

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: [www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk](http://www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk)

## What's On in 2009

**23 Apr 2009 "Problems Resulting from Owning a Roman Historical Site" by John Browning** – from court cases to fighting illegal trade and catching metal detectorists.

**14 May 2009 "Kate Elizabeth – a journey through time" by June Nice** – this member tells us about life in the Muller Orphanage.

**28 May 2009 The Archaeological Society's AGM** – Please make every effort to attend.

**11 June 2009 – Church Outing/Supper** – Terry Weatherley will meet us at Henstead church at 7 pm and later we go on to Kessingland church. There is no need to book for visiting the two churches, but if you would like to join us for a meal afterwards at Livingstone's, Kessingland, please reserve your place(s) and select your meal using the forms provided at Society meetings. The final date to confirm your choice of meal will be the AGM, 28 May.

There is parking space for cars at Henstead in the corner of the field opposite the church, the entrance is close to the nearby road junction.

*Please ring bell if the door is locked*

## Chairman's Column

On 12 March we had quite a lively talk by Audrey Wormald on the History of St Peter's Church, Kirkley. Just a week later we had an evening visit to Lowestoft Records Office where we saw many ancient documents and were given a talk by William Wexler, the Public Service Archivist. Then, on 21 March in the Bowls Pavilion, there was a meeting of stewards and helpers to prepare for the Museum opening. After that meeting we enjoyed a buffet meal prepared by our members. On 26 March, to round off a busy month, Ray Collins gave an interesting talk on the history of the Oil Industry up to 1907. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the latter due to family commitments.

Our Museum opened on Monday 6 April, with several displays rearranged during the winter break, and will continue to open daily from 1.30–4.30 pm until the end of October. Its outstanding collection of Lowestoft Porcelain, dating from 1760, is always of interest.

Tonight we welcome John Browning who will tell us about the problems of owning a Roman Historical Site.

With all good wishes **Lilian Fisher**

## **Details of recent talks:**

### **12 March 2009 – "The History of St Peter's Church, Kirkley" – by Audrey Wormald**

Historian Audrey Wormald stood in at short notice to speak about St Peters Church. As wife of the incumbent she was able to deliver an enjoyable talk with a frank and personal outlook. Kirkley and its church, being sandwiched between Lowestoft and Pakefield, and for many years sharing clergymen with the latter, was not well documented in its early period. Until about 1750 nothing was provable in local records but that is now about to change as the speaker plans to publish a collected history. The present church is probably the fifth on the site. The first may have been built around 950 ad, but that is not confirmed and there is no church listed in Domesday, where Kirkley is described as a small settlement. During the black death over 50% of the clergy died, and later rectors were so poor that they often took on the duties of schoolmaster to maintain their living. The Kirkley area had been Christian for many centuries but not being the richest part of the Suffolk coast the early churches were constructed of local materials such as wood and flint and to a budget. In general the nave was built first, then the north aisle (in order to avoid obstructing the daylight) and thirdly the tower. St Peter's tower dates from the late 13th/early 14th century and was always fairly substantial, having three floors and a spiral staircase, but by the mid-1600s the nave and aisles had deteriorated to such a degree that the building was abandoned and worship transferred to Pakefield, St Margarets.

It was to be another hundred years before things altered, when the joint rector of Pakefield and Kirkley died and a new rector named Hall was appointed for Kirkley, although his church was derelict. The rector at Lowestoft, named Tanner, encouraged Mr Hall to restore St Peters and get it in use again. Hall sought sponsors and made a serious attempt to get the ruins built up – from then on, written references remain. The existing open-top tower was connected to a new nave by a short, curved passage; there was to be no chancel, and the nave north wall was built of red brick – possibly due to lack of funds, as the local population then numbered only around 400. (Despite its shortcomings this fourth St Peters church lasted until 1858.) The income from the parish remained low, so the next rector (in 1828) got the living in Beccles and East Carleton for himself, putting in a curate to administer to Kirkley.

During the 1800s Morton Peto, who had purchased the open area known as the 'Lamplands' south of Lowestoft harbour for housing, contributed £200 and loans for the Lucas brothers to build St John's Church. He did not support the existing parish of Kirkley in spite of the ever-increasing number of worshippers from the lower classes (servants etc.) who lived in the Mill Road area. The next order of rectors in Kirkley was composed of Oxford graduates, who felt the church should be improved. Development was done in small affordable stages, first a chancel, then an extension, then a south aisle. The next rector built a new nave outside and around the old, followed by a Gothic style north aisle by 1870. In 1886, benefactor Edward Kerrison Harvey aged 66 took on the cause, offering to fund a baptistry and south porch. Some years later, after marrying his second wife, he also gave an elaborate iron screen (still in use) a clock with matching case, a baptistry screen and a font cover. In 1906 he funded new gas lamps and a huge organ that was systematically extended. His generosity to the church was outstanding.

### **19 March 2009 – "Exploring Lowestoft's History in the Archives" – by Bill Wexler**

On 19 March, members of the Society made an evening visit to the Lowestoft Records Office where Bill Wexler, Public Service Archivist, spoke about the role of the Office and how its contents are collected and used. As the third busiest in the country, Lowestoft receives regular consultations from overseas, national and local enquirers. Suffolk sent out many explorers and settlers over the last 300 years to both the New World and (through the fishing trade) to the Continent, so many contacts require information on family links. The deposited items range from photographs through to government and religious records, books, letters and printed ephemera. Major events are always well documented but do not trace how life was lived by the general public and Mr Wexler was careful to point out that everyday bills of trade, business documents, letters and records of day-to-day happenings are very important too. These items require special care when stored as they often contain materials that can deteriorate unless kept in climate controlled or lightproof areas, and protected by acid-free wrappings or boxes. Strong rooms and storage conditions in all Record Offices have to be approved by the National Archive, and religious items from Suffolk by the Norwich Diocese. The Lowestoft protected archive is now getting full and staff are concerned that space may run out should any large deposits arrive from local societies or businesses.

Other record offices in Suffolk are at Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, the latter having specialist staff who conserve and repair those donations that have become fragile due to ageing or wear and tear. Historians today have many advantages, due to the availability of computers and online research services, but often the most satisfying method of getting information is by accessing original documents. If needed, members with a reader's pass can be assisted in locating the right sources by the expert staff within the office. Deposited items at Lowestoft include deeds from the late 1100s, although the core collection comprises parish archives from the 1400s onwards. Local government records are stored covering the period 1853 to 1974, records after that time being the responsibility of Waveney District. An excellent register of shipping is held from 1852 to the present – this was returned to the Town, having been rescued when a collection was disbanded in the West Country. Poor Law records for Oulton from the 1760s, Coroner's records, also Magistrates, County Court, and Solicitors records are available to researchers. Farming records though are not well represented and the curators are always looking for more examples.

## **26 March 2009 – "Koning Olie" – by Ray Collins**

Member Ray Collins talked about 'The Oil Industry before 1907'. Amazingly, petroleum oil products date from prehistory. The Greeks used them for fire weapons and earlier, in Iraq, bitumen was used to lay bricks, seal boats, waterproof/decorate altars, and for lamp oil. The west had to rely on oil from animals, vegetables and coal for their lamps until the mid-1800s. The industrial revolution allowed production from shale or coal, of a much-improved paraffin for lamps, however it was expensive so the search began for a cheaper supply. A one-time American rail conductor named Edwin Drake was asked to look for oil at Titusville in Pennsylvania, where small quantities had been found floating on surface water and skimmed off by local Indians. He started with no experience and spent almost two years without result, digging holes and trenches in what he believed were likely spots. By 1858 he decided to try drilling but still had no luck, and his sponsor wrote ordering a halt due to lack of funds. On 28 August 1859, just before the letter arrived, the bore hole filled with oil during the weekend break, so Drake ignored the instruction and began to collect the crude oil that flowed at an average 25 barrels per day. This output rapidly increased and was sent for refining into paraffin, which was the principal product. Within ten years the company was producing 7,000 barrels per day and a number of early investors made large fortunes – by 1908 world output had risen to 37.5 million tons per year. During the first years of production, output was mainly consumed in the USA although an American ship named the Elizabeth Watts brought barrels of paraffin to the UK in 1865.

In this country the Samuel family had set up M Marcus & Co – Established 1834, exporting goods to the Far East and importing exotic goods and food for Victorian consumers, including sea shells. When the father died he left a very healthy business with lots of overseas contacts. His sons Marcus and Sam took over and in 1866 began to export case oil (paraffin in 5-gallon cans). This developed into an idea to break into the oil business but the way ahead was tricky because John D Rockefeller, trading in the USA as Standard Oil (later to become Esso in Europe, elsewhere Exxon), was working to monopolize the market. Crude oil was being found in other countries and when the brothers saw a source from the Caspian Sea/Black Sea area they developed a plan. It was to buy paraffin from Rothschilds on the Black Sea, build a fleet of tankers suitable for the Suez Canal (this had not been done before because of safety fears) and set up distribution depots all over the Far East. They had to keep their plan secret to prevent Rockefeller moving against them. Most of their business was done on a deferred payment basis and this soon made M Marcus & Co. very rich. Their first purpose-built tanker of 5,010 tons capacity, named SS *Murex*, was commissioned in 1892. It was built to a very high standard, given a Lloyds 100A1 safety certificate and sailed through the Suez Canal loaded with paraffin in August 1892. Marcus Samuel now met ups and downs in trading over several years and tried to strengthen his company by organising a syndicate that used his own fleet for transporting the oil – eventually this would turn into the Shell Oil Co. A lucky break came when the company were able to refloat the naval ship HMS *Victorious*, grounded in the Suez Canal and considered a total loss – this success brought a knighthood for Marcus in 1898. He achieved his lifelong ambition to become Mayor of London in 1902. Marcus & Co. then tried to talk the Royal Navy into using heavy oil to fuel their boilers, but a trial proved unsuccessful as inferior burners had been fitted to the test ship. It would be a further 10 years before naval vessels used oil as fuel. Another mistake was to concentrate on paraffin, as alternative energy sources were coming into use, particularly petrol. In later years trading difficulties remained, but finally a new 40/60 deal with shared benefits was arranged between Shell and Royal Dutch. Henry Deterding from Royal Dutch played a major part in management with his British partner acting in more of a figurehead role. The mix was very successful and produced the company known today as Royal Dutch Shell plc. that uses the classic pecten (shell) trademark.

## **25 and 26 July 2009 – "GEORGE EWART EVANS – A Celebration" – Blaxhall, Suffolk**

The Blaxhall Archive Group are hosting a two-day event in July to celebrate the Centenary of George Ewart Evans, outstanding historian and author of numerous books on social history and country life, ranging from the Welsh valley of his youth to the changing history of farming in East Anglia. The Group are aiming at a mixed programme of events at several venues throughout the village that should appeal to enthusiasts of local history as well as the general public. There will be no entrance fee but probably a small charge for the vintage film shows and seminar where space is at a premium – booking is advised for the latter features.

Interested local history groups are invited to book a free display space in which to explain their own group activities. A six-foot table and some chairs will be provided and room for display boards – note there is no electricity available within the two large marquees. There should be good coverage by the local media over the two days. Refreshments and a beer tent will be available to fortify visitors.

For more details on events and booking please contact the **BLAXHALL ARCHIVE GROUP** as below:

**Telephone: 01728 688611 Email: [archive@blaxhall.com](mailto:archive@blaxhall.com) Website: [www.blaxhall.com](http://www.blaxhall.com)**

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