD SOUTH)

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

Our Museum has had a very good season, and we closed at the end of October until Spring 2010. I invited all our stewards and helpers to a meeting, with refreshments, in the Bowls Pavilion opposite the museum on Saturday 7th November to exchange ideas and suggestions. Also, Mike Chester told us of all the latest additions to our porcelain collection, and Ray Collins gave a report on the museum volunteers and their successful running of the museum.

I wrote to thank Harold Whitewood of the Cine & Camcorder Club for a very enjoyable evening of films covering Lowestoft subjects including, amongst many, the herring fishing, the town scores and New Lowestoft Porcelain.

Tonight we welcome Brian Soloman who will tell us the History of the Sparrow's Nest Theatre.

With all good wishes **Lilian Fisher**

PS Please note the details overleaf about booking your places early for the Winter Meal at Lowestoft College.

Details of recent events:

8 October 2009 – "Mishap and Misdemeanour in Kirkley Roads" – by David Butcher

David brought to life scenes that involved maritime trade and illegal activity in the Lowestoft, Pakefield and Kirkley areas. Kirkley Roads (havens) are sheltered waters off Lowestoft, inside a line of four sand banks that were probably deposited by a southward drift of material from further up the east coast of England. This ancient drift was also responsible for the build up of coastline upon which Great Yarmouth was built. The size of Lowestoft around Domesday has been estimated at 90–100 persons of mainly agricultural stock, with no established fishing, and the neighbouring village groups to north and south were substantially larger. David outlined the further development and migration of Lowestoft town from its original site, near Cemetery Corner, to the newly terraced cliff, the north end of which developed into the High Street, though the latter was still

linked by Oulton Road to the main roads north and south. By 1350 the population had reached 3–400 and short streets of terraced houses appeared on the west side of the High Street. Early records show that local levels of taxation and growth of population were not always aligned (for example St Margaret's church remains the third longest in Suffolk (after St. James and St. Mary, Bury St. Edmunds) and, when built, it represented evidence of greater local wealth than is reflected in the published taxation lists. In the 14th century Lowestoft had no usable harbour, as a sand bar obstructed the mouth of the River Waveney, and all boats were landed on and operated from the beach. During times of bad weather, trading vessels sheltering in or passing through the Roads might be cast ashore, and then overpowered, or instead, captured at sea by local crews who helped themselves to any valuable cargo. The local population in those centuries was very violent and prepared to take strong measures in both attack and defence.

Substantial written evidence of misdemeanours is in the Patent Rolls, Close Rolls and Fine Rolls held at the Public Record Office at Kew. The published calendars (extracts) of these documents, written on vellum, are to be found at the Forum Library, Norwich, and also at the UEA. Amongst other items the Rolls record the granting of charters, privileges and Crown commissions, letters and patents (foreign and domestic), plus Royal Grants and Appointments of Royal Officers. When transcribed, this heavy-sounding list reveals a period of mystery and intrigue, with an east coast population controlled and governed by a set of local characters that might be loosely compared to the privateers of later generations. Several fascinating case histories uncovered during David's research into these misdemeanours were explained in the talk, and show that customs-fraud, piracy, and theft were quite common in the 14th century, involving exports of grain and malt, leather, fleeces and red herrings – imports included wine from Bordeaux, grain, flour, pig iron, bullion and coin, seditious literature and even illegal immigrants. Miscreants were listed by name in court proceedings and often ordered to pay compensation, or return certain stolen items. However, the penalties must frequently have been evaded as the same names occur repeatedly. Government officials were given permission to search ships and seize quantities of herrings above the limit of licence for export, and other forbidden export and import items were also confiscated. The prime offenders were often those in charge, including the leading townspeople, Crown manorial lords and police constables. Later Customs Officers were appointed in the Lowestoft area and the offences became less frequent.

David's talk also covered local rivalry with Great Yarmouth. The grant of a market at Lowestoft had drawn in a great deal of business from the surrounding area, but even so town growth was quite slow and it took until the 1500s for the population to reach 1,500. Great Yarmouth, whose harbour mouth was awkwardly placed near Corton, was worried by this growing status of Lowestoft to the south, and also of Caister to the north. A great deal of irregular sea dealing was noticed, so Yarmouth negotiated a deal with the Crown whereby they were allowed to add the Royal seal to their crest and given control of shore landings within 7 leagues (leucas) of their port. This (at the time rather vague distance) nominally gave them power over all sea landings at Lowestoft, whose sailors were intensely irritated. Eventually, after prolonged dispute, often physical, a league was officially established as one mile, and the requisite distance marked by a large post at Tramps Alley, Corton. This left Lowestoft in control of its own sea approaches and brought an end to the long running 'herring wars'.

Further information concerning maritime events and other trades in Lowestoft can be found in David Butcher's definitive publication – *Lowestoft 1550–1750; Development and Change in a Suffolk Coastal Town* – published by The Boydell Press, Woodbridge ISBN 978–1–84383–390–1

22 October 2009 – "A Visit to the Cine and Camcorder Club" – introduced by Harold Whitewood

On this occasion members were guests of the Lowestoft Cine and Camcorder Club, who are to be congratulated on their superb conversion of the last remaining portion of the Sparrow's Nest Theatre into a very well equipped and comfortable bijou cinema. The evening's programme was chosen by the hosts to provide a suitable mix of local topics ranging from history to humour, and was much appreciated by our members. First, came a sensitively shot film of the changing light and reflections on water at Oulton Broad. Then followed an acerbic commentary on first impressions of Lowestoft, as might have been gained by someone arriving by rail – this caused much amusement by showing the roofless station with boarded up windows facing the dilapidated frontage of shops on the "Tuttles' site. The next item, from the 1950s and typical of the period, was a promotional colour film of the town showing the beach, promenade and shopping centre, plus speedboat racing at Oulton Broad. Then came some 1960s film of Lowestoft tradespeople at work. Its images showed bread-making in Bushell's bakery, work in the cake-making and decorating department of Waller's, also manufacturing rock at the tiny Foreman's sweet factory in Pakefield and manning production lines in the CWS

Canning Factory at Waveney Drive, and reminded viewers of the incredible changes in technology that have happened over the last forty years. The next item was a modern, hilarious, club-produced comedy short (shown as a complete contrast) before some rescued and restored pre-war black and white sequences of the herring fishing industry, the latter including sailing and steam drifters, the herring dock and fish market, and the associated railway sidings. Using modern techniques, club members then provided an excellent documentary (with a message) outlining the present status and possible developments for Ness Point – this was followed by a second, very witty, club comedy short. The first half ended with a history of some of the ships built at Richards Ironworks on the south quay and, after its closure, the building and opening of the ASDA superstore on the redeveloped Richards site.

After the interval came a humorous skit based on the radio broadcast style of the 'shipping forecast', the Lowestoft Players then featured in the club's workshop production 'Amorillo' (shot partly on location in Lowestoft Town and currently entered in an enthusiasts film competition). Next was a documentary on Lowestoft Porcelain 2000, then a cine-club member's colour film cleverly edited to match an appropriate song showcasing a steam rally. Several cine clips of Lowestoft circa 1970 followed, illustrating major updates like the bascule bridge, the construction of the one-way road system and the new police station. These period clips had the audience buzzing as they strived to recognize parts of the town before the demolition of older buildings and the construction of brick walls delineating the new routes. A third club comedy from the club produced gales of laughter, before a very well researched documentary showing features of the 'Lowestoft town scores' brought the extended evening to a close.

Bookings needed in good time for the 2010 Winter Meal at Lowestoft College, St Peter's Street!

The date is confirmed as Thursday 4 February and the cost per person will be £17.00. As we have only one meeting in January it is essential that your place reservations are in by Christmas. It will help us if those who have an email address could supply it to the Treasurer [Ray93@talktalk.net] for the menu to be forwarded when it is available.

Replacement required for next year for our retiring Programme Arranger, John Knowles

John will stand down at the end of June 2010. Your committee wishes to acknowledge the excellent job he has done since taking over, and the fine topics he arranged for us. Can we please have a volunteer to take over this position? There is some help available, and details of previous presenters, but we are also looking for members' suggestions on new topics or outings. As in the past, talks from our members' are very welcome and help to keep costs down.

Annual Report: Please bring or post any article(s) you have for inclusion in the report to Ray Collins during the next few weeks. These may be typed or handwritten. It would help production of the report if text could be prepared in electronic form (e.g. Word/Excel file), but this is not essential. The deadline is Christmas for electronic and typed items – if handwritten, send in a bit earlier please.

If you are able to provide electronic files they can be emailed direct to: Ray93@talktalk.net

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