

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## Volume 40 Number 3 – **NEWSLETTER** – March 2012

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

### What's On in 2012

**8 Mar 2012 "Victorian Health and Sickness"** by Katrina Siliprandi, Education Department of Norwich Castle Museum

**22 Mar 2012 "The Lowestoft Porcelain Trail"** author and historian Chris Brooks talks about local buildings associated with Lowestoft Pottery in the 18th century

**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

**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

The Museum had a good year in 2011. Visitor numbers were 9,286 (an increase of 8.5% on the previous year). Donations showed an increase of 19.4% though shop sales decreased a little by 3.9%. These figures were very encouraging as the season was three weeks shorter than 2010. Over the winter period the Museum team have been busy renewing the lighting in the Porcelain Room, remaking the World War 2 display case, and making a new display for the irons in the Hollingsworth Room. A resident from the USA, David Edmonds, has donated one of the first transistor radios to the Museum. This is a Pam receiver said to have been assembled at T.V Manufacturing, in Oulton Broad, in 1956. Both Pam and T.V Manufacturing were subsidiaries of Pye Ltd. If any members would like to help in the Museum, possibly by looking after the displays, cataloguing, or acting as a steward, then please see Ray Collins.

I was contacted recently by William Peskett, who has published a book based on research carried out by his father Victor. It is called *Metfield Parish and Poor in the 18th Century* and is available from Amazon. All of the proceeds are going to the local church. On his retirement from a career as an English teacher and Headmaster, Victor Peskett moved to Metfield and lived in a house that had previously been the Huntsman & Hounds Inn. It was here, two centuries earlier, that the Metfield Guardians of the Poor had often held their meetings. For more information, see the Secretary's table.

As you probably know, Lord Somerleyton died on 26 January. He had for many years been the President of this Society and chairman of Trustees, lately being our Patron. A Service of Thanksgiving for his life was held at St Margaret's Church on Wednesday 15 February. Over 600 people attended the service and I, together with Jon and Gay Reed and Ray Collins represented the Society and Museum.

On Tuesday 28 February, 30 members attended the meal at the Lowestoft College Restaurant 'EAsT', which was enjoyed by all. I believe it is important to have evenings such as this, as it gives members a chance to meet and talk socially. My thanks go to Ray Collins for organising the event.

**Ron Ashman – Chairman**

## Details of recent events:

### 9 February 2012 – "The effects of the plague in Suffolk" by Pip Wright

Pip began by outlining the countrywide records of the bubonic plague that periodically ravaged the population (the black death was recorded as early as 1349). In those times it was widely believed to be a punishment from God, levied on the unfaithful, and to have been spread through exposure to bad air. Some of the public carried containers of sweet smelling unguents, or salts, and herbs that would mask the odours from drains, animals, and sometimes their neighbours, or else (after the 16thc) they smoked. Sadly this precaution did not seem to prevent the plague carrying them off in large numbers. Many other diseases of epidemic proportion existed then, including typhus, cholera, measles, tuberculosis and scarletina, but none made the enormous and sudden impact of the plague. Deaths due to this were sometimes 10 times above average, especially during hot weather, and the end of summer saw the entries for burials in the local registers reach record levels. These waves of plague infection were irregular with sometimes a break of 20 or 30 years between. London and the Home counties experienced more problems from plague than elsewhere because the black rat that carried the plague flea preferred the warmer conditions, as in its normal habitat in the southern parts of Europe, and did not spread far into colder northern Britain. The black rats came to Britain in sailing trade ships that imported cloth and rare goods including spices from eastern ports. The thick thatch of housing in earlier centuries provided the perfect retreat for them as they could exist in close proximity to humans and, if they died in winter, plague fleas dropped down into the house. They found humans a good alternative host, but if not successful were quite capable of surviving for months by hiding within carpets, household linen, or clothing, until the hot weather enabled them to multiply.

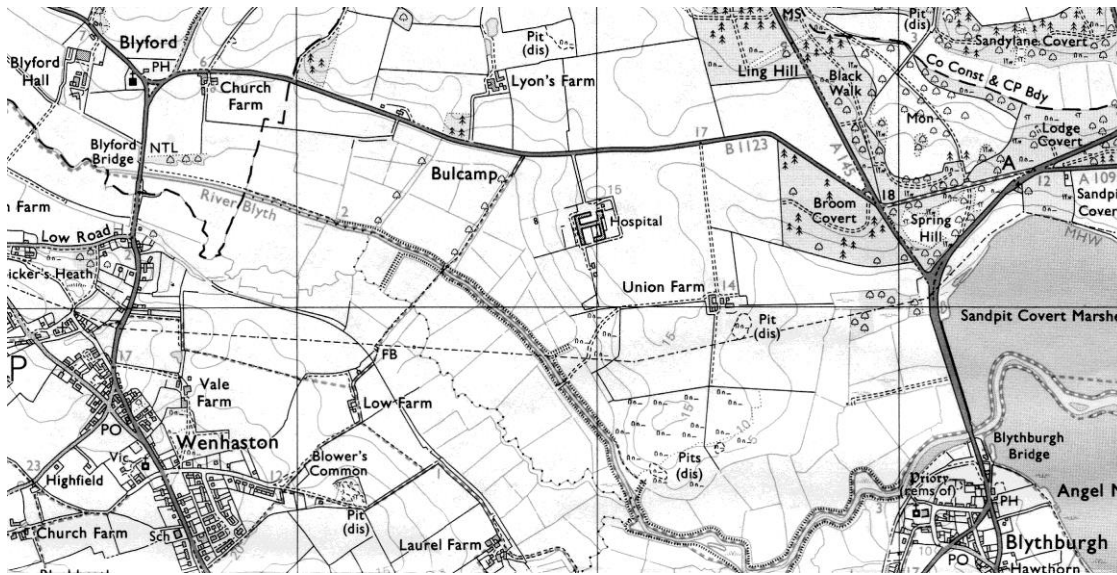
The plague was easily recognised as the sufferer developed large swellings (bubos) particularly in the armpits and groin area. The swellings were pus-filled and poisonous and skin discolouration also occurred. There was generally a circular mark around the bite and the victims developed a fever during the incubation period, followed by collapse and death in most cases, although some survived probably due to a natural immunity. The local councillors appointed searchers who looked at bodies to verify the presence of plague. A reversal of the normal burial system then occurred; where funerals had been well advertised daytime events with a coffin, and attended by the public, they now happened at night with as few onlookers as possible, the body wrapped in only a shroud, and frequently tipped with others from the cart into a pit, being then covered in quicklime. London and other big places printed special orders on how to deal with the plague, including by-laws prohibiting movement of residents by land or water. Examiners were appointed who viewed plague areas and put in place precautions to prevent the spread of the disease. One of these was to mark an exclusion zone with chains. This eventually led to the chain being adopted in England as a unit of measurement. Most of the affluent citizens, including doctors, lawyers and councillors would run off to stay in the country as far as possible from the outbreak. All Fairs and Markets were closed and warning notices erected, near which responsible citizens stood to keep out or negotiate with neighbouring villagers and visitors to try and get supplies, particularly food, for the affected families and townspeople. One interesting means to pay for goods was to drop the money into a tub of vinegar from where it was collected by the supplier when they had delivered the food (mainly vegetables, grain and fruit crops). Pest Houses were erected outside plague towns and were extremely basic rooms, but the idea of removing the sick from the centre of occupation was a good one. People appointed to organise these out of town affairs were given a staff of office and this later provided the idea for the policeman's truncheon.

John Raven, a London doctor, fled to Hadleigh, near Ipswich in 1636, taking the plague with him, and just one year later the bulk of the more affluent local inhabitants had left. Ipswich Borough Minutes record steps were taken there to build six pest houses on the heath outside of town and many deaths had occurred. Bury St Edmunds was then the worst plague spot in the county with 435 dead, affecting over 200 families, but again the chief residents had left town. Ipswich tried to forestall problems in 1665 by taking local loans and building more pest houses in early summer – in July bailiffs were keeping away visitors – even so there were 68 dead by the year end. Bills of mortality had to be submitted monthly and 80% were put down to plague. In 1665-6 the Ipswich death total was 1071 from a population of 8000 or so – and around 1800 had fled the town

By the late 1600s the worst plague periods were over, and it finally disappeared during the 18th century. Eventually the black rat was wiped out in Britain, although it continued to be a problem in Europe in later centuries. An odd occurrence of plague flared up in the Shotley Peninsula near Ipswich, Suffolk, in the early 1900s resulting in six deaths but that was its parting shot. The World Health Organization says it is now eradicated worldwide.

## 23 February 2012 – "1836 Poor Law Emigration from Blything" by member Myra Kestner

Myra made this, her first digital slide presentation, a very interesting event. She had earlier taken part in a voluntary cataloguing project for the National Archive that dealt with some correspondence between the Poor Law Commissioners and the Poor Law Union. The project meant transferring information onto a detailed set of forms that were input to the online National Archive website. The area given to her group was the Blything Union (Blything Hundred) in Suffolk and the correspondence (mainly between the Commissioners and local Boards of Guardians) dated from the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. There were a number of new provisions in the Act to be enforced and many parishes were affected. Myra worked on cataloguing correspondence about helping emigrants move to Canada in 1836, and this sparked off some further private research.



Blything's Board of Guardians met at the Bulcamp Workhouse, centre of map (and now apartments) off the Blythburgh to Halesworth Road. Each parish had one or two persons on the Board, usually local farmers, and the chairman was the principal landowner (in this case Lord Stradbroke). After the Act, the workhouse had been refurbished to forcibly separate men, women and children. (A visiting social reformer Dr Kay had been appalled by the previous conditions where all the inmates including the old and sick were mixed together.) The aim was that all inmates received relief but those outside did not; an aim that was never fully realised. In March 1836 Lord Stradbroke wrote to the Poor Law Commission that there had been trouble at Bulcamp, where 100 Westleton people were housed, and a further 200 outside it were receiving relief. He threatened to shift another 100 into Bulcamp, also to be paid for by the Westleton ratepayers. His main complaint was that farmers employed only one full time labourer per 100 acres, throwing the rest onto the rates for support, but mechanisation was also reducing the numbers required, particularly in winter. Many farmers and labourers in rural parishes wanted to keep the roundsman or ticket system, where labourers were employed as needed, with wages supplemented by parish relief based on the price of bread and size of family. The Commission did not approve this practice and it was being stamped out. His Lordship hoped the Government would not hesitate to send a ship and facilities to enable the ratepayers to send off to Canada all those that were willing to go, saying that every week was of consequence, as an earlier disorder in Ipswich had caused extensive damage.

Parish support for pauper emigration was not new (Blything had already funded a limited emigration to northern industrial areas and to the New World) but now the Poor Law Commission had to see the rulings in the new Act enforced and give approval. Much form filling was involved – not the strong point in every parish. On 30 March 1836 the Blything Guardians contracted with a London agent for two brigs, the *Allendale* and the *Albion*, to be at Lowestoft, one on 14 April and one on 21 April (a circular was issued locally to advertise the sailings to Quebec). Brigs were regularly used for emigration, bringing a timber cargo on their return voyage. A minimum provision of bread, potatoes, biscuit and flour was made and more could be added at the discretion of the parishes. Some in Blything did so – e.g. Covehithe gave tea, coffee, soap, salt, pepper, lard, butter, cheese, sugar and candles. Vestry meetings were held to determine which families or persons should be sent, at the sole expense of the parish, which included onward travel from Quebec. Cratfield parish wrote: ...these families are found in a destitute state for want of clothing; the parish proposes to furnish them with such articles... in

addition to other expences as may be necessary. The families on their list had cost the parish £45 during 1835. Family names included Oakes and Barber.

At the time, emigration to Canada was very popular and advertisements appeared in the *Norwich Mercury* for private emigrant voyages at reasonable fares from a number of ports. The Blything emigrant paupers and luggage were taken by cart to Lowestoft, accompanied by parish officers or Guardians who had to certify the correct people went on board. Persons refusing to take ship would have to refund the parish, but there is no record of such refusal despite emigrant ships being lost in transit to Quebec the previous year. Before embarkation the Captain demanded assurances about 'head money' – the Colonial Government in Quebec would reclaim that tax on their arrival. Both ships arrived safely after the six or seven week voyage. There is no surviving description, but the passengers usually slept on temporary wooden berths fixed each side of the hold with only the hatches for ventilation. On arrival 5 shillings 'head money' was demanded from each adult, but some were unable to pay (it was alleged they had used their money to buy spirits from the Captain on the voyage). After they were kept on board for 24 hrs the Captain paid the 'head money' and they disembarked. This led to a lengthy dispute involving the Captain, the Shipping Agent and the Poor Law Commission. In a previous incident when there was a lack of funds, Mr Buchanan the Quebec agent paid for the emigrants' onward travel and it is likely that he did this in the case of the *Allendale* emigrants. He had published a free 'Emigrants Handbook' containing helpful advice on settlement and gaining employment, also on getting assistance for medical and other pauper support (many were going to Upper Canada and the Toronto region, described in the book as 'suitable for large families' with work available there for grown up sons and daughters). It was a protracted journey, taking two or three days and involving three different steamboats.

A letter home from two passengers from the *Allendale* was published in the *Ipswich Journal* of 3 September 1836: Eight emigrant men were listed therein but no mention of their families. One was Edmund Barrett from Wrentham (he had travelled to Canada with his wife and five children). The point of the letter was to advise their relations in Suffolk that all the emigrants had found employment and that there was plenty of work available. Barrett had hired a house with 2 acres of land for 25 dollars per year and found employment at Port Hope. Two of the men worked at driving horses that pulled canal boats, and two more drove teams of horses delivering corn to a mill, and collecting stores (far better, said one, than working for a farmer). Prior to their emigration, the Revd Clissold of Wrentham had described these characters as 'not such as to make their residence in his parish desirable'. The letter from Canada ended 'give our respects to our English masters and tell them if they come to America they will have to run about after men as much as men run after work in England'.

Most of the emigrants were from farm labourer's families with the adults in their 20s, 30s and 40s, so it was very likely that they would find work and have a good chance of successful settlement in their new home. Lord Stradbroke, in his address to the Blything Board of Guardians on 6 January 1837 stated: that during 1836, 524 individuals – 173 men, 106 women and 245 children – were sent to the British Colonies, plus 130 going to manufacturing districts in this country. The limited evidence from the records does suggest the moves were a success for the emigrants and also for the parish ratepayers back in Suffolk.

### **Societies Day at Blackbourne Hall, Elmswell, on 17 March 2012**

We will have a stand there and all members are welcome to attend. Leaflets giving the programme and also a location map will be available on the Secretary's table at Society meetings.

### **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 (details to follow) at The Waveney House Hotel.

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