

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 39 Number 8 – **NEWSLETTER** – November 2011

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2011/12

10 Nov 2011 "The History of Belle Coaches" by coach operator Robert Shreeve

24 Nov 2011 "How well do you know your town? – Some unusual features of Lowestoft"
by member Ron Ashman

26 Jan 2012 "Sinners in the Saints?" by Terry Weatherley

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

This will be the last Newsletter of 2011, how quickly time has flown by this year.

As some members have mentioned that they cannot always hear what the speaker is saying at meetings, at my talk on 24 November we hope to use a sound system. This has been in storage for many years and we need to test and check that everything still works.

The Museum had hoped to make a bid for the Lowestoft porcelain bottle (ewer) and basin that was up for auction on 28 October. This would have been a valued addition to the Lowestoft porcelain collection in the Museum. Unfortunately, however, appropriate funding could not be obtained.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Details of recent events:

13 October 2011 – "Lowestoft – Then and Now" by John Holmes

John brought a comprehensive collection of slides to illustrate and explain the change and development of the town. These images were carefully chosen to show not only the variety of styles in building, but also the differences in employment and dress of the inhabitants, seen through the work of both artist and photographer. In the 1700s Lake Lothing was not open to the sea and, just to its north, Lowestoft covered only a fraction of the area of the present town. The town boundary was from the low ground near today's Cemetery Corner up to St Margaret's church, then eastward to the Denes and southward to the Town Battery on the Green at the foot of Old Nelson Street. There was no bridge or main road to the south, Kirkley and Pakefield were separated from the town by rough, undeveloped land and each had their own identity. Access to town was mainly via Oulton Road (today partly renamed St Margaret's Road) that linked Lowestoft to the main Turnpike road running from Norfolk

down the coast towards London. At this date all boatbuilding, fishing and commercial activities took place around the beach, the cliff areas, and along the High Street. People travelled on foot or by horse and carriage. Visitors would pass the old windmill on their way into town, arriving at the High Street near the Town Chamber and old market – passageways (scores) gave direct access to the lower beach areas.

The town required better access, so the Turnpike road (later A12) was switched from its original route through Oulton [Broad] to run via Lowestoft's High Street, over the new harbour bridge (opened 1830) and on south, connecting the town with Kirkley and Pakefield, before rejoining its former line near Kessingland. The arrival of Morton Peto, with his ideas for developing the docks and railway, saw more accommodation built from the 1840s west of the High Street and south of the harbour bridge. Using a carefully selected mix of early and contemporary images John first told us how in the north cliff area, originally heathland and gorse, buildings sprang up and Belle Vue Park was laid out next to the lighthouse. Later, the golf links, boating lake, and the Sparrow's Nest theatre and gardens also provided popular entertainment for local residents. He then showed similar contrasting views of many more areas of the town, often giving members an astonishing comparison where industry and war had totally altered the streets. Many of the audience were taken back to their school years and remembered favourite shops and places of entertainment, now mostly replaced by superstores and television. The change in appearance of London Road North, once tree-lined, with private houses and gardens on each side, but in recent years a pedestrianised shopping centre, was particularly dramatic. Many differences in transport were shown, including the town's own tram and bus service, plus some of the colourful local characters featured across the years. John amused members with his witty and knowledgeable commentary.

27 October 2011 – What has the Ice Age done for us? by Ray Collins

Ray stated that much has been learned from modern research and study. Our current climatic situation reveals one third of the planet is frozen, locking up 80% of its fresh water. Intermittent warm and cold surges in temperature see this water temporarily released, giving a rise and fall in sea level. When the temperature swing is especially wide there is an Ice Age, during which the Polar areas are extended and dramatic re-sculpting of the earth's surface may occur. Man's ability to cope with these periods and adapt to the resulting change seems to be remarkable. However, it was in only in comparatively recent times, archaeologically, that any form of study and interpretation of this took place. In the nineteenth century, wealthy men with education and a thirst for knowledge began to take an interest in their surroundings and the unexplored areas of the world's surface, particularly the almost inaccessible Polar region. By using early scientific tests they worked out how rocks were formed, and they noticed that similar rock formations were differently aligned from one country to another, and wondered why.

Studies on glaciation showed many differences across Europe, for example its effect in the Alps was very pronounced and some questioned why the UK seemed less changed – quite clearly shoreline rocks here had very different levels. Earthworks, Engineering, and building schemes during the Industrial Age revealed more clues and a quantity of large rocks (erratics) were noted far away from their natural source. Eventually the archaeologists and the new

breed of geologists worked out through studies of glacial moraines that these erratics had been moved and deposited during what could only have been an Ice Age, when the north polar ice cap had extended much further south. The excavation of gravel beds and clay pits in the UK produced a surprising variety of fossil remains that showed animals normally associated with hot regions must also have lived here in past ages, and gradually the pattern of hot and cold periods came to be understood.

As early as the sixteenth century the shapes of continents on the rough maps of explorers revealed they might have once been linked, and the theory of continental drift became a possibility. However it was extremely hard to work out how this happened and exactly where and how far the broken pieces of the original had moved around the globe, leaving the major oceans divided and subject to regular circulating currents and weather variations. A Serbian mathematician named Milankovitch used precise calculations to show that variations in the earth's tilt would have an effect on the waxing and waning of the polar ice caps. Cores taken from the ocean floor provide accurate data on the sequence of the hot and cold periods although precise dating has proved difficult. Glaciers are the forerunners of an Ice Age and there has to be a series of consistently low summer temperatures to allow them to form.

In the UK we have not been able to prove the final thickness of the extended ice cap that covered the land some 450,000 years ago but it may have varied from 900 to 1600 metres and was so heavy that it depressed the land into the mantle. Sea levels were reduced due to the frozen water collecting at the poles, and this meant that there was a land bridge to the continent allowing early man to migrate between the two areas. The limits of the ice reached from Cromer across the southern part of the UK and westward to cover Wales and much of Ireland – it was most severe in north-west Scotland. The land area just outside the ice limits would have been rather like a frozen desert. The heavy scouring action of the glaciers formed dips in hard rock formations as well as cutting valleys between them, sometimes leaving hollows that produced lakes, while the course of a number of major rivers was completely altered. The debris carried beneath and at the sides of the glaciers was left behind when the ice melted and formed areas, including East Anglia, that have a mixture of soils, clays and craggy deposits. The land would have been re-colonized with trees (mainly birch, that can spread at up to 400m per annum) as the warmer climate returned. An example of the resilience of humans is that they have adapted to and utilized the new and varied materials randomly deposited in their home territory to promote agriculture, all types of building, including roads, and the waterways for transport and fishing.

Annual Report

Perhaps this is a good time to remind all members that the next Society Annual Report will be published and on sale in January 2012. This will contain details of the Society, the Museum and our members, plus a summary of all the talks from 2011; also some interesting articles on subjects not covered at Society meetings. It is good value for money and an excellent reference should you miss any of our meetings.

Please bring any written article you may have for inclusion in the next Annual Report to Ray Collins by our final meeting this year (24 November), alternatively email it to: ray93@talktalk.net or send it on to him by post during the next few weeks – posted articles may be printed or hand-written. Production of the report is made easier if your article is computer-printed (e.g. from a Word or an Excel file, at 12pt font size) but this is not essential. The deadline is Christmas for any item sent by email – please send in a bit earlier if your article is handwritten and is to be posted.

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