

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

## Volume 41 Number 2 – **NEWSLETTER** – February 2013

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

### What's On in 2013

**14 Feb 2013** "Medieval Legacy in the East Anglian Landscape"

What revelations will be brought to us by Derek Leak's narrative? Perhaps a few skeletons?

**28 Feb 2013** "How well do you know Lowestoft?"

Ron Ashman delivers part 2 of his interesting discoveries within our town's hidden recesses.

**14 Mar 2013** "Practical Field work" Paul Durbidge talks of this interesting branch of archaeology.

**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**

Last year I received an email from a lady called Margaret Buchholz who lived in New Jersey, USA, and had just published a memoir of her mother's life. The book included details of her mother's visit to Lowestoft when she was working for Lowell Thomas, the American writer, broadcaster and traveller. Thomas had interviewed and photographed T.E Lawrence during his campaign in Palestine during WW1. Margaret's mother, a ghost-writer for Thomas, came here to interview English and German WWI submarine commanders, for a book about them.

Margaret's new book is titled "Josephine: From Washington Working Girl to Fisherman's Wife" It is a memoir covering from 1917 to 1959 and I have included a flavour of it below.

**Ron Ashman** – Chairman

### **Extracts from the new memoirs of her mother by Margaret Buchholz**

*'Just before the Easter holidays she travelled north to Lowestoft, on the track of the skipper of a fishing smack who'd had five fights with submarines in one day.'*

..... Lowestoft is a fishing town on the North Sea, and I didn't expect anything wonderful in the way of a hotel. I asked the taxi driver to take me to the best one there ... It was off on the edge of town, overlooking the sea, and principally a summer resort hotel. I was expecting a tourist crowd over Easter, but the hotel was not expecting it to the extent of putting any heat in the place. My room was as cold as Labrador, but I didn't tarry there long. I snatched some dinner in the very nice dining room and took off to look up the man I had come to see.

Skipper Wharton was a typical North Sea fisherman, a little roly-poly man with a thatch of grey hair, and the pinkest cheeks you ever saw; he looked exactly like an apple dumpling. He had a shrew of a wife and I wished for a nice dose of chloroform to give her before the evening was over. Nothing her husband said was right and she continued to interrupt his story and correct him until I could have bound and gagged her. I will say for her, that she walked me down the dark street to the station, where I could pick up a taxi to take me back to the hotel.

My room seemed colder than before and the only redeeming feature was the jug of hot water I found in my bed. Six jugs would have been more to the point, but I curled around it so it would touch as much of my anatomy as possible, and then dropped off into a frozen stupor.

The next morning the sun was shining brilliantly, and a bracing wind came off the sea, out where you could see the white sails of the fishing boats, and the surf was lashing up on the beach. Just the sight of it gave me an enormous appetite, and I ate an enormous breakfast, then settled down in the lounge in front of a blazing open fire to sort over the notes I had got the evening before. It was delightful, overlooking the sea, and all done in bright green and yellow chintz. In the middle of the morning I had a telephone call from a friend of Skipper Wharton's, one Capt. Atkinson, who asked if I would like to go down to the harbour and go on board one of the fishing schooners. Would I? I dashed off at once to meet him at his office, just at the edge of the docks, and as we sat there talking he spotted walking along the sea wall another of the skippers who had had fights with submarines during the war. He called in this fellow, who was at first embarrassed at being introduced to a strange lady from across the Atlantic. He was so shy I thought he would tear his cap to pieces, he was twisting it so much. After a while, however, he saw I wouldn't bite, and then he was in his element, telling me stories about his wartime adventures. I could have listened to him all day, but I didn't want to miss going on one of the ships.

This, by the way, was much to the horror of Mrs. Wharton, as she said no decent girl ever showed her face about those docks. But as my reputation in Lowestoft couldn't affect me anywhere else, I didn't let her scare me. The whole fleet was in the harbour and we walked along the pier until we found one close enough so that I could leap over to its deck, with Mr. Atkins standing ready to fish me out of the slimy water if I missed my jump.

This sailing smack was about sixty feet long, with part of the hold built to contain ice and the fish they catch, and the forward part is the cabin, where the crew of six or eight men lives like the proverbial sardines. The cook was getting dinner and putting in his supplies for the trip. He told me he had "nine cookin's of beef on board and he guessed that would be enough for dumplings." Skipper Wharton told me that every time during the war they had beef dumplings for dinner they met a submarine. Perhaps the Germans smelled the dumplings.

I walked along the sea wall back to the hotel where I ate everything on the menu for lunch. After lunch it began to rain – it does that every day about this time in England – and I took a taxi to the town library where a timid little librarian showed me the wartime relics. Then back to the hotel for tea in front of that gorgeous open fire ... I went back that evening to get the rest of Skipper Wharton's story and the next morning caught the first train back to London. It was crowded to the roof with people going away for the Easter holiday, which is much more important there than it is with us. At one time, in a compartment that is comfortably full with six people, there were eleven of us, including three obstreperous children. All the mothers were dressed in obviously new Easter hats and cheap finery, and the children cried and ate sticky cookies, so the new finery got spotted and the children cried some more and I was glad when we reached London....

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I asked Margaret if she knew the name of the hotel her mother had stayed in. She replied; 'Sorry – that she didn't say – but there couldn't have been too many that fitted this description at that time, right?'

I assumed she thought Lowestoft was a one-horse town and did not reply that the town had several hotels at that time. However, as she walked along the sea wall back to the hotel, I thought it could have been one of many that were situated along the seafront, including the Grand, Kirkley and the Empire hotels. *Ron Ashman (Chairman)*

## **24 January 2013 – "A closer look at the treasures of Sutton Hoo" by Terry Weatherley**

Terry began by saying that in his estimation, Basil Brown's finding and excavation of the boat burial at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, deserves to rank alongside Howard Carter's discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun in Egypt. Terry had produced a neat video to remind members of the story behind the discovery and introduce the main characters.

Mrs Edith Pretty was born at Elland, Yorkshire in 1883, the youngest daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Dempster, widely travelled industrialists who gained their wealth from manufacturing equipment for the gas industry. In 1926 Edith married Major Frank Pretty from Ipswich, whose family manufactured clothing. He had

served in WW1 and afterwards continued in the Suffolk Regiment. After marrying, they bought Sutton Hoo House with its surrounding land and the mysterious mounds thereon. Frank died in 1934, leaving Edith with a four-year-old son, Robert.

In 1938 Mrs Pretty approached Ipswich museum in an attempt to get the mounds investigated. They recommended Basil Brown who had experience in digging sandy heathland. An interesting, self-taught freelance archaeologist, he toured the estate at Mrs Pretty's invitation and they discussed her ideas. Rapid action was needed as another world war was imminent, and work began on the largest mound in summer 1939. Terry had researched a good selection of photographs, including one of the first day of excavation, showing Mrs Pretty with the gardener, the gamekeeper and a labourer who with Basil Brown made up the initial investigation team. It was poor weather, raining hard and very muddy but they pressed on with the dig. During the afternoon a type of metal bolt was found and shown to the expert who remembered seeing something similar, but where? Stopping the dig, Basil cycled off to the Aldeburgh museum and gained access to their store, where he eventually found a similar item labelled 'Snape 1870'. He knew a boat had been found at Snape in 1870, and with that in mind rapidly pedalled the 8 miles back to the mound site.

The dig then continued and immediately more of the bolts, or rivets, were uncovered at roughly six-inch intervals, their presence revealed by staining in the sandy soil. By careful brushing more and more appeared in regular rows, and our sleuth had the wit to realise they were fastenings for the timbers (by then completely rotted away) outlining a large boat, that when finally exposed was found to be 90ft in length and of Viking shape. Leaving the rivets in situ, the team proceeded with the careful excavation work – however news of the find had reached the British Museum who, concerned that it was led by an amateur archaeologist, sent along their specialists. As soon as Basil found the burial chamber he was sidelined, being detailed to continue uncovering the ship but not to touch the chamber. At that stage tantalizing glimpses of grave goods could be seen. As some things were of gold and of silver, the village hall at Sutton became the venue for a treasure trove inquest. The inquest findings stated that as the treasure had not been buried with the intention of recovery, it must legally belong to the landowner, Mrs Pretty. With astonishing generosity she immediately scotched any other claims to ownership by giving the contents of the ship to the nation.

After the war the treasures were taken out of storage to be conserved by the British Museum under the charge of Bruce Mitford who recorded the proceedings. The chief items are spectacular – they include a beautiful pair of gold cloisonné shoulder clasps set with garnets; a decorative purse, similar in manufacture to the clasps, that contained thirty-seven gold coins (some from the late 500s), two gold blanks and two small gold bars; nearby was a great gold buckle with interlaced designs of animals. The iconic Sutton Hoo image is of course the helmet, of striking design, fitted with bronze panels, featuring scenes of warriors. This was found in a collapsed state and was reconstructed after prolonged and painstaking work. The remains of two large drinking horns are now restored and also those of a great shield, originally of lime-wood covered in leather, with gilded decoration. Other items are a whetstone sceptre a couple of gold spoons and a wooden harp (rebuilt from its outlines). Over 1200 years, the acid soil had destroyed all traces of a body and organic material but the grave's occupant was probably King Raedwald of East Anglia.

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

**Answer to the mystery photo in our last Newsletter.** The soldiers were guarding the Oulton Broad rail bridge over Lake Lothing during the First World War to prevent any unauthorised individuals travelling between the north and south shores.