

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 40 Number 6 – **NEWSLETTER** – September 2012

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2012

13 Sept 2012 "Lowestoft from 500–1500" a talk by David Butcher, specialist on local history

27 Sept 2012 "The History of Lighthouses" by Keith Seaman

11 Oct 2012 "The Herring Girls" by Chris Unsworth

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 those renewing their membership, and all new members, to an events programme that looks both interesting and varied. I hope you had a good summer and are looking forward to the coming talks.

The AGM was well attended. Keith Davies decided to retire from the Committee, and I take this opportunity to thank him for his valued contribution to discussions within the committee, and his support. I am pleased that two new members, Mrs Marilyn Duerden and Mrs Janis Kirby, have joined the committee, which stands as follows:

Ron Ashman – Chairman Janet Royce – Vice Chairman

Irene Ashman – Secretary Ray Collins – Treasurer/Annual Report Editor

Jenny Hatton – Programme Secretary Don Friston – Newsletter Editor

John Knowles – Committee member Rodney Duerden – Committee member.

Marilyn Duerden – Committee member Janis Kirby – Committee member

Earlier this year the Society took charge of a red leather-bound book that had been presented to the Rev Hedges on his departure from St Matthews Church, Kirkley, in 1906. The book was in recognition for his seven years of faithful service to the local community, and was given to the Society by Evelyn Varrell, granddaughter of Rev Hedges. In wonderful calligraphy, it lists the names of all those who contributed to his leaving collection of £100 (or Purse of Gold as it is referred to in the book), a considerable sum in 1906. The book is now on loan from the Society to the Lowestoft Branch of the Suffolk Record Office, so anyone can arrange to view it there.

We have been meeting in South Lowestoft Methodist Church Hall for many years and I thought it would be an idea to find out a little more about the building and the people who worship there. The foundation stone of this church was laid on 7 April 1962, so it is now 50 years old.

This was the first Methodist Church built in Lowestoft after the Second World War, and was to replace the Lorne Park Road Church. More than 100 people attended the service and were welcomed by the minister of the Lorne Park Road Church, the Rev E Ronald Kemp. The stone laying and dedication was carried out by the chairman of the Methodist East Anglia District, the Rev Hubert J Morton. Following this ceremony,

subscription bricks were laid by many supporters, the first of these being the Mayor of Lowestoft, Mr Frank Jones, followed by many local dignitaries and Church ministers. Earlier in the day some children who had subscribed towards the building were also invited to lay a brick. The site had been purchased in 1956 for about £4,000 and the building cost £26,000.

The Methodist religion came into being in England in the 18th century as a result of the Christian ministry of two brothers, the Rev's John and Charles Wesley. John travelled around this country, preaching to all who wished to listen, whilst Charles was a poet and writer of many of the hymns used by the Methodist Church.

John and Charles had studied at Oxford University and, with some fellow students, were methodical about their lives as Christians. Together they said their prayers and involved themselves in helping others with precise organisation and careful use of time. Some other Oxford students derided their diligent way of life, calling them 'Methodicals' or 'Methodists'. John Wesley took the attempted mockery and turned it into a title of honour.

In May 1968, the *Lowestoft Journal* carried a report that closed-circuit television was to be used for the first time in a Lowestoft Civic Service. A camera and two receivers were to be set up at the South Lowestoft Methodist Church when the Mayor of Lowestoft, Mr G.G Davy, with some other members of the Corporation and a large congregation were expected to attend the annual Mayor's Sunday Service. The Rev David Caink, the minister, realised that the church could not accommodate all of those wishing to attend, so he arranged for the overflow congregation to be seated in the adjacent church hall. T.V. Manufacturing (a Pye company, who manufactured televisions, radios and audio equipment in Oulton Broad from 1951 until 1981) agreed to loan an industrial television camera and two 25-inch television receivers for the duration of the service.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Members visit to Somerleyton Hall Gardens, plus buffet meal, 10 May

After heavy rain during the afternoon, members paid an evening visit to the 12-acre gardens surrounding the picturesque Somerleyton Hall that in the 1840s was owned by the entrepreneur Sir Morton Peto. The weather held out during the visit, but it was a little wet underfoot. The tour, guided by the head gardener, was excellent as was the meal afterwards. Also, thankfully, we did not lose anyone in the maze. The gardens are renowned for their wide variety of splendid specimen trees, including eucalyptus, pine, cedars, a tulip tree and mature limes. An ongoing programme exists to help replace the occasional tree loss due to gales and old age, and they are interspersed with a multitude of shrubs, borders and plants, both native and imported, providing colour and contrast throughout the year. We saw a very good selection of colour in flowers and shrubs, despite this being late spring, and of course the foliage specimens were at their freshest. The tour first went through to the walled gardens and old glasshouses, the latter erected by Joseph Paxton in the period following the Great Exhibition, using similar designs to the Crystal Palace for its roofing and framework. Oranges and other citrus fruits were grown, as well as grapes, peaches etc. The glasshouses had heating and clever ventilation, with drainage routed through the support columns.

After this the group was taken through an ancient and lengthy pergola of wisteria, grown over the years into grotesque forms around its arching support frame. The next feature was the maze designed by Nesfield, a celebrated landscape gardener, and planted with yew in 1846 with a small, raised central pagoda. Recognised as one of the finest in the country, its hedges are cut on opposite sides in alternate years to encourage a dense, even structure. In today's conservation-conscious system nothing is wasted and all trimmings are recycled through the estate. The walk continued, to cover several areas, including huge specimen trees and rare varieties of shrub including examples of topiary. We were also shown some elegant statuary that has survived many generations, and could view the hall and stables from most faces, including the newly restored sunken 'white' garden. It is impossible to miss the very handsome tower housing an historic striking clock, designed in open competition, in 1847, by Vulliamy for use in the New Houses of Parliament. His design proved too costly at that time, but Morton Peto bought the model for himself and had the tower at Somerleyton built to house it.

Sadly Peto's wide-ranging building and railway construction businesses crashed after a time and he was forced to sell up. However, the Crossley family have been efficient stewards over many years and the Hall's future looks assured. The evening was rounded off by a splendid evening buffet in the restored buildings and our guide ably fielded questions on the Hall and Gardens from the guests.

Society's AGM on 24 May – extracts from chairman's report

A total of 21 members attended the Annual Meeting that concluded Ron Ashman's first year as chairman. The good turnout was appreciated as, in addition to the regular items, the Constitution had been brought up to date and was put to the Society members. The approved document will go before the Trustees for confirmation. Despite increases in charges for the speakers, and overheads, the Society had just covered its costs, helped by the 2011 increase in membership subscriptions (membership now totals 43) and some donations. For 2012 there would be no change in subscriptions. Treasurer Ray Collins's report was approved by the membership.

Society members had completed the 2011 summer season by visiting Covehithe church and Sotterley chapel, led by Terry Weatherley. Jenny Hatton had produced an interesting and varied list of speakers from September 2011, scheduled to finish in summer 2012. In November Paul Durbidge led a team of members on an exploratory archaeological dig on the site of No 1 High Street, next to Arnold House. The last house built on the site was demolished in the late 1950s. The dig was carried out in conjunction with the Heritage Centre and as a result the Society received a cheque for £500 that was divided equally between the Society and the Museum. Many thanks must go to Paul for his effort in acquiring this funding. Hopefully, the excavation will be continued during the coming year.

Last year my e-mail address was added to the Society website. As a result, enquiries have come from as far afield as British Columbia, Canada, and Brisbane, Australia. Some have requested news about speakers, or membership, others historical information. In February, the winter meal at the Lowestoft College restaurant was well attended and enjoyed. Thanks to Ray for organising this. It was even better when we found the price had been reduced.

On 17 March, Ray Collins, Irene and myself took a display to the Suffolk Local History Council's 'Societies Day' event at Elmswell, near Bury. This went well and attracted interest. We sold a number of books for the Society and booklets from the Museum. Paul Durbidge loaned parts of a medieval 'Knight' jug recovered from beach level at Corton, and a decorated schist whetstone for us to exhibit. The Society has been given a number of historical books to sell that had been owned by Dave Cuming, a past Society member. The money raised up to the AGM was £118.40, through a variety of sales outlets – the remaining books have been moved to the Museum for general sale. Our thanks go to Dave's family. Ray Collins has worked hard to transcribe all the Society's Annual Reports into pdf format and the first 20 issues are now on the Society website www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk Members can download them using Adobe Acrobat reader, to view on screen or to print via their own system. More will follow.

The Museum had reported an increase in visitor numbers over 2010, particularly school children – donations also were up. The team had carried out improvements in décor and lighting and had re-presented some of the displays during the winter. Finances were sound. Volunteer stewards were still being sought for the season.

Churches Outing and Supper on 28 June 2012 – led by Terry Weatherley

We met at the attractive Church of the Ikon of the Mother of God, adjacent to the White House, off Low Road in Mettingham on a fine evening. Fr Andrew welcomed the group and guided us into the church that stands in extensive grounds that contain the grave of the foundress, this being one of only a handful of purpose-built Russian Orthodox churches in this country. He explained how the site was chosen and plans developed for the interesting and unusual octagonal design, of white painted wooden construction, with blue roof, topped with cupolas and crosses in traditional style. Orthodox churches had been in use for some time at Felixstowe and at Colchester but the local group had searched many years for a building to convert in Norfolk or Suffolk. After trying various places, including chapels at Bungay and Topcroft, the decision was made to build from scratch. The present church site was selected and the designs went ahead after some curious suggestions by the planners that the size of the main building should be increased, and the roof should be of metal. Generous benefactors have been able to supply the church with traditional furnishing and many ikons. Members were surprised to see such a fine and richly coloured interior, in what seemed a relatively small area. The decision not to have seating allows for suitably large groups to attend when the occasion demands. The new Ikon for Our Lady of Mettingham uses details from the representation of the Mother of God depicted on the seal of the ancient Mettingham College, destroyed in 1543. The Ikon will be installed at the house that will function in future as a chantry college, to be named *College of Our Lady of Mettingham*. The church also has links with the ancient church of St Botolph at Iken, near Snape.



Some days later, Terry thanked Fr Andrew for welcoming us to the Church, offering some pictures taken during the visit, and received the following reply.

"Terry – Thanks for your kind comments. We look forward to getting the pictures. Maybe some can be used on the website. I hope your members will not see their visit simply as a one-off because we welcome people at any time and church is always open during the day. Sometimes people feel that they would be trespassing on private property but this is not the case. We had a very nice day at Iken on Saturday and made some new friends there. Sometimes there is a perception that Orthodox churches are ethnic ghettos but we most certainly are not. We really want to show that we are part of the local community and proud of the local heritage.

With best wishes – Fr Andrew"

From Mettingham the group went on to the magnificent medieval church of St Michael the Archangel in the centre of Beccles. It has been at the centre of life in the town since its foundation in 1369. This church is sited on high ground that looks out over the River Waveney and the marshes beyond, and has a massive tower set slightly apart from the main building, and containing a hang of ten bells. The tower is open for visitors to climb in summer, and commands a spectacular panoramic view of both Norfolk and Suffolk landscapes from its position almost on the county boundary. This church is an impressive structure with some very elaborate and attractive stonework, and contains hatchments and many fine monuments within its nave, the latter having north and south aisles to emphasize its width. It has links to a number of well-known families including a previous curate, Edmund Nelson, who married Catherine Suckling, from nearby Barsham. They were the parents of Horatio Nelson. The church also saw the marriage of poet George Crabbe in 1783 and is the burial place of madrigal composer William Cobold (1560–1639). The church is well served by its incumbents who have provided comprehensive information boards to guide the visitor around its many interesting features.

Afterwards a number of the Society members gathered to enjoy a pre-arranged meal and social at the *Three Horseshoes* pub at North Cove.

New Book Review – EAST ANGLIAN COAST by David Brandon, issued in 2012 by Amberley Publishing, softback priced £12.99 – ISBN 978 1 84868 256 6.

This book is refreshingly different and is likely to appeal strongly to historians. It steers away from the format that proliferates today of ‘then and now’ photographs with extended captions. The text has been carefully researched to introduce material not commonly covered in such publications, and its illustrations are also well chosen. Covering a huge stretch of coast from the Wash to Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex, with occasional diversions inland, the author’s love of his subject is professionally expressed, spiced with touches of everyday humour. The only point preventing this book scoring an exceptional rating is that the author was not served by an editor ready to remove minor text duplication, and the small, but annoying misspellings and literals sprinkled throughout.

A reasonably priced, well printed, quality book. This is a thoroughly good read and highly recommended.

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