

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Volume 37 Number 2

February 2009

What's On in 2009

- 12 Feb 2009** “Second World War Defences on the Suffolk Coast” by David Sims –
David comes from the University of East Anglia.
- 26 Feb 2009** “Funding and Building Corton Village School (1894–95)” by Don Friston and
“The Suffolk Coastline – nature and man (covering 700,000 years)” by Keith Davies –
two short illustrated talks on local history given by these Society members.
- 12 Mar 2009** “The Great Yarmouth Archaeological map” by Ken Hamilton –
An outline of this historical document.

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

On Thursday 5 February thirty-five of us met in the dining room at Lowestoft College, where we all had really good and enjoyable meals. In fact, it was a very enjoyable evening.

Our museum opens at Easter. However, three of our regular stewards have had to resign and I am hoping for new volunteers to get in touch with me, as the museum is due to open every day from Easter until the end of September from 1.30 pm 4.30 pm.

John Knowles is collecting names for our evening visit to the Records Office on Thursday 19 March. This addition to our programme is limited to 30 people – the cost is £2.00 per head and you may reserve your place tonight.

Tonight, David Sims from the UEA will tell us all about ‘Second World War Defences on the Suffolk Coast’.

With all good wishes **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

8 January 2009

“John owes me sixpence!” – a talk by Terry Weatherley

‘*John owes me sixpence*’ is the very last entry in a diary that owes its existence to a bet between two brothers. John Burnaby bet his brother Geoffrey that he could not keep a diary every day for the whole of 1912. The notes were made in a Boots scribbling diary, price 6d. It was profusely illustrated as the writer was a talented artist and at times preferred to draw his entries.

Terry, in the first talk for 2009, related the story of Geoffrey Burnaby who had two younger brothers, Hugh and John. Their father was for many years the vicar of Ashfordby but after his untimely death in 1908 the family found themselves in reduced circumstances. The father’s sister, who had married a Captain Prickett and lived near Lowestoft, suggested they move to Ashby, near Somerleyton, Suffolk, since she had found the Somerleyton Curate no longer used Ashby Rectory. The family soon relocated and Geoffrey divided his time between Ashby and Haileybury in Hertfordshire where he attended school.

In early January, the diary records the Burnaby family visiting their friends, the Combes, where they enjoyed a horse-racing board game called Minoru (Minoru was the name of the King’s horse) and it seems a surprising game for a vicar’s family. Mrs Pankhurst spoke in Gt Yarmouth that month but the Burnaby boys didn’t go. Later, a series of visits were made to the Crossleys, at Somerleyton Hall, whose children enjoyed their company. ‘Let’s invite Geoffrey over’ they said, he always makes us laugh. Sir Savile Crossley moved in exalted circles and frequently entertained society guests, including members of the Royal family. Another neighbour was Lieutenant Colonel Hill Mussenden Leathes, the eccentric author and Lay rector of Herringfleet church, who lived in Herringfleet Hall and who until 1908 had been in dispute with the Bishop of Norwich. Leathes argued that he was Prior of St Olaves and was therefore independent of the Bishop’s Diocese, and able to appoint his own ministers.

Then it was time for Geoffrey to pack and return to Haileybury, the public school in Hertfordshire where he was a boarder. He was allocated a poorly equipped room for study and slept in a dormitory. He records how he had to furnish the study, including providing the carpet; he also wrote that the study smelt of mice, and of how he trapped several in the following period. Haileybury introduced its pupils to modern education with science lessons, and Geoffrey put down that he did not enjoy a lecture from Dr Stephen Paget (son of James Paget). The students ordered their schoolbooks from Mudie’s famous bookshop in New Oxford Street.

Easter 1912 was early, and after church preparations for the festival Geoffrey spent the holiday reading, writing, composing, and even listening (unsuccessfully) for the nightingale. He noted the boat race was a flop, with both Oxford and Cambridge capsizing, but, surprisingly, never mentions the loss of the Titanic. In spring and summer the Burnabys kept active by walking and cycling, in the countryside, often visiting the coast and also, just occasionally, the Coronet cinema (now part of Chadds) at Lowestoft.

The summer term brought the saga of his misdirected private box (eventually found at another school, with the cake it contained still eatable) and his School’s Jubilee torchlight procession, which was a great success despite his nervousness over the procedure. When he returned for his summer break he was able to see an air race (a rare thing in those days) and, later, a fete in Lowestoft. Soon after came the great floods in East Anglia – Norwich being badly affected. The diarist illustrated this exciting event. He also went to Cambridge with his brother John, to see the King, and ascended Beccles church tower with his brother Hugh.

His return to school in autumn 1912 brought glorious weather (he recorded sadly). Most of the term was taken up with sport and fieldwork. The diary had become a problem – both writing and keeping it safe from curious readers. He complained that his study and favourite seat had been taken over by a cat. At the

end of term came another trip to Cambridge, to see his brothers act in the play “Oedipus Rex” performed in the original Greek.

The diary bet, it is believed, was never paid off. The idea of publishing “Uncle Geoffrey’s Diary” was proposed by G.V. Burnaby the son of the debtor as a tribute to his uncle on the centenary of Geoffrey’s birth. G.V. (also a Geoffrey) recalls from his own childhood that whenever his aunt Margaret (Mazzie in the Diary) visited the family she was always requested to bring the diary with her.

Young John Burnaby obtained a first class degree at Cambridge, went to the Dardanelles in 1914 and then the Somme, where he was wounded. He returned to Trinity to a succession of posts, ending as Regius Professor of Divinity in 1952, and retiring in 1958. His brother Hugh became Fellow and Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. As for Geoffrey, he also went to the Dardanelles, and survived, and then to the Somme. Like so many from Haileybury, his name appears on the Roll of Honour!

22 January 2009

“How did that get there?” and “Not many people know that!” – by Ron Ashman

‘How did that get there’, the first of two short talks by Ron Ashman, explained the appearance in 1919 of a World War I tank next to Lowestoft Lighthouse. The answer was that the government had encouraged the public to invest in War Bonds and War Savings Certificates and those places that raised the best totals were awarded a tank, supposedly brought back after active service in France and Flanders (many were believed to have been training tanks that had never been abroad), as an acknowledgement of their efforts. Only 265 were awarded nationally, just three came to Suffolk at Lowestoft, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds – Norwich and King’s Lynn were the only examples in Norfolk. The female Mk IV tank, with four machine guns each side would have used a crew of eight – two drivers (one being the commander) two gearsmen and four gunners; the male Mk IV tank had two machine guns and one six-pounder gun each side. The Lowestoft tank travelled, with guns removed, by rail from Bovington camp to Lowestoft North Station from where a Tank Corps crew drove it to the Lighthouse. The *Lowestoft Journal* reported its progress ... The wind blew with hurricane-force and the rain pelted down in torrents. Notwithstanding there was a good gathering at the North Station siding, where the tank reposed in all its glory... It was swung round in its own length, slewed up to the roadway, got straight, and ambled forward at a dignified pace to the Yarmouth Road, into which it turned with the ease of a bicycle... The tank then proceeded to the appointed site, accompanied by the Mayor and other dignitaries and turned onto a prepared runway of planks. The report continues... In a moment the machine was straightened and in position. Not, however, before considerable damage had been done to the grass surrounding the base, which was literally piled in a heap by the huge machine. The crowd did not cheer... Only the Warren School pupils (from a planned large school group) joined the welcoming party braving the appalling weather. Soon after, the delivery crew removed the guns and drive chains to make sure its useful life was over – there was considerable unrest after the war both in military and civilian groups.

It is believed that most communities did not really welcome the tanks as they were not actual war trophies and were a visible reminder of bad times, and things they would rather forget. The town was to remember its fallen in better ways, with a hospital, a social club for discharged and demobilised soldiers, sailors and airmen and a monument, with memorial tablet inscribed with names of the fallen, erected at the Royal Plain in August 1921.

The Lowestoft tank lasted until 1937 when it was considered a rusty eyesore and sold to local metal merchants Seago & Harrison for scrap, fetching a very modest amount. The sole surviving example of the 265 tanks that were presented is in Ashford, Kent. It was preserved by chance, having been converted years ago by a local electricity company to house a transformer. This tank, a male Mk IV, was restored and repainted in 1998 and is now protected from the weather by a substantial canopy.

‘Not many people know that!’ The second story featured Roy Edwards, who after joining the Navy at fifteen did service in the Great War and was finally invalided out in 1931, with the rank of Lieutenant, following two years in submarines. After this he worked as pool manager at the Sandford Park Lido,

Cheltenham, then the outdoor pool in Maidenhead, and was finally appointed in 1937 as superintendent at a new swimming baths in Crewe. He remained there until 1939 when recalled by the Admiralty, upgraded to Lt Commander, and appointed to HMS Watchful, Great Yarmouth, as Rendering Mines Safety Officer NORE Command. He was based at Hastings but his main work area stretched from Clacton and Harwich to Scarborough. It included much of the East Coast convoy route running between the Firth of Forth and the Thames. By June 1942 he had become a legend, roaming the east coast beaches to order, to defuse and deal with a variety of lethal mines. He also acted as instructor in that field for NORE Command.

On 11 June 1942 Bill Ayers, an auxiliary coastguard, reported a mine in the breakers north of Tibbenham's Score, at Corton, north of Lowestoft, to Lt Com Edwards. It was identified as a submarine laid, T-type magnetic mine, over seven feet long and containing a 507lb explosive charge. Two had already been defused elsewhere and Edwards asked permission to attempt to disarm the Corton one. Knowing that this type of mine was very dangerous, and reputed to be booby-trapped, his superiors Cmdr Ashe and Captain Maitland-Dougall, Director of the Department of Torpedoes and Mine Investigation Section said they would arrange for a specialist from HMS Vernon to do the job. Later that day Edwards repeated his request and, because of local conditions, permission was reluctantly given – John Howard, an American Navy Ensign who had transferred to Naval Ordnance in 1942, was to assist. In late afternoon they examined the mine but withdrew smartly when a strange noise came from it. After half an hour they returned, leaving Cmdr Theobald, a colleague from Great Yarmouth, on the cliff-top recording their progress. Edwards removed the cover plate while the young Ensign watched and then began work on the smaller plate beneath. After removing the securing nuts he was seen trying to force it free using a piece of driftwood. Soon after, a tremendous explosion signalled the virtual obliteration of two very brave men – the time was 6.02 pm. The Navy later discovered that the arming clock lay beneath this plate and had been booby-trapped. The force of the explosion was so great that sand landed on a train at Corton Railway Station, a considerable distance away, and nearby, Cliff Cottages were damaged.

Sailors billeted at the Civil Service Camp in Corton (now Warners) collected the fragmentary remains of the two brave officers and placed them in a single coffin. Later, after a service aboard ship, conducted in dock with a large guard of honour, the Royal Naval vessel took the remains five miles off Great Yarmouth for sea burial. Commander Edwards, who had successfully dealt with over 180 mines in two years, was awarded the DSO and, later, a commendation for 'coolness and devotion to duty'. Ensign Howard, the first American from the US Navy to lose his life in World War II, had a US Navy ship named after him. Cmdr Edward's daughter unveiled a plaque in his memory at the swimming baths in Crewe in September 1944.

A local memorial plaque, dating from 1946, was moved from the redundant St James's Church to St Nicholas Church in Great Yarmouth and re-dedicated on 9 June, 2002, on the same day that a brand new memorial was unveiled at Corton Village. Members of Cmdr Edward's family, plus representatives from the US and Royal Navies, the British Legion, the Wrens and the RNVR attended both ceremonies.

Note: the evening visit to Lowestoft Records Office has been booked for 19 March at 7.30 pm.

This is extra to our published programme, with a limited number of 30 places available at £2 each. The theme will be '*Exploring Lowestoft's history in the archives*' and Bill Wexler, the Recording Officer (and member of the LA&LHS) will be the presenter. When people book, it would be useful if they could state any aspects of local history they're particularly interested in. Bill will then try to cover these topics, or some of them at least. A reservation list was opened for members at the last Society meeting and is available again tonight for those who wish to add their names. Reservations will be on a first-come first-served basis. Should there be spare places, these will be offered to family and guests of members.

The Society's Broad House Museum has now been awarded Accreditation status and will, in future, be allowed to use various versions of the logo shown here on its letterhead and publications.

The successful bid for this award was achieved due to the concentrated efforts of a number of members of both the museum and the LA&LHS, together with the help of their various contacts. The Society would like to express its thanks and recognition to all these people for their work and persistence throughout the long application process.

.....

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