

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## Volume 38 Number 4 – **NEWSLETTER** – APRIL 2010

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

### What's On in 2010

**22 Apr 2010 "The Southwold Artist – Reg Carter" by Hilary Huckstep** – Local expert, Hilary will talk about the work of this versatile and well-remembered illustrator.

**13 May 2010 "The Rest", Reydon by Cynthia Wade** – A detective story about the Arts & Crafts style building in Covert Road, well researched and presented by Cynthia Wade.

**27 May 2010 "The Archaeological Society's AGM – Would all please make every effort to attend.**

**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 Broad House Museum opened a few days before Easter, with two stewards daily from 1 pm to 4 pm, and I am glad to say it is already quite busy. Our visitors are now appreciating the refreshed layout of several exhibits and the redecorating that has been carried out by some of our members during the winter break.

Tonight Hilary Huckstep will tell us about Southwold artist, Reg Carter, and then on 13 May, Cynthia Wade brings us a detective story from neighbouring Reydon concerning the Arts & Crafts style building named 'The Rest'.

Please make a diary note of our Society's Annual General Meeting on 27 May when we look at proposals for the new season. I look forward to seeing you all there, and this year, after the usual business items, there should be time for an informal chat, during which we will provide you with tea, coffee and biscuits.

With good wishes, *Lilian Fisher*

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

#### **25 March 2010 – "Finds on Pakefield Cliffs" – by Paul Durbidge**

Founder member, Paul Durbidge, gave a relaxed but most informative talk on finds made in Pakefield and the adjoining area. He recalled at the start of his interest in local history consulting Rainbird Clarke's 'East Anglia' book, and being surprised to find just one Anglo-Saxon burial listed for Pakefield, and nothing at all for Lowestoft. Paul helped start the Lowestoft Archaeological Society in the 1960s – the activities at first being mainly field-walking and recording finds between Pakefield and Kessingland, covering both sides of the Hundred River. An annual meeting with similar societies took place then in Stowmarket, where each had a table to exhibit their finds. Lowestoft was very productive, usually needing several tables, and decided to open their own museum to display artefacts, establishing it in a former laundry at 'The Prairie', a side road later redeveloped as the Britten Centre.

The two churches at Pakefield, dedicated to Sts Mary and Margaret, which date to the 11th century, were originally administered by two lords of the manor, with separate vicars, but merged about 1734. The stonework

shows many alterations in the walls, central arcading and in the basement level. There is one tower now giving fine views over the sea and the houses inland. Until the early 19th century Pakefield was a fairly small village and separated from Kirkley. Cliff erosion here was particularly bad in the years 1936–38 with some houses in Beachstone Place falling and many others nearby having to be pulled down. The cliff edge came so close in 1941 it was felt that the church might have to be abandoned, but money was found to extend the sea wall southwards and provide additional groynes. This caused a reversal of the situation with the beach here regaining considerable width, the cliff stabilised, and the church seemingly out of danger. Comparison with earlier maps reveals just how many streets and houses disappeared around the start of the 20th century. The southern coastal path was reinstated from the Jolly Sailors public house although periods of high rainfall still cause slippage of the cliff and loss of the path towards Pontins Holiday centre. The cliff strata may be clearly observed and from the beach up reads as lower rootlet bed; upper rootlet bed; various sands that are themselves overlaid by boulder clays, and finally the top surface soil.

A number of Neolithic or Bronze-Age flint arrowheads have been found locally, and at one period six medieval rubbish pits were exposed in as many years along the top of the cliff. The latter contained pottery of the period plus a small amount of Roman ware. Later, a 35ft length of Roman ditch broke away from the cliff edge, the ditch was full of pottery, including Samian ware (probably imported from France or Germany) and some tesserae, but few coins appeared. Pottery turns up in local gardens and the allotments south of the church, often being of continental type. Worked antler fragments, some spindle whorls and a single loom weight have been collected. On the beach there has been a steady supply of fish and animal bones, including pike bones from the peat beds, fossils, mainly washed or uncovered from the falling boulder clay, and even plesiosaur vertebrae. Many fossils originating in the Cromerian beds have built up over a long period and some have been sent to collections elsewhere in the UK.

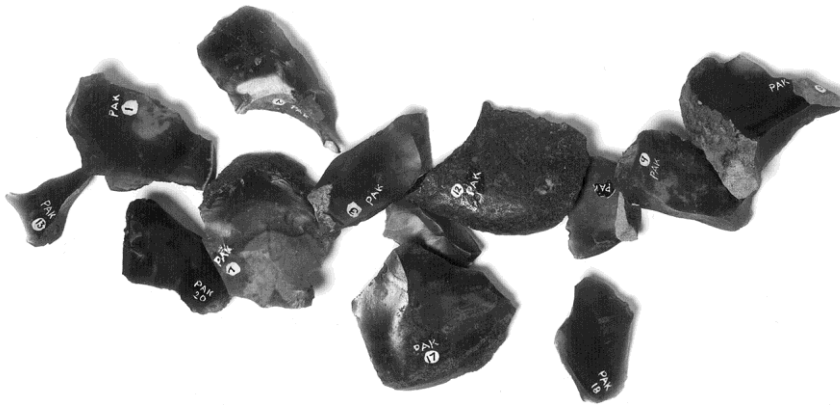
Paul then spoke about the settlement on Bloodmoor Hill, at nearby Gisleham. This was outlined by a Roman ditch system dating from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD, overlaid by the Anglo-Saxon occupation from the 6th century, and is the 5th largest East Anglian site. The large-scale excavation around 1998 showed evidence of post-hole and many sunken-featured buildings, plus a cemetery of west-east aligned graves within the settlement zone. Paul showed slides of the excavation at which he was present. He explained that the acid soil meant few human remains survived but they left residual stains that could be read by archaeologists, as at Sutton Hoo. Grave goods were simple and sparse but a detectorist examining spoil heaps discovered a gilded, silver small male figure of outstanding quality (possibly of the God Frey) that is now in the British Museum. Quantities of Romano-British and Saxon pottery were found along with spindle whorls, seeds and animal remains and an escutcheon from a hanging bowl.

Paul continued with the story of the outstanding and nationally important discovery, triggered by a small, original planned excavation in 2003 by him, Bob Mutch and friend Adrian Charlton below Pakefield cliffs. The riverbed deposit they found contained flint flakes, apparently worked by hand, and this led on to proving the presence of humans in the area some 200,000 years earlier than previously recorded in the UK, and possibly northern Europe.

Geological research on the period when Britain was a peninsula joined by a wide land bridge to Europe had plotted the course of the lost River Bytham, the largest in England at that time. This river rose near the Stratford on Avon of today, and flowed eastward across East Anglia into a large north-facing bay opposite to where the River Rhine also reached the North Sea. Bob Mutch had spent thirty years collecting and studying bones from Pakefield and in late 2001, with Adrian's help, sieved gravel river deposits from the base of the cliff and found a flint flake (apparently worked) as well as teeth and bone from a small extinct water vole which could give a possible date. With Paul they continued their search and were rewarded with more of the same finds. The work of cutting away the heavily compacted rootlet bed, was limited to small areas below the unstable cliff line, it was labour intensive and not a little dangerous. Below it the *Unio bed*, that they now believed had once formed part of the Bytham, was a mere four inches thick and was composed of gravel containing broken pebbles and the occasional larger flint. This was slowly trowelled and examined, put in the box sieve and washed by Adrian Charlton in cold North Sea water, then sorted, bagged up and taken home for drying. Repeated trips to adjacent points, each one meaning hours of labour cutting through the overlying beds, brought the reward of more worked flints and eventually a core. The majority of their samples had now dried, and when searched contained the bones and teeth of the primitive vole *Mimomys savini*, the first time they had been found alongside human artefacts. Professional Archaeologist John Wymer was called in to visit the cliff site where he saw a flake in situ. He went on to examine the previously sorted remains and agreed with their findings, congratulating them on their 'splendid discoveries'. He warned that no public announcement should be made and that it was time to

call in the big guns. The Natural History Museum, London sent a team to Pakefield for a weekend dig – this was delayed at first by a cliff fall but the Sunday gave ideal conditions. The team found good evidence within a few hours and carried a quarter ton of sediment away to London. In addition to the worked flint flakes, examination under laboratory conditions revealed microscopic mammal bones rarely seen in the Cromer Forest bed. Also found were remains of a rare aquatic shrew, a bat, and teeth from squirrel and hamster, as well as a second species of vole that became extinct during a cold period some 700,000 years ago.

The Museum spent almost a million pounds (provided from the Leverhulme Trust, English Heritage and UCL) on the project and research. The artefacts from Pakefield now form an important part of the Natural History Museum collection, where scholars will have opportunity for future study. The resulting scientific paper on the dig concluded that Pakefield was enjoying a warm period 700,000 years ago, with an average temperature of 23° C, when hippo, rhino, straight-tusked elephant, deer and carnivores like lion and hyena roamed the plains. Incredibly rich remains of plants, beetles and microfossils helped paint a picture of the climate. The human species may have been *Homo heidelbergensis* or *Homo antecessor*, but this cannot be proved in the absence of actual remains. The full story was announced in December 2005 at the *Institute of Science at the Royal Institute, London*, to reporters and editors from all over the world, putting Pakefield firmly on the geological map. Paul ended with news that a major 3-year study covering Pakefield to Benacre is planned, but with no date given at present. Members will find fuller details of the local team's Pakefield excavations in Volume 38 of the Society's Annual Report; also there is a related display in the Broad House Museum, plus relevant fossil remains also collected at Pakefield by Bob Mutch.



*Flints collected from Pakefield cliff*

Illustration from *Homo Britannicus* © Penguin Books

***The Society's Annual Report detailing last year's activities is available from the Treasurer, price £2.00.***