

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 39 Number 2 – **NEWSLETTER** – FEB 2011

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2011

24 February 2011 "Medieval Covehithe" by Paul Durbidge - Paul will talk about the medieval finds from Covehithe.

10 March 2011 "Roman Norfolk" by John Davies – Chief curator of Norwich City Study Centre, John is an expert on Roman Britain, particularly Roman Norfolk.

24 March 2011 "One of the last Horsemen" by Ron Ashman – another tale from Ron having local interest, this time detailing part of his grandfather's life on the farm.

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

Welcome to our second meeting of 2011. This evening's talk is by Paul Durbidge who will tell us about Medieval Covehithe.

Our Museum at Broad House will re-open on 18 April and, as always, volunteer stewards will be needed to help with manning through the season. Please speak to our treasurer if you can spare a few hours each week.

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

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Editor's Notes:

Members at the last meeting were very kind not to mention my glaring error in printing the first Newsletter for 2011 from a rough draft, where I had not updated the volume and date numbers.

A note for your diary: After our last meeting, Terry Weatherley said this year's Church outing is to be on 23 June, when we visit both Covehithe and Wangford churches. The meal afterwards will be at the Five Bells, Wrentham.

Please note the Annual Report is available, price £2.00, from the Treasurer. It contains the Society's membership list and financial statement for 2010 and additional articles by members, plus a summary of all last year's talks.

Details of recent events:

27 January 2011 – "Glass and Brass" – by Terry Weatherley

Terry opened by explaining that he had obtained permission from Simon Knott to use both his 'Norfolk and Suffolk Churches' websites as a source for a number of the illustrations used in this talk. The sites are particularly useful to Society members who are researching local church monumental brasses and stained glass windows. Sadly a great number of ancient brasses have disappeared for a variety of reasons across the centuries and the search is becoming more difficult.

Brass rubbing was a well-supported hobby of Victorian ladies, and in the 20th century, for cycling youngsters. Brass that is set in floors, or church walls, may be difficult to photograph and hard to interpret, depending on their condition. Generations of polishing and wear can cause loss of detail, and so a rubbing often reveals a surprising amount of extra information. The oldest specimen in England is now dated to 1282 by the Monumental Brass Society and features a priest. Once believed to be products of the local engraver or tinsmith, brasses have now been studied more closely, and striking design similarities occur across many counties. Today it is believed that some manufacturers in larger conurbations kept pattern books and would supply designs to match orders from outlying monumental masons. A brass would then be locally commissioned, and fitted by the latter. The metal used was an alloy of copper, tin and zinc known as latten. Figures in copied designs were changed (depending on the skills of the engraver) to match the deceased – sometimes by adding different hair, or a beard, or by substituting armour, or clothing specific to a trade. If the family were included, the number and sex of the children would be modified to suit. Swaddling clothes on a child indicate an infant not surviving past one month.

The number of sections making up a monumental brass could be increased to include deceased partners – John Day of Dunwich has a brass in Little Hadley showing just his second family (he had two wives and 13 children of each). Particularly ornate designs for brasses were sometimes imported through Dutch or Flemish ports, depending on the financial powers of the would-be donor. Imported designs often have the background filled with detail whereas the figures would normally be cut out in English examples. Brasses might have several components and be enclosed in a canopy. From the 1400s illustrations of shrouds and cadavers began to be included, bringing a sense of mortality. One (now vanished) Lowestoft example had a picture of death and is recorded in an engraving by the artist J.S Cotman. Interesting brasses may still be found at Sotterley, Ellough and Wrentham churches.

Locally, at Little Wenham, is a brass to Thomas Bewse (died 1514) and his wife Mary with their two sons and three daughters. The daughters have long tresses and no veil, indicating they were unmarried – indeed one later became a nun. This ornate family brass is enclosed in a double canopy of perpendicular style and is the only undamaged example of this in Suffolk. At Depden, a brass for Lady Ann Jermyn shows her two husbands and all their children. Her first marriage produced five sons and two daughters while the second added two more sons. In this brass, the two husbands use the same basic figure design and wear identical Tudor armour. The first is shown clean-shaven, with Tudor hairstyle, but the second sports an Elizabethan moustache and beard.

Probably the oldest glass in the country is exhibited at Bede's World in Jarrow, where two windows have been reconstructed of 7th-century Saxon glass. Most East Anglian churches had stained glass windows in Medieval times but these were routinely smashed or removed during the Reformation, or by William Dowsing acting for Cromwell. Dowsing kept a diary of his activities in Suffolk which make depressing reading. Church after church had long lists of treasures ripped out including wonderful windows, statuary, inscriptions and icons. Also church plate and decorative carving and ornaments. Fortunately a few gems survived and may be found, sometimes in fragments later remounted, as at Blythburgh and at Wilby, to give a small glimpse of what once graced these buildings. Dowsing also visited Beccles, Sotterley, and even tiny Benacre church, from where many items were removed. At Brome two roundels survive, though rather stained, one holding a shield of chalices, the other a shield of instruments of the passion. A much later window in St Margaret's church, Lowestoft was painted in retirement, about 1819, by Robert Allen who was a china painter for the old Lowestoft Pottery. It is his only known glasswork and is very rare.

With the reformation, and revolution, much continental stained glass became available, particularly Flemish roundels, and found a ready market in England. Some of these use silver stain that produces a distinctive yellow colouring, other pot metal glass colours are made by mixing metallic oxides with the molten glass, and the technique of painting geometric regular patterns onto white glass is known as grisaille. Grisaille is commonly used in small diamond panes called quarries. Leaf patterns (rincau) in a variety of colours are frequently used for filling borders and backgrounds. Students and collectors of historic stained glass undertake extensive research into the styles of painting that developed in the UK and the Continent. In the written records of religious and public buildings, and in the wills of wealthy persons who commissioned and donated glass in

memory of their ancestors and family members, are to be found the names of glaziers and the painters they employed. By historical study, and comparison with known examples, many windows can still be attributed with great confidence to the best-known glass painters, even though they may have been reinstalled, at a much later date, far from their point (and country) of origin. The colourful illustrations, as well as telling the famous biblical stories to a congregation, of whom many could not read well, often feature members of the leading local families. Early records by clergy and town officials can provide fascinating details of the glaziers, the original cost, names of the donors and installation date of the glass. Experts can find and interpret the very small identifying symbols scratched in the glass by glaziers during fitting and repair work, as well as dates and signatures.

After the Church Buildings Act revisions, 1822, there came a Gothic Revival period, following the principles of Pugin, Gilbert Scott and others. Ringsfield church, restored by William Butterfield, has fine windows with perpendicular surrounds by glaziers Clayton & Bell, who also installed a trio in Bury Cathedral showing the life of Queen Mary. Flamboyant Anglo-catholic Ninian Comper, when just 19, wrote from Barsham Rectory to his mother... 'Dearest mother mine, it is a lovely place – a sweet rectory in the midst of splendid trees and the little church almost touching the house. There is a curious East window all in diamond tracery down to the cill and most of the diamonds contain a saint or angel painted by my master [Kempe] so I feel at home...'. A few miles north lies Comper's own masterpiece, the beautifully decorated Lound church, with its wonderful font cover and screen.

Through the 19th century taste and styles changed, with some glaziers installing windows designed by fashionable artists such as William Morris and Edward Burne Jones in pre-Raphaelite style. In Haddiscoe church is an Art Deco style window by Martin Travers showing a young John the Baptist greeting Jesus – in the background you can see Haddiscoe Church. Nearby Toft Monks church has a modern window by RCA-trained (and later instructor of decorative painting) Thomas Derrick, of Bristol, who was also a prolific book illustrator. Another well-known British artist was John Piper, famed for the replacement glass at Coventry Cathedral, but here in Suffolk designing a window to commemorate Lowestoft born composer Benjamin Britten. The handsome window was installed at Aldeburgh church in 1979. The newest local stained glass is at Kessingland church, in memory of the Driftermen (sea fishermen) of the village. This colourful design by Nicola Kantorowicz was installed in 2007.

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

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