

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 38 Number 8 – **NEWSLETTER** – Jan 2011

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

## What's On in 2011

**27 January 2011 "Glass and Brass" by Terry Weatherley** – another inimitable topic will be presented by this local speaker. This time the subject deals with aspects of church decoration.

**10 February 2011 "The Archaeology of Rabbit Warrens" by Tom Williamson** – a topic not many historians could tackle. This should cause the members to prick up their ears!

**24 February 2011 "Frederick Dodington and the Rule of Three" by Don Friston** – a bright boy from Carlton Colville studied hard and became the youngest shop proprietor in the village.

**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 first meeting for the New Year. This evening's talk is by Terry Weatherley who will tell us about "Glass and Brass". We look forward to meeting you all at our annual meal on Thursday 17 February, to be held again at Lowestoft College (see below).

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:**

If you have not booked for the Society's Annual Meal, but wish to do so, please get in touch with Ray Collins right away to see if there are any vacancies. Details are included at the end of this Newsletter.

Tonight we can welcome Ron Ashman, as our Vice-chairman, and Jenny Hatton as our Programme Secretary. Both of these members volunteered their help during a recent committee meeting. As co-opted honorary officers, their posts run until the AGM on 26 May this year, when they must be re-nominated, along with other proposals for the Society's officers and committee, and confirmed by vote from the membership. Please give them your support and any ideas you have for improving the Society. A particular need is your help in forward planning of the members' evenings for next season. These will be alternate meetings between the pre-booked talks by visiting speakers.

## **Details of recent events:**

**11 November 2010 – "Tolhouse, Great Yarmouth's Medieval Gaol" – by Les Cole**

Museum steward Les Cole presented an entertaining tale of the 800-year history of this prison. The local provost in the early 1100s, issued licences for boats trading up river, and collected taxes required by Henry I. Then, from 1155, Henry II organised the 'cinque ports' to supply ships for his defence. Great Yarmouth had to pay annual dues on fish landings – a system that continued for 500 years – and the King provided the Host House (later to be named Tolhouse) for the use of the provosts while in the town. The Norman arch in the entrance, and windows in the south wall may be dated to this period. King John gave the first charter to the town in 1208, making it a Free Borough – unchartered towns had to pay a £55 annual toll to hold markets. Great Yarmouth prospered under the charter and had its own bailiffs, although the 'cinque ports' still managed the fishery tolls. Later, Henry III authorised the building of a town wall, doubling as a military barrier to protect Norwich. This wall is now the best-preserved in East Anglia – none of the 10 entrance gates remain, but 11 of the original 20 towers survive, several in remarkably good order. Many changes were to take place in the use and construction of the Tolhouse over the centuries, the north part later holding a courthouse and the south end a temporary gaol. A second Tolhouse was built further north, near St Nicholas church and the market, but in 1426, when a town council was formed, the latter was renamed the Guildhall. Great Yarmouth had developed within its walls and the church was represented by no less than five separate religious orders. Part of the Greyfriars cloister survives and stone from churches was reused elsewhere, including the town wall. The 1588 map of Yarmouth shows a castle, north of the original Tolhouse, that should have included a prison. Apparently it took so long to complete the castle (70 years) it was decided that the prison should remain in the southern Tolhouse, this having been rebuilt in 1552, with an external staircase and 'audyt' chamber added around this time. Queen Elizabeth gave it the right to hold courts in 1558.

Prisoners were primarily held for minor crimes but in 1582 Cecelia Atkin and Elizabeth Butcher were accused of witchcraft. In the 17th century, 'witchfinder general' Matthew Hopkins became involved and 15 more witches were hanged in Yarmouth, after trial in the Tolhouse. The earlier cells were partly below ground level and prisoners were lowered by rope into either the debtors room or the felons room (the latter had shackles fixed in the wall). New cells were built in the 1790s with grated windows, allowing some light, and ceiling ventilators, however conditions in general were still grim – bars separated the sexes – there was one condemned cell. Prison reformer, Sarah Martin, was active in the early 1800s, introducing better clothing, scripture study, literary and craft skills; before this, the prisoners' comfort depended on their ability to pay the gaoler for luxuries. In 1823 the prison was extended into what had been a pub next door, additional cells were installed and a treadmill in the new part. 1836 saw the Tolhouse also serving as Great Yarmouth's first police station, but that was later moved to the rear of the Town Hall. A new act of 1865 decreed all prisoners were to have their own cell. As this could not be achieved in the small Tolhouse, all inmates were removed to Norwich by 1875, and three years later the gaol was unused. The building was finally considered of historic interest, and worthy of preservation, in 1885. It suffered serious blast and fire damage in World War II, but the roof was restored in 1960 and the building reopened as the Tolhouse Museum. A new display was installed in 2002 to indicate its earlier uses and it continues as a popular visitor attraction.

## **25 November 2010 – "East Anglian Goldsmiths 1500-1740" – by Mary Fewster**

Mary Fewster said this was recognised as the key period for those working locally. The most important places were Norwich, in Tombland; Ipswich, near the Buttermarket, and Bury St Edmunds, in Angel Hill and the Old Market – all were larger centres and linked by the main road network. Smaller workshops operated at Beccles, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, with individuals also at certain times in Stowmarket, Harleston and Diss. Woodbridge had a goldsmith too – it was an important centre for people doing business while there to settle local Liberty taxes, and some visited from as far away as Cratfield in Suffolk.

The majority of the work produced in East Anglia was in silver or silver gilt (due to the high cost of pure gold) and there are relatively few surviving examples because of fashions changing, and the expensive metals being melted down and recycled. Some regalia, including silver gilt chains of the Norwich musicians 'waites' remain, made by Richard Bere who worked in Norwich in the 15th century. No assay marks were used before 1565, and goldsmiths were not obliged to add any symbol or name to their work. Some buildings have been identified where these 16th-century traders lived, but sadly very few of the pieces they produced remain. Lists of house contents in local wills show a few wealthy people in the city (sometimes linked by marriage to goldsmiths) owned extensive collections of plate. These include Peter Peterson of Cutter Row, Willam Cobbolde of London Street, councillor William Rogers, and John Basyngham. There was also Nycholas Isborne and his son Valentyne, although later it was recorded that the latter failed in business.

Probably most of the 16th-century goldsmiths' output was commissioned by donors and took the form of patens and chalices for religious services. During the reign of Edward VI a great deal of this would have been sold off. Later, when Elizabeth came to the throne, she asked for chalices to be replaced and East Anglia still contained those with the skills to produce them. In some cases, no doubt, the better-off local families ensured their route to heaven was made smoother by donating suitable cups and plates to the nearest church or abbey for use by the clergy. Distribution of cups was irregular, and by favour, some poorer churches having to make do with pewter. Distinctive styles of decoration and shape were produced in certain areas, and some fine pieces are to be found in local churches and museums, a notable example being a communion cup by William Cobbolde still in its original woven basket. Some cups had a cover that could be inverted to function as a paten during worship. Occasionally cups were quite small but Puritans often used a beaker for the wine. As the consumption increased, in some services a flagon was provided, although certain churches offered communion only three or four times per year. The first assay master in East Anglia, a Dutchman named George Fenn, came to Norwich from Utrecht – after his arrival the value and origin of each piece was clearly marked, adding some protection for the purchaser against unscrupulous dealers who might be tempted to give short weight. There had been an acknowledged practice of clipping the edges of coins that were to be melted down for bullion, but now the London Company of Goldsmiths regularly travelled to the provinces to examine the work of local craftsmen, making sure it conformed to the strict rules of assaying (fines could be imposed and unsatisfactory work destroyed).

As towns and cities developed in the 17th century and businesses flourished, some benefactors presented plate to local councils and dignitaries. This could be in the form of a mayoral chain, a mace or shield or, as in the case of Peter Reeve of Norwich, a magnificent silver-gilt 'salt' manufactured by William Cobbolde. Some of these items survive but much of the family plate has gone. Personal jewellery, christening cups and spoons seem to be more common, often having a sentimental value, and metal detectorists have turned up some 'lost' pieces. The best articles are treasured and sometimes brought together for international exhibitions. A rare, and valuable silver tankard by a Great Yarmouth maker appeared on the 'Antiques Roadshow' some time ago.

### **The 2011 Winter Meal at Lowestoft College, St Peter's Street on 17 February!**

Your payment for the meal (£18.00 per person) is now due. Please pay the treasurer, Ray Collins. We look forward to seeing you at the college on Thursday 17 February, arrive 7 pm for 7.30 pm. If you received the printed menu please make sure you bring your copy of the meal you selected, as an *aide mémoire* on the night. This helps the college staff to get everything to you in the shortest time, without confusion.

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

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