

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 41 Number 4 – **NEWSLETTER** – April 2013

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2013

11 Apr 2013 "Morton Peto, Lowestoft and Beyond"

Ivan Bunn tells us more about this outstanding entrepreneur, and his exploits elsewhere.

25 Apr 2013 "Traditional East Anglian Songs and Music"

Ian Prettyman will bring his voice and instruments to perform fishing and sea songs.

9 May 2013 "Catering the Royal Way from the time of Henry VIII"

Will Patrick Thompson, ex-royal chef, serve members an extravagant menu?

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 remind members that the Annual General Meeting is next month. 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 has any issues or items they would like discussed, then please speak to myself or to the Society secretary.

On Saturday 16 March, Ray Collins, Marilyn and Rodney Duerden, Irene and I took a display to the Suffolk Local History Council's 'Societies Day' event held at Elmswell, near Bury St Edmunds. The event went well, the talks were interesting and our display attracted quite a lot of interest. The only other representative group from Lowestoft was the Record Office. Our display this year was different in that it included a rolling display of 52 pieces of Lowestoft Porcelain. For this we used the Society laptop and Museum monitor. As this year marks the centenary of the birth of Benjamin Britten, we displayed photos and information relating to his early years in Lowestoft.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

14 March 2013 – "Practical Field work" – by Society member Paul Durbidge

Paul delivered another great presentation in his calm and well-considered style. Backing up his information with appropriate slides, plus a selection of finds from earlier field walks and excavations, he described a range of related topics covering practical outdoor archaeology. Members were briefly shown the artefacts and specimens, and invited to examine and handle them following the talk. Years ago Paul became one of the earliest members of the Society, having got the bug after finding some shards of pottery that were classified by Norwich museum as ancient. The new enthusiast quickly found himself in the role of secretary. Some of the younger members wished to try outdoor archaeology so with no one experienced enough to lead an excavation, they were recommended to try field walking. Having already obtained the permission of a local farmer, Paul was introduced to a flint collector from Kessingland who, along with an experienced Norfolk gentleman, joined the initial group to demonstrate how to conduct a search. So began a life-long and consuming interest in the subject.

He explained methods of identifying likely farmland sites, and the techniques, stressing the importance of keeping to a straight line and not looking too far ahead – also vital, although time-consuming is the discipline of writing up or photographing and recording anything discovered. This is because once an object is removed from the ground the archaeological evidence is destroyed forever.



These large Neolithic hand axes were among the items found on the Persimmon housing site at Beccles Road, Carlton Colville in 1999.

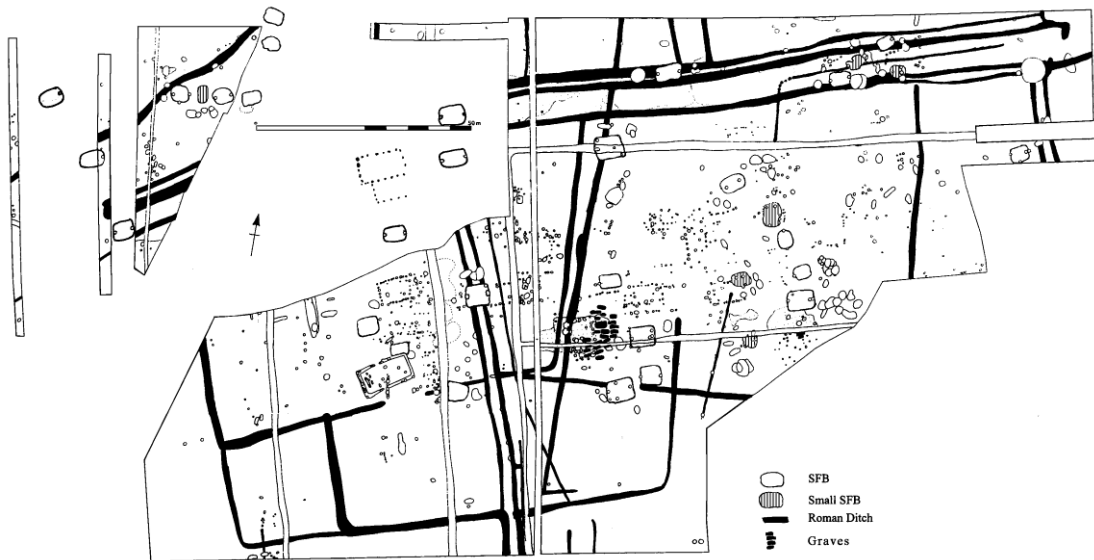
Looking at the situation today there have been sweeping changes. New technology has introduced geophysical survey equipment, and the metal detector, and these inventions have brought mixed reactions from archaeologists. The surveyor may now look beneath the ground for signs of dense material such as compacted soil, stone or brick walls and outlines of buildings, all without breaking the surface.

The detectorist can identify even very small pieces of a range of metals under the surface, though almost universally these are excavated immediately.

Great discoveries have been made revealing many wonderful treasures that have been identified, researched and conserved for the benefit of the nation, the finders being rewarded through a payment scheme based on the status of the objects relating to their historical importance and rarity, treasure trove rules, etc.

On the downside, a sinister cult of theft of objects by trespassing detectorists has developed, usually hunting secretly at night, whereby they hope to add to their own collections, or sell their finds for whatever they can realise to either collectors or dealers. In the latter case the inestimable value of recording any historical or geographical information that adds to the provenance of those objects is lost. Fortunately the number of enthusiasts acting responsibly and reporting their finds is growing, but still leaves room for improvement. Another negative is the modern practice of farmers using mechanical drills that are capable of sowing the seed directly beneath undisturbed stubble. This means any objects or artefacts that field walkers might normally have spotted after annual ploughing remain covered.

There have been significant excavations in our area within fairly recent times. One was at Carlton Colville, in 1999, when the Suffolk Archaeological Unit examined the Persimmon Homes development site near the junction of the Beccles Road and Chapel Road – followed by a well-documented, mixed Romano-British and Saxon site, further across the village at Bloodmoor Hill, near Gisleham, investigated by Cambridge Archaeological Unit, where Paul was able to take part in, and photograph, some of the excavations.



1999 Bloodmoor Hill site with numbers of sunken featured buildings, mixed with graves, Roman ditches and ancient trackways.

22 west-east aligned graves were found in the Saxon settlement zone but Paul said very little bone remained due to the acid nature of the sandy ground. A few grave goods including pins, brooches and a pair of shears came out, but the best item was a very rare silver phallic figurine with some gilding, found in a spoil heap after the main dig. The priceless figurine is now housed in the British Museum. Two types of Saxon building were found – post-hole, and SFBs of mixed size – pottery, seeds and animal remains were also recovered. Results of both digs were published.

In the past, Society members have also examined and recorded four moated sites in Gisleham and Carlton Colville and some of these appeared in the slide presentation. Paul explained that several theories existed about their original use, but most likely they served as local defences, or as temporary compounds for cattle. There is evidence that they were still used into the 19th century – one remains near Carlton Street, but the 64ft diameter ‘Mardle’ was levelled and developed for housing. The larger of the two in Gisleham was unusual in being double-moated and measuring 527 x 474ft. The dry moat was 20ft wide and the wet, inner moat 30ft – a house had been built between them.

Paul has also done much work in studying the erosion of cliffs and beach between Lowestoft and Covehithe over a prolonged period (50 years for Covehithe). This has involved measuring and reporting the loss of land, examining the remains of buildings, human artefacts, and naturally occurring geological strata. Almost 400ft of cliff has been lost at Covehithe in the last 20 years. Neolithic or Bronze-Age arrowheads have been found at Pakefield and at one time six medieval rubbish pits were exposed in a cliff fall. Some of these contained pottery of the period and some Roman ware. A separate Pakefield survey in 2003, involving Paul and two friends, led to the discovery of worked flint flakes in exposed *Unio* riverbed strata below the cliff. Adjacent bones of a species of ancient vole showed the estimated date of human occupation as 700,000 years ago – far earlier than expected, causing the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (AHOB) project team to get involved, taking away samples from Pakefield for further study. They verified the date of these, and as a result the flints recovered are now exhibited in the British Museum.

Finally members heard about ‘rescue archaeology’ where items are literally plucked out of sites threatened by the action of weather, or subsidence, or cases where building work may have uncovered remains unexpectedly. A case in point was when Paul was employed on the construction of the multi-storey flats in Lowestoft, in the Crown Street area, and he observed many potsherds in the foundation level. These he guessed came from the Lowestoft porcelain factory and comprised a mixture of broken moulds, wasters and props from the kiln, and some broken glazed wares. He collected many thousands of these pieces and they are now in storage at Broad House Museum, Oulton Broad, having added much to the store of knowledge on the patterns produced by this factory. Members are reminded that sections and exhibits relating to several of the topics mentioned in Paul’s talk are displayed at our museum.

Two of Paul's talks have been covered in more detail in our earlier Newsletters and appear on the website: For Pakefield finds see Newsletter Vol 38 (April 2010) and for Covehithe finds Newsletter Vol 39 (March 2011).

"Escape to England" – Some interesting details discovered recently by Ron Ashman

During World War II it is estimated that about 1,900 young Dutchmen fled the Netherlands to escape the Nazi occupiers. These young men left for their own safety or to help the allied forces to fight the Nazis. They were called *Engelandvaarders* (England goers) regardless of whether they actually came to this country. Most attempted the journey through occupied Belgium, France and Spain, whilst a few attempted the direct crossing of the North Sea, to land on the East Coast of England.

One such escape was attempted by five Dutch students, Philip Winckel, John Osten, Henk Baxmeier, Hein Fuchter and Edzard Moddemijer.

The young men purchased, in November 1943, a seven-metre launch named *Marko*. Then they bought a 60hp Chevrolet truck engine to replace the boat's original 17hp engine. The Chevy engine had been built in 1929 and was known as 'the cast-iron wonder' because of its renowned reliability. During the fitting, several modifications were required, including an underwater exhaust outlet to suppress the noise. Together with the building of the driveline and propeller, this was all carried out clandestinely. To get the money to pay for the boat, engine and fuel, the escapees had to sell personal belongings and borrow from family and friends. Philip Winckel sold his motorcycle and borrowed some money from his landlady.

One problem they had was acquiring the 375 litres of fuel required for the journey.

They left the Netherlands on 23 February 1944, the coldest day of that winter. The following day they were picked up by RAF Air Sea Rescue high-speed launch 185, skippered by F/L Sidney Spencer Bates MBE. Having been taken aboard the rescue launch the young men were given tea, rum, fresh bananas and fitted with navy jackets. Before setting off back to their base the sailors sank the *Marko* using the 20mm Oerliken guns on the ASR launch. At the time of the rescue the launch had on board an American, Captain A.J. Hardy, of the USAAF, who filmed the event. This unique six-and-a-half-minute film can be seen on You Tube.

The RAF launch then returned to its base of operations in Lowestoft harbour. The five Dutchmen had been at sea for 24 hours since leaving the Dutch coast. It was the only successful escape during 1944, prior to D-Day. Skipper Bates had conducted routine search and rescue operations to find American or British aircrews that had ditched their aircraft in "the drink." but the only matter of interest that day was these five Dutchmen. According to the logs of RAF Coastal Command, these Dutchmen were brought on shore at Lowestoft, detained briefly at the harbour and thereafter spent the night at the old Lowestoft Police Station in Regent Road. The security forces (MI5) took no risk with these five men as the Country was readying for D-Day, and previously foreigners who were picked up on the North Sea had turned out to be German spies. From Lowestoft they were transported under guard by train to London for four weeks of screening at the Royal Victoria Patriotic School at Wandsworth, also known as the "London Reception Centre". Following clearance by MI5, Major Oreste Pinto interrogated them for three days on behalf of the Dutch government.

Fuchter, Baxmeier and Moddemijer joined the RAF, Winckel joined Special Forces and Osten joined the Princess Irene Brigade and took part in the Normandy landings.

Not all escapes from Holland were as successful. On an earlier occasion 32 young men attempted the trip in sea kayaks. They launched from near Katwijk, but unfortunately only eight survived the 56-hour journey, eventually landing on English soil at Sizewell. Of these just two made it safely through to the end of the war.



Photo © P Jenkins

Several of these fast, powerful Air Sea Rescue boats were based at Lowestoft during World War II, and also carried medical facilities.

EVENING OUTING

Please note that an evening visit to Broad House Museum has been arranged for Tuesday 14 May. It is hoped that Mike Chester will be available to talk to members about the Porcelain Collection during this visit.

Annual Report: Ray Collins now has copies of the Annual Report for sale to members at just £2.00.