

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## Volume 38 Number 7 – **NEWSLETTER** – OCT 2010

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

### What's On in 2010

- 14 October 2010**      “**Beccles in the First World War**” by **David Lindley** – this expert Beccles historian returns to speak on how the town and its people were affected by the war period.
- 28 October 2010**      “**A medical student at Belsen-Bergen**” by **Dr Gordon Walker** – now retired, this local GP recalls his time spent helping in the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp.
- 11 November 2010**      “**Tolhouse, Great Yarmouth’s Medieval Gaol**” by **Les Cole** – closed in 1878, this building is now used as a museum – its history stretches back over 800 years.

**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 will be closing for the winter on Sunday 31 October, and we have had a very busy season. Without the assistance of our team of volunteers, we would not be able to continue and I would like to thank everyone for their invaluable help and support. We hope you have enjoyed contributing to the daily running of Broad House Museum, in Everitt’s Park, and that you will rejoin us in 2011, when we will be re-opening from 18 April.

The Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society meetings will continue (with our usual winter break) until 26 May 2011, which is our AGM. The final event in June should be a local church visit – details still to be arranged.

Look on our website, listed above, for additional news of Society events past and present.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

### **Details of recent events:**

#### **9 September 2010 – “A review of Archaeological Excavations at Flixton Park” by Stuart Boulter**

This review comes 7 years after the original Report, during which time early finds have been conserved and investigated, and a number of additional areas examined. Flixton Park, the site of extensive stone and gravel extraction, lies between Bungay and Homersfield in Suffolk, close to the county boundary and River Waveney, and has been actively quarried for the last 50 years. Since archaeologists have studied the site it has revealed signs of human occupation through most of the important early periods, and continues to do so as the gravel excavation progresses. Flint hand-axes up to 250,000 years old, possibly Neanderthal, were found in the gravel. An early Neolithic long barrow was discovered and a late Neolithic almost circular monument. A post-Neolithic circle contained burial remains with slight traces of bone. One of a number of Bronze-Age ring ditches had a central trough (the latter may have contained

bones, indicating ritual use). Sadly, the acid nature of the ground means that, with a few notable exceptions, almost no bone has survived. Ring ditches from most periods have shown up. One showed signs of a cairn with potsherds beneath; a number of others held pottery and pottery fragments, beads and smaller items such as pins and fastenings for clothing.

A 'first' for the county has been a ring ditch, with enclosure, and two cremation burials in bi-conical urns – these contained remains of up to seven individuals of mixed age, plus bronze beads. Among newer finds has been a post-hole circle divided (like a cake) into six segments with access ways between. Some flint cobbles are inside the circle and a huge central grave, 2.5m deep, held a crouch burial, smashed beaker pot and an archer's stone wrist-guard – additional concentric ditches have been added in history. Elsewhere on site some seven-post-hole buildings were identified (one with porch) and two larger four-post-hole buildings that may have been granary bases. An isolated grave showed the hollow shape of a possible tree-trunk coffin and also held an upturned beaker.

Archaeologists identified a 27m Iron Age palisade ring beside pits containing whole pots, loom weights and querns. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery lies within the quarry area and inhabitants lived near to, but outside it. Approximately twenty SFBs and a number of 2–6 post-hole buildings were recorded, plus a couple of contemporary buildings with multiple side wall post-holes but no corner posts. A conventional Roman four-post-hole line building was found, and a more unusual, probably aisled, version – the latter with combination outer plus three inner lines of post-holes. Remains of 1st-century Roman kilns, one with centre pedestal and one with twin pedestals, showed that itinerant potters had used the area (another fine example of a kiln was found at nearby Homersfield in the 1950s).

There were several other special finds. An early Roman grave containing two adults and two juveniles had been dug within a rubbish pit – one skeleton had been beheaded and another showed head wounds, indicating deliberate execution. An almost entire sixth-century (6in tall), extremely rare Anglo-Saxon glass claw-beaker was found and successfully reconstructed from fragments. Also there were grave goods including remains of several spears and other metal objects, over 100 each of amber and glass beads and some very small bucket beads. Recent site activity included a 19 to 20th-century brickworks at adjacent South Elham St Cross, and remains of WWI military practice trenches on the Flixton Park site.

### **23 September 2010 – “The Dissolution of the Monasteries” by Pip Wright**

Pip began his talk by outlining the distribution of land ownership in Britain at the time of the Norman invasion. In general the abbeys had substantial holdings with the balance shared between influential individuals. The Normans quite naturally commandeered substantial amounts for their own use after their arrival. This situation then changed slowly through the Middle Ages until religious bodies owned about one third of the land, the balance being split between the Crown, the landed gentry and a smaller number of locals. By the early 1500s, when Henry VIII took the throne, there were perhaps 800 priories, abbeys, nunneries and monastic hospitals. These were all eager to collect donations of one kind or another from donors who set out their benefactions before death, often wishing to be buried, or remembered in perpetuity by a mass, or through monuments in their favourite religious building. The donations were frequently of land, which was extremely useful, as its ownership could generate income through rental, forestry, farming and hunting while land remained an asset in its own right. Suffolk alone held approximately 75 institutions, with a few large examples such as Bury St Edmunds abbey and Sibton priory (although these were

much overshadowed by places elsewhere like Walsingham, Glastonbury and Peterborough). There were also many quite small ones with some cells having only a handful of monks in modest buildings with limited land attached.

Henry VIII's reign was fairly lavish in style and his revenues soon began to drop. On the other hand, the monasteries were getting richer from donations and their abbots living a life of plenty entertaining their benefactors. Thomas Wolsey, statesman (known as Cardinal Wolsey) saw the King's plight and in 1536 devised a way to tap into the rich holdings of the monasteries – closing the weaker ones and seizing their assets for the Crown. He first conferred with the Pope, and then suggested a performance standard whereby any monastery should have a minimum of 1 abbot, plus 12 monks and be able to raise £200 per annum. To see if they complied, all monasteries were quietly asked to complete a questionnaire on their income. Suspecting there was a new tax in the offing they tended to play down the figures and, unwittingly, large numbers of them reduced their status to below the recommended standard – this led to their premature closure. Shortly after the scheme became operational Wolsey died and was soon replaced by Henry's first minister Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell, in addition to overseeing Henry's break with Catholicism, decided to take the dissolution of the monasteries very much further – in Suffolk only Bury and Butley survived the questionnaire.

Preferential deals were done with many smaller priories, and unofficial sales of land benefitted such as the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, even the King, while provision of housing was often arranged for ministers prepared to retire quietly. Sometimes, as at Eye, the abbots and priors were ahead of the situation and commissioners arriving to strip the assets found locals had beaten them to it. The facts remain that over two years most of the monasteries were dissolved and sold for an average of 20 times their rentable value. The land seized during the dissolution of monasteries in East Anglia was heavily concentrated along the Norfolk/Suffolk border. One anomaly is that there were specific houses (with no land attached) reserved for abbots who regularly visited certain localities to oversee the conduct of caretaker tenants, Snape being a local example. By the end of the 16th century monasteries had problems in recruiting people. Often nuns were well off – having come from richer families – not so monks, meaning a few inmates of advanced years ran many priories.

The large-scale demolition and robbing out of magnificent abbeys and monasteries was a great historical loss to the country. Some recognisable ruins are fairly well preserved and still feature in re-enactments and services, but most are visible only to the enthusiast who seeks out the re-used stone and flint still visible in later buildings. Rumburgh church in Suffolk is one that is left from monastic days.

### **We still need your help to find a Programme Arranger for next season**

We would remind you that we **must have a volunteer now** to begin planning the talks covering September 2011 to summer 2012.. Please ask a committee member for further details if you can help us with this important task.

### **Bookings needed in good time for the 2011 Winter Meal at Lowestoft College, St Peter's Street!**

The date is confirmed as Thursday 17 February and the cost per person will be £18.00. The College are anxious that we confirm our place reservations before Christmas, as they have keen competition for their limited space. Please submit your name(s) as early as possible to let our treasurer know how many seats you need, and certainly no later than the Society meeting on 11 November. It will help 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.

ANNUAL REPORT: Please bring any article you have for inclusion in the report to Ray Collins at one of our meetings, or send it to him by post during the next few weeks. Articles may be printed or handwritten. Production of the report is made easier if your article is computer-printed (e.g. from a Word or Excel file, at 12pt size) but this is not essential. The deadline is Christmas for printed items – send in a bit earlier please if your article is handwritten.

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