

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 39 Number 6 – **NEWSLETTER** – September 2011

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2011

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

22 Sept 2011 "Round Tower Churches around Lowestoft" by Richard Harbord

13 Oct 2011 "Lowestoft Then and Now" by local historian John Holmes

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

I would like to welcome all members, those renewing their membership and all new members, to the start of the 2011/2012 series of talks.

As Lilian retired from the position of Chairman at the Annual General Meeting in May, I would like to thank her for all that she has achieved during the time in that office for the Society and the Museum.

The AGM on 26 May 2011 was well attended, and apart from the election of myself as Chairman, the election of the Committee was as follows:

Janet Royce - Vice Chairman. Don Friston - Newsletter Editor.

Irene Ashman - Secretary. Keith Davies - Committee member.

Ray Collins - Treasurer/Annual Report Editor. Rodney Duerden - Committee member.

Jenny Hatton - Programme Secretary. John Knowles - Committee member.

One of the important changes agreed at the AGM was that the annual membership fee should be increased to £15.00 per person. This is to cover increased speaker's fees. To keep costs down the 2011/2012 programme includes a number of talks by members. If you have any subjects you would like to have included in next year's programme, know of any good speakers or would like to give a talk yourself, then please speak to Jenny or myself, or any of the Committee members.

On 23 June the Society visit to Covehithe Church and Sotterley Chapel was also well attended, as was the meal afterwards. Following this visit I received a letter from David Hatton (churchwarden to St Andrew, Covehithe with Benacre) thanking all members for the donation of £27 raised for the Covehithe Church restoration fund. For those who wish to see the letter a copy will be on the Secretary's table.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Details of recent events:

12 May 2011 – "The Life and Work of George Skipper, Norfolk Architect" by David Summers

George Skipper (1856–1948) was born in East Dereham, Norfolk. He wanted to be an artist and studied at the Norwich School of Art. At the end of his art course he toured the Low Countries for a time. However, his father, who was a builder, suggested he become an accountant or an architect, as either of these would offer a more financially stable career than one in art. Heeding his father's advice he then trained as an architect in London for three years before returning in 1876 to work in his father's building firm. Over this period he was able to see how both building design and construction actually worked.

In 1879 he set up his own office in Dereham, ensuring that his career took off by then winning a design competition for a building in Somerset. This led to further work, particularly for William Clark, of Clarks shoes. As well as a new house for William Clark, his designs included a clock tower; Butleigh Hospital; work in Street; several rows of cottages and a vestry, all sited in Somerset. Those contracts also allowed George to meet many influential people who would prove beneficial to him in future years.

George Skipper went on to be a leading Norwich-based architect, who, along with his rival Edward Boardman, dominated building in the city around the end of the 19th century. He combined many styles in his designs but particularly liked to incorporate cupolas and spires.

Skipper was now employing 50 people and, in 1895, built some offices at 7 London Street, Norwich. For this high profile building, set in a prominent location at the corner of the Market Place, he chose a richly decorated style using brick and terracotta. At that time architects were not allowed to advertise but interestingly, on this building, the six decorative terracotta panels depict scenes of the craftsmen who converted the designs into reality. These terracotta panels had been produced, using high quality clay, in Costessey on the outskirts of Norwich. They may be seen today forming part of the first and second floor main façade of Jarrold's department store, which they took over in 1940. He also designed the other Jarrold buildings around his signature office block.

Of the many buildings attributed to Skipper in Norwich, the most well known must be the Royal Arcade, which was started in 1897. This was built on the site of the medieval coaching inn, the Royal Hotel, and a pub called The Angel. To commemorate the latter an angel can be found in the top of the façade.

The Arcade shop fronts have elegant curved glass (bow) windows. Italian workmen were employed to install the roof lights and the decorative floor tiles. The walls over the shop fronts and below the first floor windows are also covered with specially designed tiles – they depict stylised plant forms and peacocks. These and the lettering in the Arcade use Art Nouveau styling, and another fine example of this can be seen over the door of the Norwich Conservative Club.

George Skipper also designed the Norwich Union building, and the Norfolk Daily Standard office near Upper Goat Lane in Norwich. The latter uses a mixture of styles as it has an

Italian tower, Dutch gable, Romanesque arches and medieval-style oriel windows. George and his company designed many other buildings around Norfolk and, of local interest for Society members, the Royal Norfolk & Suffolk Yacht Club, and the Hotel Victoria in Lowestoft.

After winning another competition he designed the town hall for Cromer. The arrival of the railway had brought much investment to that town, and it was here that his contacts made in Somerset became useful. The Metropole Hotel, Cromer was specifically designed for entrepreneurs to bring their families on holiday. Sadly, this building was demolished in the 1960s as was another of his buildings, the Grand Hotel, but several private houses and small hotels still survive in the town. At Hunstanton, a Mr Le Strange decided to build a new resort that he wanted to be a Borough, but for this he needed a town hall. Skipper designed that building in 'carr stone', a kind of ironstone found in North West Norfolk.

23 June 2011 – "Visit to Covehithe Church and Sotterley Chapel" led by Terry Weatherley

St Andrew Church, Covehithe: Terry explained that the original church remains date to around the mid 1400s. Funded by the great wool trade in East Anglia, this church was rebuilt at around the same period as those at Southwold and Blythburgh. By 1672, when public worship was a low-key and sober affair, the small parish of Covehithe found its congregation was too poor to support such a large building. As it was almost derelict, permission was granted for the removal of the church roof and a much smaller church was erected within the original walls, against the retained old tower. A substantial amount of the original outer wall structure, with its chequered flint base, remains today and gives a clear impression of the magnificence of the early church, set within its spacious graveyard at the heart of this rural village.

Wall plaques naming the prime movers in the rebuild, James Gilbert and Enoch Girling, are set high in the interior walls. The original font that had been defaced by the Puritans was re-used along with a door from the old church. Stone from the original church provided material for the new, and of particular interest is the external east wall where numerous lumps of re-used masonry may be seen, including some decorated carvings, perhaps from shrines, piscinas and sedilia. Quantities of material were also put to use in the surrounding village. Inside the new church, which is thatched, there are some memorials for local incumbents and families but the interior is generally plain. With the current congregation measured in low double figures, the church is desperately in need of refurbishment and suffering the ravages of damp, not helped by a preservation order forbidding any remedial work to weatherproof the junction of church and tower. Also of concern is the long-term survival of this church with its tiny village, the latter under threat from severe coastal erosion that has already claimed several buildings from the end nearest the cliff.

Sotterley Chapel: Just south of Sotterley Park, stands this Gothic-style red brick octagonal chapel, near to the war memorial by the crossroads leading to Shadingfield, Hulver, Stoven and Wrentham. It was to be demolished in 2001 but, despite having its original clay pavement flooring removed, was saved by the prompt action of an alert local parishioner. Now taken

care of by The Sotterley Chapel Preservation Trust, it is beautifully restored and in regular use again. Sotterley Parish Council and local clergy encourage the Trust, which is formed of like-minded people from Sotterley and the surrounding parishes. It intends to support the chapel in perpetuity and see it used regularly for worship, burials and as the centre for a range of events. The Parish Council owns both the chapel and cemetery. Geoffrey Munn who features on the *Antiques Roadshow* is a patron.

History: Around 1880 the graveyard at nearby St Margarets church in Sotterley Park was running out of space, so the Sotterley Burial Board, helped by local benefactors, planned a new mortuary chapel and cemetery nearby. The work was completed by 1883 and the site consecrated by the Bishop of Norwich at the instigation of the Barne family. The cemetery contains some interesting monuments and is presently managed as an area for wildlife and wildflowers – a peaceful place for quiet repose and contemplation.

One monument near the south door is for Michael Barne who was born at Sotterley Park and attended Stoven School. He joined Captain Scott's ship *Discovery* for its Antarctic expedition of 1901–1904 as 2nd Lieutenant, sailing with such luminaries as Shackleton and Edward Wilson. Responsible for taking magnetic readings he survived the trip, where he was regarded as the peacekeeper on board, and was awarded the Polar medal. He later served in both world wars and died in 1961.

The Preservation Trust was formed in 2005 and managed a 5-year programme to restore the Chapel. Most important was to make it weatherproof. The roof was completely restored, and freshly tiled, and the original cross re-installed at the summit. Some stone buttresses were replaced where required. The Trust were able to act in time to save the furniture and pews but their biggest task was providing 1500 floor tiles and laying them on the original sand surface. The Trust is to be congratulated on the transformation of this lovely and unusual octagonal chapel and its surroundings.



Covehithe

Church of St Andrew,



Mortuary Chapel, Sotterley

Photos: Covehithe by Don Friston and Sotterley Chapel by Sue Weatherley

Remains of a third Iron Age Causeway in East Anglia – this time found near the River Waveney at Geldeston – and following up on the previous discoveries in 2006, 2007 and 2009.

History: Well-preserved large posts were discovered below ground during bank realignment of the River Waveney in 2006. Three digs (2006, 2007 at Beccles and 2009 at Barsham), established that these were part of a triple post causeway structure, of which 500 metres have been traced, dating to 75BC, or near the very end of the Iron Age. In addition to the large upright oak posts a substantial quantity of worked wood and pottery fragments (Iron Age and Roman) was found, and also some adjoining trackways made from bundles of wooden rods. The causeway runs at an oblique angle to the river approximately north-west to south-east. Because only the lower ends of the posts are preserved below the peat it is not known if they ever supported a superstructure such as a raised platform, but there is evidence of notches cut in the sides of some that might have located smaller diameter cross members and thin branches to form a walkway.

The Eastern Daily Press of 29 June told the story of a new excavation, in 2011, near the River Waveney at Geldeston, where further traces of a third causeway had been unearthed in 2010. Dr Ben Gearey, archaeology lecturer at Birmingham University, said the site was "pretty rare" and appeared to be aligned with the earlier Barsham excavation across the river. This third site also is probably Iron Age in date. Six students and four members of staff have spent three weeks investigating the area and discovered the lower ends of 13 oak posts of varying size, possibly in a triple line, similar to the earlier digs.



Photo: Andy Damell © Archant Ltd

Archaeologist Kristine Kraviec, from the Birmingham University team, with one of the Iron Age posts found in the river bank at Geldeston this summer.

Society members will find fuller details and photographs of the earlier Iron Age excavations at Beccles in Newsletters Volume 35 number 9, and in Volume 37 number 6.

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: rav93@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 to be posted.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

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

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