

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2013

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

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

23 May 2013 "Annual General Meeting" All members are invited to attend.

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 wishes to raise a point, please speak to the Chairman or Secretaary.

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

This month we have our Annual General Meeting. I hope that you will all attend as it gives you an opportunity to vote on matters relating to the Society and to elect the Committee – tea or coffee and biscuits follow the business.

As the cost of postage is now very high, I would appreciate it if all members with e-mail could let our Secretary know their e-mail address, so Society information can be sent that way instead of by post, saving us quite a lot of money. For members without e-mail, we will of course continue send on any Society information by post.

I hope that the coming Summer will be better than last year and look forward to seeing you all for the new series of meetings starting in September. The programme covers a range of subjects that look interesting and should have something for everyone. Our next Newsletter will be issued at the Society's 12 September meeting, when well-known local historian John Holmes will be showing slides and presenting his *'Memories of Pakefield'*.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

11 April 2013 – "Morton Peto, Lowestoft and beyond" – by local historian Ivan Bunn

During Ivan's recent visit, members heard a wider description of Peto's achievements than the usual title *'Father of modern Lowestoft'*. Born in 1809, at Sutton, Surrey, Samuel Morton Peto (he preferred to be called Morton) was the son of William, a tenant farmer, and aged 6 went to the village school at Cobham where his grandparents lived. A year or so later he became a day boy at Marlow, his grandfather having died and his parents moved near to Great Marlow. When 12 he attended a strict, independent boarding school at Brixton Hill to be prepared for a business career. In 1823 he was apprenticed to his uncle Henry Peto, a successful builder, and went to live with him at Little Britain EC1. Henry gave his nephew few favours and Morton endured a rigorous 3-year training in the joinery, plus evening classes in drawing and the theory of construction; then a year at bricklaying, followed by three years of practical work in London on erection of buildings. Thomas Grissell, another nephew of Henry, had been apprenticed some time before Morton and when Henry died in 1830, aged just 56, these cousins inherited his wealth and his substantial business. The widow and relations

contested the will on the grounds of 'undue influence' as only the cousins and their solicitor had been with Henry when the will was recast a few days before his death. The widow was left very little, but the contested case was lost in the courts and the nephews immediately set about building up their business as partners. The arrangement was further strengthened when Peto married Grissell's sister in 1831. They moved into a house in Albany Terrace, Lambeth near the workshops and builders yard, and stayed there happily for eleven years until Mary died in 1842, having three daughters and two sons – the second son died just before his mother. Peto remarried after some twelve months to Sarah Kelsall (a Baptist) and they moved out to Hertfordshire, but kept a town house at Russell Square in Bloomsbury. They went on to raise a large family.

There was a building boom in London at that time, and the partners' early projects included St John's Church, Paddington; rebuilding Hungerford Market (they retained the Hungerford name for this replacement) but it was not a trading success and was later demolished to make way for a new bridge and Charing Cross railway station; they also built a model prison at Clerkenwell in 1833. Two years later, a relationship with Brunel, who was planning the Great Western Railway, secured them the £39,487 contract for the Hanwell (Wharncliffe) viaduct over the River Brent near Ealing, but this brought problems – a dispute with the resident engineer over the quality of bricks causing them to lose money – however they did further work for Brunel on the GWR. In this decade Peto and Grissell also built the Reform Club; the Oxford and Cambridge Clubhouse; the Lyceum Theatre and St James' Theatre (the latter in 13 weeks). In 1838 a Nelson Memorial Committee was set up to raise subscriptions for a monument to Nelson in London. The involved final stages took many years to complete, but Grissell and Peto won the critical contract for excavating the site in Trafalgar Square and they constructed the column in 1843 – the Nelson statue was sculpted by Bailey, the column designed by Railton, and the lions by Landseer. Other projects at this time were for Paddington and Reading Stations (under Joseph Cubitt) and the Woolwich Graving Dock, plus Stephenson's stations at Curzon Street and at Birmingham, then in 1840, working on his on 3-mile, cable-powered London & Blackwall railway.

The two cousins seemed to have boundless energy and undertook many building projects through the 1840s, plus getting involved with philanthropic schemes that benefitted religious bodies and orphaned children among others. Work also included the stabling at Windsor Castle, and the south entrance to the British Museum, although that was released due to the increasing workload on the new Houses of Parliament. The latter covered important stages in the construction, beginning with the range of buildings fronting the river. They then completed a rival firm's unfinished contract for the foundation and river wall, and the quality of their work on this won them a second contract for the foundations of the Central Hall, the Royal Staircase and the remainder of the south flank. Grissell and Peto were by now principal contractors and showed great organisational ability, winning a third contract for St Stephen's Hall and Victoria Tower. They skilfully managed a very large workforce and employed the latest techniques and equipment, earning a great deal of money in the process. However Peto's very productive employment system must have put considerable pressure on their employees, as there was a strike by stonemasons in 1843. Also in the mid 1840s they built Pentonville Prison and worked on the glasshouses at Kew (Peto employed the new techniques using wrought iron construction, and an underfloor heating system, when he constructed his Winter Garden at Somerleyton).

Since 1841, Morton Peto had owned a residence at Bracondale south east of Norwich to be near the new railway development linking Norwich and Yarmouth. Hearing that the Godolphin Estate was to put Somerleyton Hall on the market, he attended the public auction in 1844 and secured the Estate for £86,000, giving him a perfect new base for developing the East Anglian railway network and also the town of Lowestoft. The Lowestoft Improvement Act was passed in 1854 and, never one to let the grass grow under his feet, Peto immediately began planning a series of works to develop the town, using his own ideas and capital, while continuing his projects elsewhere. By now Peto's business ventures appeared to be affecting his links with Grissell – difficulties had arisen and some of their contract opportunities had been missed. Peto was developing railway undertakings that Grissell considered to be high risk and so they decided to sever the partnership. Grissell would keep the profitable building contracts, taking over the London premises with workshops, sawmills and the associated labour force – Peto diversified to three heavy railway contracts in 1845, thus keeping busy and gaining more experience before their quite amicable dissolution in March 1846. In addition to Somerleyton with its many adjoining lands and manorial lordships, he had purchased the rough ground south of Lowestoft at Kirkley (known as the Lamplands) for housing development and for St John's church. Incredibly he was also managing the development of Lowestoft as a port and linking it to the main rail network.

Around this time he was introduced to Prince Albert and was involved with the planning for the Crystal Palace and its rail links to the north. In 1851 Peto became commissioner for sewers in London, an important public service that he took seriously, and the experience gained building those helped him in later projects including

that at Lowestoft. Lowestoft improved as a port during the 1850s and Peto set up exports and imports by sea with the Continent. The railway mania spread to the Continent and Peto joined Betts and Brassey at various locations overseas, arranging bridges, tunnels and rolling stock as and when needed, including in Norway; in Denmark; and on the Grand Trunk Railway in Canada (to supply which he built the 'Canada Works' at Birkenhead). They later supplied equipment to India and Austria. The transport problems at the Crimean War called for a rail link from Balaclava to the front line at Sevastopol. Peto did the job and was later rewarded with a baronetcy. The 1860s saw a downturn in the sea trade through Lowestoft, and Peto's company virtually bankrupt. Somerleyton Hall and Estate was sold to the Crossley carpet family, easing Peto's immediate money problems, but in 1866 the London bank of Overend & Gurney, where Peto kept his wealth invested, crashed (*Black Friday*). Grissell's fears proved true, with Peto exposed financially through shares and bad debts. He then lived overseas for a time, and also lectured in America, but despite some trial projects, failed to recover in business terms. With declining health he died at Blackhurst, Tunbridge Wells in 1889.

25 April 2013 – "Traditional East Anglian Fishing and Sea Songs – by Ian Prettyman"

Ian, who sang and from time-to-time accompanied himself on melodeon and guitar, explained that many of these songs existed before the use of any instrumental accompaniment. Their subject matter was broadly confined to happenings; situations; persons; farming and fishing. The lead singer would begin informally at a gathering, typically a pub, and many of these songs encouraged audience vocal participation. The words and tune could be passed on from father to son, or through a family group, occasionally rendered in harmony. Increasingly, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the singer or an accompanist played a mouth organ, melodeon, concertina or guitar, with some tunes suitable for performing Morris, or Step dancing. Specialist collectors like Cecil Sharpe travelled the country noting down the words and tunes, thus saving them for the nation. The first song was '*All Jolly Fellows who follow the Plough*' that would have been performed by the head horseman of the farm, and this was followed by the quicker tempo '*Joe the Carrier Lad*'. Ian continued to intersperse songs and stories to produce a thoroughly entertaining evening that contained some humorous and timely warnings for all ages in the audience. He carefully explained the differences in traditional and today's more commercial folk songs.

Evening Visit for members to Broad House Museum at Everitt's Park

Please note that this has been arranged for Tuesday 14 May, starting at 7pm. It is hoped that Mike Chester will talk to members about the Lowestoft Porcelain Collection. Parking is free after 6pm

.Evening Visit for members to St Bartholomew's Church, Corton (meet at church car park by 6.30pm)

This will be on Thursday 27 June. Michael Soanes (Corton History Recorder) will talk about the church, following which there will be time to look round. Those wishing to continue for a meal at the Wherry Hotel in Oulton Broad should make their reservation with Jenny (selecting from the menu provided at meetings) as soon as possible.

Can you assist with lifts to and from our regular Thursday meetings for non-driving members?

Would-be members who do not drive have contacted us from Sands Lane and Beccles Road. If you would be able to help them, without going too far out of your way, please advise the chairman or secretary.

Annual Report: Ray Collins has copies of this year's Annual Report for sale to members at just £2.00.