

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2012

12 Apr 2012 "Lowestoft's Lost Village" by Colin Dixon, who speaks about the Beach Village on Whapload Road (now virtually gone) where he lived as a child

26 Apr 2012 "Frederick Dodington and the Rule of Three" by member Don Friston who tells how a bright lad from Carlton Colville became the main shopkeeper in the village

10 May 2012 "Outing to Somerleyton Hall & Gardens" We will be meeting at the Hall at 6.30pm. Entry fee, which includes the buffet meal, is £15.95 per person.

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

On 17 March, Ray Collins, Irene and I took a display to the Suffolk Local History Council's 'Societies Day' at Elmswell, near Bury St Edmunds. The event went well, the talks were interesting and we managed to sell a number of books. Paul Durbidge had loaned parts of a medieval 'Knight' jug recovered from beach level at Corton, and a decorated schist whetstone for us to display. The period of the whetstone is probably Anglo Scandinavian and there are similar forms from Coppergate in York. The only other representative group from Lowestoft was the Port of Lowestoft Research Society.

It may be a little early to mention the Annual General Meeting, but I would like to remind members that this meeting in May is an opportunity to have your say on who sits on the committee, and how the Society is run. If anyone would like to join the committee, or has issues they would like discussed, then please speak to me or another Committee member. Committee meetings are quite informal.

As postal costs are soon to be increased, I would appreciate it if members using e-mail could let our Secretary have their e-mail address. Society information can then be sent that way instead of by post, saving us a lot of money. We will of course continue to post information to those members who do not use e-mail.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Details of recent events:

8 March 2012 – "Victorian Health and Sickness" by Katrina Siliprandi

Katrina, from Norwich Castle Museum's Education Department, is responsible for Learning Development and her talk covered health changes due to scientific and social development during the Victorian era. Public Health reports in the 1840s showed the startling fact that Britain, by then a world-leading country, had shockingly poor living standards. Its main urban centres were growing at a furious rate but were beset with problems of disease and lack of sanitation. The life expectation for professional and better off persons averaged 38 yrs, while labourers averaged just 17 yrs. The cause was linked to the Industrial Revolution – large factories had appeared, mainly in the Midlands and the North and attracted labourers from outside the area causing the towns to become overcrowded. The driving power for their machinery was steam, the latter produced cheaply using the plentiful coal supplies available in that location. In the early days business flourished and fortunes were made but, as industries developed, there came a point where pollution from smoke (to the air) and chemicals and sewage (to the water supplies) brought misery.

Overcrowding was rife in Manchester in 1844 – more than 18,000 people lived in cellars – the water supply was hard to obtain and, what was connected, only worked intermittently – few houses had water closets. The night soil men took away sewage once or twice per week and sold it as fertilizer to local farmers, hardly a healthy system. Many people collected water daily from local pumps or wells to use for cooking and washing, but had limited storage facilities, and nothing worked well (in parts of London water pipes worked for only 2hrs on three days each week). People were tempted into using water from ponds and pits and consequently diseases, especially of the waterborne variety, were hard to eradicate – death rates were high and health concerns grew apace. Those who were well off then fled the cities and towns for clean living in the country – the remainder stayed in their smoke-filled, cramped, dwellings. The water supply in Norwich was very poor in 1850, but the residents were 25% paupers so there was no enthusiasm for a change that would increase their rents. Gradually pumping stations began to be built, the Sanitary Act passed (1866) and another 1875 Act saw water and sewage systems improve. Science began to help too in the 1870s with new medicines to fight infection, but slum clearance only got going in the late 1800s.

Education in medicine was generally poor in the 1800s until the Royal College of Physicians was established. In the early days bleeding, by use of fleams or leeches, was seen as a cure-all but had little impact. Prescribed drugs often contained toxic chemicals or metals that were not good for patients whose diet and hygiene were already poor. The realisation that disease could be spread by contact came slowly, and patients in crowded hospitals even shared beds. Operating theatres were not sterile and floors were covered in sawdust; surgeons and staff wore no protective gloves or gowns, but sometimes a coat that would be changed after a few months (spectators were allowed to sit and watch the proceedings). No anaesthetic meant surgery was fast to minimise the pain. Amputations were common and, with those conditions, sepsis came quickly, the death rate averaging 26 per cent. At this time, workhouses were often providing better care than the recognised hospitals. Around 1844 ether had been tried in the USA as an anaesthetic during dental extractions. Liston tried it successfully at University Hospital but the smell was not good and it irritated the eyes, so with Simpson and other colleagues he switched to chloroform, later to be used during birthing.

Accepting Pasteur's theory that infection was caused by micro-organisms, Lister, in 1870, began to spray operating areas and equipment with carbolic acid to fight the problem. Wound dressings and gut for sutures were also treated. There was then a move away from the foul, poorly ventilated, closed rooms in the big houses used as hospitals, and Victorian wards began to use antiseptic and clean water, although sterilisation of instruments was some way off.

Nursing, often the role of Religious Orders, was primitive in the early 1800s. Patients weren't washed (especially their feet) nor bedding changed. Then Florence Nightingale came into nursing and by 1853 had started her great work. The party of nurses she led in the Crimean war achieved miracles and returned highly regarded. New training was set up and the profession became respected as quite fit for any woman. This also brought a new era of light, cleanliness, air and warmth to hospitals. By the end of the century Marie and Pierre Curie were investigating radium and brought the age of x-rays, but sadly Pierre succumbed to radiation at an early age. Clinics were introduced at that time, although home remedies and quack doctors were to survive into the 1900s. The good news for working class women was that their local midwives, with years of experience, were often better than the incumbent doctors.

22 March 2012 – "The Lowestoft Porcelain Trail" by Chris Brooks

Some years ago Chris teamed up with the late Jane Jarvis to tell the history of the 18th-century Lowestoft Porcelain Factory and its 20th-century namesake. The Chelsea pottery in London had produced English porcelain in 1745, and by 1750 had been joined by factories in the provinces. The first porcelain at Lowestoft was developed between 1757 and 1759 using a fine white clay found in the north of the town at Gunton. The main partners, who had limited experience in tile and brickmaking, were Philip Walker, Obediah Aldred and Robert Browne, and the business was quite small to begin with, being based between Crown Street and Bell Lane (the main road into the town at the time). Surprisingly, their output was of good quality, some said better than Delftware. The factory had a life span of some 45 years, closing in about 1802. Chris had slides of the street plan of the town in the 1700s when there was no real development south of Lake Lothing. The lack of a bridge where Lake Lothing entered the sea meant visitors to Lowestoft approached from Yarmouth via Oulton village or from the south via Mutford. The plan pinpointed the factory site and showed how small and simple the town was in those days. The factory increased in size, later involving over 90 people, and was equipped with two coal-fired kilns. The blue porcelain produced in the first few years was inexpensive and about half was exported through Holland and France; these delicately painted early pieces are now very rare.



Teapot decorated by an anonymous artist (known as the Tulip Painter) -- also 6 inch moulded bowl plus octagonal caddy

Clay had been dug for generations at a number of places near to Lowestoft, for brick and tile manufacture, before the interest in porcelain occurred. There was a suitable clay pit for the latter on land owned by the Fowler family who lived at Gunton Old Hall (the footings of which remain, with an ancient well, off Gunton Church Lane) A kiln, possibly used for trial firings, was excavated in the 1950s beneath a garden lawn at Glebe Close, not far from Gunton Church Lane but was then covered over and left in situ. A second clay pit was by the Warren Houses, near the spring by the Dell at the bottom of the cliffs just north of Links Road. (Older members may remember the pools below the spring that were improved by Harry Dowsett of Brooke Marine but fell into decay after the war.) Chris then took members on a picture tour of buildings associated with the original Porcelain Factory and also places where collections of the porcelain, now highly-valued, may be seen today. The most important of these are the Victoria & Albert Museum at South Kensington, Norwich Castle Museum, the Lowestoft Museum in Broad House at Everitt's Park, Oulton Broad (where both porcelain and moulds are displayed), and the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge.

Products ranged from tea caddies, pots, bowls and saucers, to plates and coffee pots, jugs (including the 'sparrow beak' variety) spoon trays, ewers, vases and invalid feeding cups. A sideline was their range of souvenir items entitled "A Trifle from Lowestoft". These were popular, and they supplied "Trifle from" souvenirs for a number of other East Anglian towns. A limited number of human and animal figures were made and some commemorative bowls and plaques (plus the only birth plaques made in this country). Items were either thrown or slip moulded, then fired at about 1050°C, being at first decorated by hand in cobalt blue or polychrome. Later, transfer printing and enamels were also used. Early pieces imitated

oriental designs but many local scenes were recorded in the following years. One anonymous decorator specialised in tulips, but Robert Allen is probably the best-known Lowestoft porcelain painter and was very skilful at calligraphy. Late in life he painted a window for St Margaret's church in Lowestoft (still in the chancel). The decorators worked in cottages near the factory or took pieces home to finish. Morse's Brewery took over the factory premises in the early 1800s and traded on into the 20th century. During later building work on the site a disused basement area was uncovered containing a large amount of wasters (spoiled or broken pottery) and moulds.

In the late 1900s an enterprising businessman in south Lowestoft attempted to revive the porcelain industry, copying some of the original designs, but using modern slip casting and firing techniques. Local employees were trained in the moulding and fettling and also worked hard to interpret the hand painting of the originals, with some success. The company traded quite well initially, and later moved to larger premises north of the bridge. Several ideas were tried there, including a hands-on approach where customers could be involved in the production sequence, but some years later the proprietor died and the main company ceased trading. However Colin Challis, a designer and decorator, is still able to handle commissions for some of their unique, commemorative porcelain items via his studio at the Lowestoft Arts Centre near the Triangle.

Churches Outing on 28 June 2012

Terry has arranged for us to visit The Russian Orthodox church in Mettingham, plus St Michael's in Beccles, and there will be a meal afterwards at The Waveney House Hotel. Menu and list for those who wish to book for the meal is available at Society meetings.

New facility on the Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

Ray Collins has been working hard to transcribe the Society's Annual Reports into pdf format. Terry has now updated the Society's website by adding the first 20 issues of the Annual Report and members can download them, using Adobe Acrobat reader, to view on screen or to print via their own system. It is the intention to get the balance of these Reports available, as opportunity arises.