

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

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What's On in 2009

12 Mar 2009 "The Great Yarmouth Archaeological Map" by Ken Hamilton –
An outline of this historical document.

19 Mar 2009 "Visit to Lowestoft Records Office" hosted by Bill Wexler – This addition to our programme is limited to 30 people and is almost fully booked – the cost is £2.00 per head, subject to availability. John Knowles is collecting names now.

26 Mar 2009 "Koning Olie" by Ray Collins –
The story of the early Oil Industry.

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

Tonight we shall welcome Ken Hamilton, who will tell us all about 'The Great Yarmouth Archaeological Map'

Our Museum opens on Monday 6 April, a few days before Good Friday, and will remain open until the end of October. Before this there will be a meeting of stewards and helpers in the Bowls Pavilion, opposite the Museum, at 11 am on Saturday 21 March – there will be refreshments too! I trust all involved have received my letters and hope that we shall have enough stewards and helpers to keep the Museum open every day throughout the season. I look forward to seeing you all on Saturday 21 March.

On 19 March is our visit to the Records Office, which is almost fully booked (see note above), and we shall also look forward to Ray Collins' talk on "Koning Olie" on 26 March.

With all good wishes **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent talks:

12 February 2009

"Second World War Defences on the Suffolk Coast" – by David Sims

David Sims from the UEA spoke on 12 February about 'Second World War Defences on the Suffolk Coast'. His talk covered the period 1940–1944 and gave details of the building and manning of coastline defences from Lowestoft, south to Aldeburgh. The declaration of war, in September 1939, had triggered defensive precautions in the UK, but when Germany attacked Norway in April 1940, the pace was stepped up. It was very obvious to the government and military powers that any invasion of Britain by sea would be concentrated first on the flatter stretches of the southern counties, they being closest to France, followed by air, or combined sea and air attack

on vulnerable parts of the east coast. Lowestoft, Felixstowe and Harwich being ports suitable for Naval use were particular targets.

Parts of the Suffolk coastline have low to medium cliffs, but there are also many points where the narrow beaches and gently sloping dunes would have allowed invading troops and vehicles to arrive by landing craft. They could then drive directly ashore and quickly penetrate the first lines of defence, using a pincer movement to cut off key towns and open up access for following heavier units. To prevent, or at least delay this threat, a huge effort by the armed forces was needed to get defences in place and manned. David explained that within just a few months in 1940 the beaches were mined and protected by scaffolding and barbed wire; also at some points, pointed metal rails (known as 'dragon's teeth') were embedded vertically in the sand. Local builders were contracted to assist in constructing pillboxes and the thousands of concrete cubes required to prevent or hinder the access of invading tanks. When the defences were complete, members of the public were excluded from the beach and its surroundings.

A string of coastal batteries, mostly with 6 in guns, ranged northward from Bawdsey to Hopton, covering spots where the cliffs were low or easily scalable. Home Guard forces manned many of the batteries. Radar stations were positioned at Orford, Dunwich and Hopton, while anti-aircraft batteries were installed at numerous sites between Harwich and Lowestoft, including larger inland places such as Leiston, Saxmundham and Beccles. There was one at Lound to protect the amphibious-tank training centre at Fritton Lake. To help counter night raids most of the batteries were equipped with two searchlights. Different calibre, mainly ex-naval guns were commandeered to set up these defences, including 9.2 in Howitzers and (to the west of Leiston) some 25 pdrs. After the war outdated guns were sent for scrapping. Halesworth, Blythburgh and Westleton each supported a garrison, but the manning of defences in between was largely covered by the Home Guard – by 1942 three companies of soldiers occupied the area south of the River Blyth. Like the Waveney, the Blyth formed a stop line and a pillbox covered every crossing. A mobile armoured train with two 3in guns and crew of twenty-six was stabled at Saxmundham.

Photographs, drawings, maps and diagrams showed many types of local defensive structure, and both British and Luftwaffe aerial photos of the coast around Southwold were compared. David Sims has done much fieldwork to reveal that a surprising amount of defences remain, although largely hidden by weathering and almost seventy years of vegetation. The most common relics are pillboxes (found covering key points and road junctions throughout east Suffolk) but there are also a few gun emplacements and underground shelters. The South Lowestoft battery observation post and nearby gun casemate are still on open view by the CEFAS building at Pakefield, but not recognised by today's generation – other gun batteries were positioned on the South Pier and at Gunton Cliff near to Heather Road. All the guns, mines, scaffolding and barbed wire were removed at the end of the war and the beach opened up once more. A few of the 3ft 6 in square concrete cubes used as anti-tank obstructions survive from those that surrounded the Lowestoft area, but the extensive and deep anti-tank and anti-aircraft ditches dug along the coast and around most of the key towns and military sites were filled in after peace was declared and are difficult to find. Some smaller trenches, and the bases of a few gun sites remain, now mainly overgrown, but may be traced by the enthusiast. Runways from quite a few wartime aerodromes survive – some, like Ellough, Seething and Parham are still used for club flying and practise but most now serve as bases for farm activities and storage. Roads in north Lowestoft carry the names of Naval shore bases Europa, Mylodon and Minos and the Patrol Service Memorial Museum may be visited in the town's Sparrow's Nest Gardens.

The left photo taken in 1999 of the pillbox overlooking the road junction at St Peter's Church, Carlton Colville, reveals it to be the small, square type with additional low embrasure for a Piat gun. The 2009 photo shows how effectively a shrub and a Russian vine can conceal this relic of WWII.



26 February 2009 – two short talks

Talk 1 "The Funding and Building of Corton School 1895–96" – by Don Friston

Corton Village in the mid 1800s was much smaller, and on the 1830s map continued north along the cliff, level with the church. There were two farms, the mill, a small school, and a few cottages by each farm. Life then was hard but conditions in the village were about to change. Jeremiah James Colman (youngest partner in the Norwich Mustard company) purchased a house on the cliff for his family summer residence in 1869 and brought a 'golden era' to Corton. A wealthy man, he extended the house (built near the old coastguard station site) naming it *The Clyffe* and also developed Corton Gardens, an estate surrounding his house that stretched south as far as Tramp's Alley. Each summer the Colman family might spend up to 3 months there and entertained a stream of important visitors, these included the politician William Gladstone in the early 1890s.

JJC also bought surrounding land and began to build homes (marked with a 'JJC' plaque and date). Over two decades he was generous to and provided much work for locals, and also organised new facilities – a village room, with bowls green, upgrading the rocket life-saving equipment and encouraging a village choir. He also helped establish a Methodist Chapel in 1874, although he was a Baptist, and worshipped there until he died in 1898.

In 1895, JJC moved the Friston family into Hawthorn Lodge (the cottage in the village street, opposite the Estate) – the first rental agreement shows £5 per annum. The tenancy was settled on George and his wife Mary at a modest rent for the rest of their natural life – George died in 1940, but the tenancy remained intact until Mary's death in 1951. (The cottage remains in fine condition today although its garden is much reduced.) After the deaths of Caroline and Jeremiah Colman, the family interest in the village seemed to disappear. *The Clyffe* was dismantled in 1917 and its contents were sold. Notleys of Lowestoft auctioned off the Estate and all its landownings in 1921.

Corton distributed a London-printed monthly parish magazine entitled '*The Dawn of Day*' wrapped in a localising news sheet that cost an extra penny – the following notes are mostly from the 1894 and 1895 issues. March 1894 states that the offices (toilets) at the existing school, opposite the Methodist Chapel, had been condemned at the last inspection. Although the schoolroom was not condemned it was over sixty years old and fell short of contemporary standards, the infant's room in particular being too small. The feeling was that a new and larger school would be the best solution, so the matter was laid before village benefactor Mr Colman by vicar William E Smith.

Jeremiah James Colman ...with great liberality agreed to buy the old school and site. Provided a new school is built and playgrounds laid out, amply meeting the wants of the place, he is willing to give a large and convenient piece of land, and £500 for the [old] building.... However, this generous proposition would need to be matched by at least another £500 from the village in order to build a good school.

In the April issue the fired-up vicar heads the first list of contributors with his (in those days) massive donation of £50. In addition, he planned church collections on 27 May, 15 July and 19 August, plus a sale of work in July. Such were his powers of persuasion that £154.18s.0d was raised in the first month. Records show this initial enthusiasm could not be maintained; later the contributions vary from 6d up to 5 guineas, with a few larger windfalls from dignitaries (most probably visitors to the Colman home).

Meanwhile village life continued, and in May parents were reminded that the Schools Inspector was due on 20 June. Attendance was vital, as on this was based the yearly Education Grant for the school. Summer 1894 wasn't the best and on 12 July ...*the Sunday-school Treat was seriously marred by frequent heavy showers...* Rain also affected the sale of work, now rescheduled to 2 August, but despite the weather a net profit of £54 was added to the £25 (1st grant) from Lowestoft and Lotheringland Church Schools Aid Association making the total to date £333.12s.8d.

Harvest holidays were from 10 August to 11 September (a period which might be approved by parents today). In that month the new Education Grant was confirmed at £80.19s.0d but raised to £83.5s.6d because of a 'good' result in the Boys Drawing Examinations (held earlier on 2 May). This was the largest grant awarded to date.

By October the fund had crept up to £356.4s.3d and the vicar now appealed vigorously for an additional £40 before applying to the Charity Commission for permission to do the land exchange. His prayers were answered, for in November Mrs Archibald Smith (was she related?) donated £50 and the Church Extension Association £20. Also in November a long-promised and eagerly awaited tea was given to the schoolchildren by the indefatigable vicar. This was due to the average school attendance for a week hitting 90% in June. Another tea was promised should 91% be reached.

December collections were very low but January 1895 brought a bonanza, with a further £100 from JJ Colman MP, also a £20 grant from Suffolk Education Society and £10 (2nd grant) from L & L Church Schools Aid Assoc. Allowing for the £500 purchase of the old school, the plans could go ahead immediately!

In February, Mr Colman confirmed the new school site would be the west part of the land formerly known as the Town[?] Pightle. This was preferable to the earlier proposed site south of the mill. During March and April, plans were sent to the Education Department and approved – all tenders were to be in by 13 May, with mid-May forecast for the building work to begin. The contract stipulated completion in seven months.

The building preparations went ahead from 30 May and on 12 June 1895, in a hurriedly arranged ceremony preceded by a few prayers from the vicar, and with only a few persons present, the first spadeful of concrete was thrown into the foundations by Margaret Lilian Smith (vicar's wife?). A few days later (this time in beautiful weather) the children enjoyed their 1895 Sunday-school Treat in the Vicarage garden, but ...*were unable to play in the adjoining field as the hay was not yet carried...*

The village was now alarmed by the serious illness of Mrs Caroline Colman. Sadly, after a temporary recovery she relapsed and died aged 64 on 5 July. (JJC commissioned two windows for the Chapel in her memory.)

More cheerful news came when the Inspector's report showed a general improvement in pupils' schoolwork. The new grant per head was 17s.8d for older children and 15s for infants (previously 16s.1d and 11s) but was still below the national average of 18s.1½d per head. Because average school attendances had been up in 1894 the new annual grant totalled a record £100.

At the end of July, the brickwork on the new school was almost complete and carpenters were ready to start on the roof. The vicar made another urgent appeal (this time aimed at visitors) to help find the £250 still required to cover final expenses. In August the roof was nearing completion and Mr Tovell's picture of the building must have been taken around this time. School summer holidays for 1895 were given as 9 August to 11 September.

The September donations list was the longest to date, though by no means the largest total, and included £1 from Mr GE Hawes of Norwich (who was building the school). Presumably he took on local contract labour, as daily travel from Norwich was hardly practicable in 1895.

October saw the school roof complete and the internal structures nearly so. Surprisingly, at this time Miss Woods the schoolmistress gave notice that she had accepted another engagement at Bury St Edmunds and would leave at Christmas. In November, the ever-industrious vicar reported he hoped to engage a Master to take her place.

Due to a violent outbreak of measles around 17 November, affecting almost every family in the village with children, the Sanitary Authority closed the school until at least 9 December. The month's donations were

reported to be very small and the next list would not be published until the New Year. The New School was due to be completed near the end of January, and finally opened on 3 February 1896.

THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN

The new school plan listed two rooms for older children, one 30ft x 21ft 6in (accommodating 64) and one 24ft 3in x 21ft 6in (accommodating 52) – these could be made into one by sliding doors. A separate room 24ft 3in x 20ft would hold 60 infants. Each room could be easily enlarged at a later date if needed. There were separate entrances, and cloakrooms for boys, girls and infants, a spacious playground for boys, and another shared by girls and infants.

TENDERS FOR BUILDING THE SCHOOL

Mr WE Sewell, Lowestoft £1471 Messrs Allerton & Earl, Lowestoft £1445

Mr George Beckett, Gt Yarmouth £1365 Mr John Ward, Gt Yarmouth £1355.10s

Mr JFW Bray, Gt Yarmouth £1276 Mr F Grimble, Gt Yarmouth £1244

Mr GE Hawes, Norwich £1240 (This, being the lowest tender, was accepted)

Talk 2 "How nature shaped our coastline and human occupation from 700,000 bp to the present" – by Keith Davies

For most of the last million years, Britain was joined to Europe by a wide land bridge. During this period it was subject to violent swings in climate, ranging from ice ages to sub-tropical periods. Only recently, in 2003, has the earliest date for human habitation of the country been established as being 700,000 years ago, with the discovery of humanly worked flints, plant, animal, and insect remains at Pakefield, near Lowestoft. At that time it was part of the estuary of the largest river in the country, the Bytham, and enjoyed a Mediterranean climate, having a landscape of marshy ground with reeds and alder trees near the river, and oak woodland plus open grassland further away. The area supported hippo, rhino, mammoth, bison, tiger, lion, jackal, wolf and bear. The early nomads who had crossed the land bridge from northern Europe, probably scavenged and hunted for meat, which was supplemented by plants and fish. The source of the Bytham was close to today's Stratford on Avon. The Thames flowed along a more north-easterly course than today, through the vale of St Albans towards Colchester before entering the North Sea near Ipswich. When in 450,000 the Anglian Glaciation advanced to its maximum extent it obliterated the Bytham and pushed the Thames southward to its present course through London.

As successive ages came and went, settlers returned during warmer periods except for a period of 100,000 years before 60,000 bp when there was no evidence of human occupation. There is a theory that the English Channel or at least a large river appeared during this period, and severed the chalk ridge joining the south coast to France. Modern surveys (2003) reveal that the huge underwater valley is more than 10 km wide and 50 m deep. The final cold cleansing of the population took place 13,000 years ago. Our ancestors lived here continuously from 11,500, and Britain became an island about 7,000 years ago. New migrations then had to come by sea and we trace their development through the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages.

Evidence of Neolithic settlement has been found at Corton, Pakefield, Carlton Colville, and Kessingland, although erosion by the sea has taken much of the evidence from Corton and Pakefield. Recent excavations to the east of Carlton Hall have revealed flintwork and pottery of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date – 5–4000 bc. A circular ditch with a spiral entrance containing burnt posts suggested a henge-type structure. An urned cremation and two burials were inside. At Kessingland, on the marshland by the River Hundred, evidence was found in 1996 of a flint industry left by hunter-gatherers pre 4,000 bc, and on high ground overlooking the river a large settlement dated about 2,500 bc has been discovered.

The first settlers in Suffolk who grew crops were Celts, and they arrived about 2,000 BC. By this time the rise in sea level, due to global warming, meant that many streams were open to shallow draught boats. It is likely that

the Kirkley Stream would have been navigable to the end of the Street in Carlton Colville until the late Saxon Period. There are two place names in the local area of Celtic origin – the wis in Lothu-wis-toft, and Mortway in Carlton Colville. ‘Wis’ is slow moving water, and ‘way’ means road.

Romano-British, Iron-Age settlements were revealed in 1998 excavations on Bloodmoor Hill. The site was occupied in the 1st to 3rd centuries ad, and was a minor settlement. Later it was to become the most easterly Saxon settlement in the country and was occupied from the 5th to the 8th century with a maximum population at any one time of 25 to 30 (spanning 5 generations). Buildings of SFB and post-in-trench buildings housed metal workers, weavers, and farmers, who carried on a thriving trade, indicated by the remains of glass palm pots, claw beakers, and imported cult items in silver. A silverine figure 43 mm high was identified as a votive object of the 7th century. Digs in 2002/3 near Carlton Hall showed settlement periods similar to those at Bloodmoor Hill and sites on both sides of Castleton Way contain 4-post Iron-Age granaries, and field boundaries. The Carlton settlement had its first centre to the east of Castleton Way, with the indication of an Anglo-Saxon Hall post-hole structure of early to middle Saxon date, while a second Hall was built later to the west, close to where the Norman Hall had been situated.

Finally the Vikings, having established themselves in Lothingland, found a very desirable base in the Frostenden valley, remains of which can be seen today. Here was a land-locked harbour, protected from winds and invisible from the sea, with a fort for the harbour guard. The valley was part of a large estuary that included Easton and Covehithe Broads, open nearly to Wrentham, with sea levels at least 5 feet higher than today and a silt free river navigable by shallow draught boats.

The site was investigated in 1924, approaching the eastern bank of the stream by a footpath and an elevated terrace that was considered to be an ancient quay, 87 paces long, jutting into marshland. Just 28 paces to the north were unmistakable signs of an excavated dock. At the head of the dock was an oval mound, identified as a Danish earthwork, measuring 34 paces from east to west, and 23 paces from north to south, surrounded by a ditch 227 paces in circumference. The bottom of the ditch was 12 feet below the summit of the mound, which had been ploughed down by farming. The ditch/moat was fed by a spring and almost certainly connected to the dock. In the Danish era, Kirkley, Benacre and Easton probably all had harbours. Then as the river began to silt up and the sea level fell Frostenden became inoperative, though surviving to be recorded in the Domesday Book as a seaport with salina (salt work to preserve fish). In 1308 John de Cove built a quay on part of the estuary that remains today as Covehithe.

Note: The evening visit to Lowestoft Records Office on 19 March at 7.30 pm.

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 some of these topics.

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