

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 40 Number 7 – **NEWSLETTER** – October 2012

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2012

11 Oct 2012 "The Herring Girls" by Chris Unsworth – Scots girls visited East Anglia on a yearly working trip

25 Oct 2012 "Gt Yarmouth Gaol 1835–77" by Chris Wright – the fascinating history of our neighbouring town

8 Nov 2012 "In the Footsteps of the Famous" by Paul Scriven – a different topic for many of our members

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

We were contacted recently by Annette Gregory who lives in Townsville, Queensland, Australia, for information about where her ancestors had lived in Lowestoft. Her great great grandfather, Thomas Anderson, was born in Great Yarmouth but settled in Lowestoft and raised a family. A sailmaker by trade, he ran his business from premises in Whapload Road, opposite the net drying area on the North Denes. He lived in Edinburgh Road and St Margaret's Road and then moved to a large detached house in that area. Before the First World War business was obviously good, as he also owned two fishing vessels. Two sons followed him into the sailmaking business and his oldest daughter became a net mender. Mrs Gregory wrote that his boats were commandeered during the war by the Admiralty to do minesweeping. However, Thomas Anderson had bought sail canvas costing £5,000 before the outbreak of hostilities. Without the income from his fishing boats at that time, he could not recover the cost of that canvas and, as a result, lost money and was declared bankrupt at the end of the First World War. Shortly afterwards the Andersons emigrated to Australia to join their son who had moved there in 1910.

Society's Annual Report: Please provide any items you have prepared for this in writing to Ray Collins at our meetings or, if by email, to ray93@talktalk.net (preferably a Word document) before our last meeting in 2012.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

13 September – "Lowestoft 500–1500" by David Butcher

For this talk, David partly took the theme of his new book, to be published by the Heritage Centre this month, dealing with the Half-hundred of Lothingland. The book is mostly based on information in the 1086 Domesday survey of this country, and the Hundred Rolls of 1274. Our local area has revealed remains of Neolithic, Bronze-Age, Iron-Age and Anglo-Saxon settlements; and the Romans were also located nearby at Burgh Castle. Other settlers came from Scandinavia and, in the 10th to 11th centuries, would have found landings easy as many places had sloping beaches, often backed by sparsely populated, low heathland. So began the slow build-up of the population prior to the Norman Conquest. The Royal Manor of Lothingland filled the area between the half-hundred of Mutford, and the town of Gorleston (originally in Suffolk). Ralph Ballistarius was a member of the new, ruling, Norman elite. The English Hundred was an administrative unit of 100 *hides* (each of 120 acres) known post-Conquest as *carucates*. Lothingland had some fifty-two hides, but neighbouring Mutford only

twenty-seven. The two units may have been considered as one, although separated by a freshwater lake (*Lake Lothing*) cut off from the sea by a shingle bank.

The Hundred Rolls of 1274 were commissioned by Edward I to form a fiscal survey of all England, but only the Lothingland record has survived for the northern part of Suffolk. Lothing, as a name, was probably formed from the Old English *hluda* and *-ing*, suggesting descendants of *Hluda* ("the loud one"). Lowestoft's name is made up of *Hloðver* and *toft* – A Scandinavian form of the parish where *Hluda* made his home. The name Mutford derives from the Old English *mot* (meeting) and *ford* (shallow place in water).

No doubt there were taxes payable to the Crown from its estates, based on the findings of the survey and, as always, there were those who administered (and took profits from) the scheme. Taxes were either paid in cash or by labour- service to the individual manors. The area was divided into settlements (*vills*) and estates, in which were manors, holdings and outliers (or *berewicks*), overseen by various lords and earls reporting to the Crown. A number of vills took the names of important local families and can be recognised today, albeit with slightly altered spelling, while others have been absorbed into adjoining parishes. At Domesday, those living and working on the manors and estates were classified in descending order of importance as *Thegns* – under the earls, and controlling the *Freemen* – who were able to hold land in return for rent, and sometimes to dispose of it; *Villans* – a skilled class of workers who might hold land for profit or subsistence; *Bordars* – a middle-class of general labourers, also allocated subsistence holdings; *Slaves* – who were given menial but essential tasks at the lowest level, with in-house accommodation or the simplest of lodgings. Local overlords included Gyrrh Godwinson, for Lothingland and Mutford (pre-Conquest) plus Roger Bigot (Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk) for Lothingland, post-Conquest. The overlords had many land-holders under them and sometimes controlled the churches too. The hub of Mutford half-hundred was a 420-acre, large manor in the village of Mutford itself, while Gorleston (with a manor of 600 acres) was the Lothingland equivalent. Estates would have held a limited number of cattle (mainly for ploughing teams) plus a few horses for the rich to ride. Pigs were more common and were allowed to forage (*shack*) in the local woodland – all common and heathland was strictly managed at that time. Substantial numbers of sheep were also kept in some communities.

The inhabitants of Lowestoft in the 11th century are believed to have lived in the low-lying area to the north of Lake Lothing, close to what is now known as Cemetery Corner. They were mostly concerned with fishing and agriculture, along with some bartering for everyday food and essentials. (Lowestoft seems to have become a manor by 1212 and, by 1274, shared control of the half-hundred with Gorleston.) Around 1300, the townspeople started a gradual migration to the elevated cliff area that was to become Lowestoft High Street. An ingenious system of terracing was carried out to make practical use of the cliff for buildings and gardens, allowing development from the north end of the town, down to the location of the present docks. The beach was then used for shipbuilding and maritime trading and, in the next two centuries, the fishing industry expanded, with its main merchants living along the seaward side of the High Street. Certain manors, in surrounding parishes (including Corton, Somerleyton and Oulton), held plots of land between the cliff and the original settlement, from where the town had re-located, and in addition there were six heath areas. To the north was another settlement named Akethorpe, on land later held by Magdalen College, Oxford. An early church existed at Akethorpe, possibly on the site now occupied by Lowestoft St. Margaret's (parts of the latter date from the 14th century). Lowestoft was listed at number 14 in the 1320 Lay subsidy, but by 1524 it headed the list of successful towns and manors in Lothingland Half-hundred.

27 September – "The History of Lighthouses" by Keith Seaman

Having spent many years working at or maintaining lighthouses, Keith is well qualified to talk about their history and operations. His family connections began with his grandfather, who was a principal keeper, and then his uncle who also worked in lighthouses. Sadly the job of 'lighthouse keeper' no longer exists as since 1997, in common with the UK lightships, they have all been fully automated and de-manned.

Monks first used light signals on cliffs and headlands to alert lookouts on vessels approaching their shores. The Romans built some splendid ones and a few remain today. The oldest example still working is at Coruña in northern Spain; in the UK are the remains of a tower close to the seaside church at Dover, and a heavily refurbished light at Flamborough Head on the East Coast. All these early structures were topped by brushwood fires, and must also have been visible, in certain conditions, from the smoke they produced. The first Lowestoft lighthouse was coal-fired, and built close to the site of the present one. In 1513 Henry VIII gave a charter to Trinity House requiring them to mark safety hazards, but this was mostly through the use of buoys and shore signals – private operators provided the first lighthouses. Before 1836, any person could petition to erect and

operate a lighthouse, for which service they could charge a fee to shipping. John Brown wanted to put one at Corton in the 1600s, but Samuel Pepys offered to operate the Lowestoft one that he was then installing, free of tolls, effectively ruining Brown's plan.

Trinity House bought up all the private lighthouses in 1836 and became responsible for fee collection. The ships had their voyages checked port to port, were listed for local lighthouse service when they docked, and a bill for the total sent to the owners for payment. A modified system is in use today with the duties shared between 3 Boards covering Scotland, Ireland and the UK. All dues are collected via the Harwich office, with Westminster setting the fees.

Famous lighthouses: Henry Winstanley erected a wooden tower on the *Eddystone Rock* in the late 1600s but it soon suffered sea damage. Despite it being modified, all the crew were lost in 1703 when a severe storm destroyed it; John Rudyard erected a new tower of wood and stone with a lead roof. Candles set fire to wood in this lantern top in 1755 and the lead melted, pouring down on keeper, Henry Hall, who died from internal injuries. John Smeaton then built a granite tower using dovetailed blocks. This was more durable, but eventually the sea undermined it in 1877. The Douglas family then built a fourth one that survives today, using Robert Stevenson's development of Smeaton's dovetailed stone system. A helicopter pad is fitted above the light now to enable easier access for maintenance staff.

Other famous names include *Bell Rock* where, circa 1808, Robert Stevenson used the interlocking dovetailed stone blocks and curving profile that proved to be the best design to successfully withstand the power of the sea (it too exists today). The *Longstone*, off Northumberland, was associated with heroine Grace Darling, who carried out a rescue with her father, the keeper, during a storm in 1838. The *Fastnet Rock*, Ireland, is forever linked to the famous yacht race, but the *Smalls Reef* lighthouse in the mid Irish Sea is remembered for bringing a change in manning procedure. Initially, two keepers served up to three-months duty on each lighthouse, but here one died of a heart attack shortly after arrival. The other could not attract the attention of passing vessels, and much later, when the relieving party finally arrived, instead of assistance for his distracted and exhausted state he was thought to have murdered his fellow-keeper. The truth was then revealed and from that time a minimum of three keepers instituted.

Early lights were of low power, but when Fresnel, the French engineer, invented a special ribbed glass lens that intensified the strength of the beam, things improved. The advent of more-and-more powerful electric lamps meant that ships could pick up their position much earlier and recognize lighthouses from the type, colour, and frequency of their flashes. Keith covered the very interesting history of the Lowestoft lighthouses at some length, plus some local lightships (the latter now replaced by automated buoys) and the sandbanks and channels they represented.

Free Film Show – '*Fishing Heritage*' from the East Anglian Film Archive will be shown at Lowestoft Record Office at 2pm on Saturday 20 October. It is essential to book places in advance by ringing 01502 405357.

Book Launch – David Butcher's '*Lothingland Handbook*', produced by the Heritage Centre (price £10.0.0) will be launched at the Lowestoft Heritage Centre at 7pm on Monday 22 October.

Society's Annual Winter meal: Your committee is negotiating a February 2013 date and costings with Lowestoft College, and will provide details as soon as possible. Please let us know if you would like to attend this event.