

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 39 Number 5 – **NEWSLETTER** – May 2011

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2011

12 May 2011 "The Life and Work of George Skipper – Norfolk Architect" by David Summers – David will bring an expert view on G Skipper's work in East Anglia.

26 May 2011 Annual General Meeting – All members are invited to attend.

23 June 2011 Visit to Covehithe church and Sotterley chapel with Terry Weatherley – Please meet at Covehithe church at 7.00pm.

8 Sept 2011 "The Battle of Blythburgh church" by Dr A Mackley

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 in Nicholas Everitt Park, Oulton Broad, re-opened for the 2011 season on 18 April. The first few weeks brought us a large number of visitors and we hope this trend continues through the year.

On Thursday 12 May the Society will feature a talk on the life and work of George Skipper, the Norfolk architect, and our AGM will be held on 26 May. Please make every effort to attend.

The church outing will be held on 23 June at Covehithe Church and Sotterley Chapel. A meal will follow at the Five Bells Inn at Wrentham, with two or three course meals available at £11.95 and £14.95 respectively.

We are most grateful for the invaluable help of all our voluntary stewards and we look forward to seeing you all over the coming months.

With best wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Details of recent events:

14 April 2011 – "Aircraft Archaeology" by Ian McClachan

Ian McClachan explained that one important reason for this archaeology is to honour the aircrew who lost their lives during World War II. About 2,000 British, American and German aircraft crashed in Norfolk and Suffolk during the war, and on this occasion Ian spoke about some of those relating to American aircraft. Having once identified an aircraft at a crash-site, Ian would carry out research to find information about its crew, where they were based, and the missions flown.

When he first started, all that was needed was the landowner's permission and a few tools such as a spade and a fork. Today it is much different as there are many regulations to follow and the equipment has become more sophisticated, with items such as ground scanning radar. In the 1970s the MOD issued 'Notes of Guidance' for aircraft recovery and in the 1980s, concerns over the salvaging of military remains led to the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. A licence to dig will not be granted if human remains or bombs are thought to be present. Health and Safety rules also apply requiring hard hats, fenced off site, insurance, as well as the site and finds being photographed and recorded, with the information being copied and sent to the MOD.

It all started for Ian in 1964 on a site near Reedham where, according to rumour, two German bombers were said to have crashed into the marsh. These aircraft turned out to be two Flying Fortresses that had collided on their return from a raid over Germany. Following the excavation of an engine cowling marked with a serial number, it was possible to identify one aircraft involved from Service reports. The pilot had been Johnny Hutchinson, (known to his crew as Hutch) who had flown 25 missions. He had brought his crew home safely on many occasions with engines out of action or battle damage to the craft. On 28 February 1944 Hutch and his crew had one mission to complete before going home to the States. A 19-year-old photographer called Bud Creegan was assigned to record the flight. On the return flight Hutch's aircraft was in the centre of three when they entered cloud. Coming out of the cloud the aircraft on his right hand side, piloted by Warren Pease, was seen going into a dive. Pease pulled out of this dive and collided with Hutch's Fortress, both aircraft then plunged to the ground and a total of twenty-one young men died. The camera belonging to Bud Creegan was later recovered but unfortunately the film had been destroyed. Also found among the wreckage of this plane was a parachute, made from the earliest man-made fabrics. This is now in the USAF museum at the Wright Patterson Air Force base as a tribute to the crew. In 2000 a memorial to these young men was placed alongside the Reedham village war memorial.

In 1976 the aircraft of Warren Pease was also located and partially excavated. In 1998, the television programme Time Team became involved with the Pease site, as less work had been carried out there. However, by 1998 the area had become a SSSI so special precautions had to be instigated. A containment lagoon was created, into which water from the excavation could be pumped so that it did not pollute the marshland surface water. The aircraft would have leaked aviation fuel and engine oil into the ground over the years.

A conflict arose over the excavation method as Time Team wanted to carry out a traditional approach and Ian wanted to complete a full recovery over the three days. Ian won the dispute. One of the propellers recovered was 'feathered', indicating that there had been a problem with that engine. This may have been a contributory factor to the crash that had not been recorded in the original accident report.

Between 1976 and 1978, a Liberator was excavated near Halvergate, near the Acle Straight. This aircraft was full of 'Chaff' or 'Window' which was strips of aluminium foil that were dropped to deceive the German radar, particularly their anti-aircraft guns. Also recovered was a flak jacket, a heavy jacket fitted with steel plates for protection. The original idea for this jacket came from the Wilkinson Sword Company. One Pratt and Whitney radial engine had been damaged by fire and its propeller had been feathered. Thousands of rounds of ammunition were recovered along with twelve 500 lb bombs. The disposal of these caused a problem as a safe site had to be found where they could be blown up. As a result, Norwich Airport, the A47 and a railway line were closed while the disposal operation was in progress. A wallet belonging to the nose turret gunner, William Myers, was found in the wreckage. This contained a photo album in which there was a picture of a little girl, who would not see her father again.

At Kenninghall a Liberator pilot experiencing problems on take-off took evasive action to miss two houses which resulted in the plane crashing with the loss of all twelve crew members on board.

At the end of World War II a gravel pit at Weybread was filled with equipment the Americans no longer wanted. Some parts recovered have been sent to the USA to be used as spares to keep old aircraft flying.

To repeat a note from last month's Newsletter, I do hope that members will attend our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 26 May. For although you may not wish to be on the Committee, it is important for you to come along and elect those who do wish to be Committee members. It is also an opportunity to raise any issues or suggestions you might have regarding the Society. There will be tea, coffee and biscuits available after the meeting, (a small donation would be appreciated to cover costs). Looking forward to seeing you there.

Ron Ashman (Vice Chairman)

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

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk