

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 41 Number 7 – **NEWSLETTER** – Oct 2013

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

## What's On in 2013

**10 Oct 2013** "Benjamin Britten and his time at Lowestoft" a Britten/Pears group talk. This year, being the centenary of his birth, it is very appropriate that we hear about our famous local composer.

**24 Oct 2013** "A picture story of Margaret Catchpole" by Pip Wright, who shows us images of this feisty 18th-century-woman's extraordinary life and travels.

**14 Nov 2013** "Mutford Half Hundred – A Domesday evaluation" by David Butcher, who gives us an outline of his companion volume to *The Island of Lothingland*.

**28 Nov 2013** "Education and family life in Corton in the late 1800s" by Society member Don Friston, whose family lived in the village during that time, and also into the next century.

**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 year the number of enquiries from our website has decreased slightly. We did, however, receive one from Douglas Worts who is a descendant of James Worts who used to own the Kirkley Mill in the late 1820s. James emigrated to Upper Canada with his family in 1831 with the goal to build a windmill and continue his milling business. This he did on the shore of Lake Ontario near the river Don in Muddy York. The town of Muddy York is known today as Toronto. The following year his brother-in-law William Gooderham, who with his family had previously lived in Scole, joined him in the business.

The new life in Canada did not have a happy ending for James as in 1834, with the milling business well established, his wife Elizabeth died in childbirth. James was so grief-stricken that he drowned himself in the company well. However, the family business continued to grow and in 1837 they started the distilling of alcohol, which went on to become the main focus of their trading. By the late 1870s it had become the largest distillery in the world (or at least that was the claim). The distillery of Gooderham & Worts closed in 1990.

*Society's Annual Winter meal:* Your committee is negotiating a February 2014 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.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

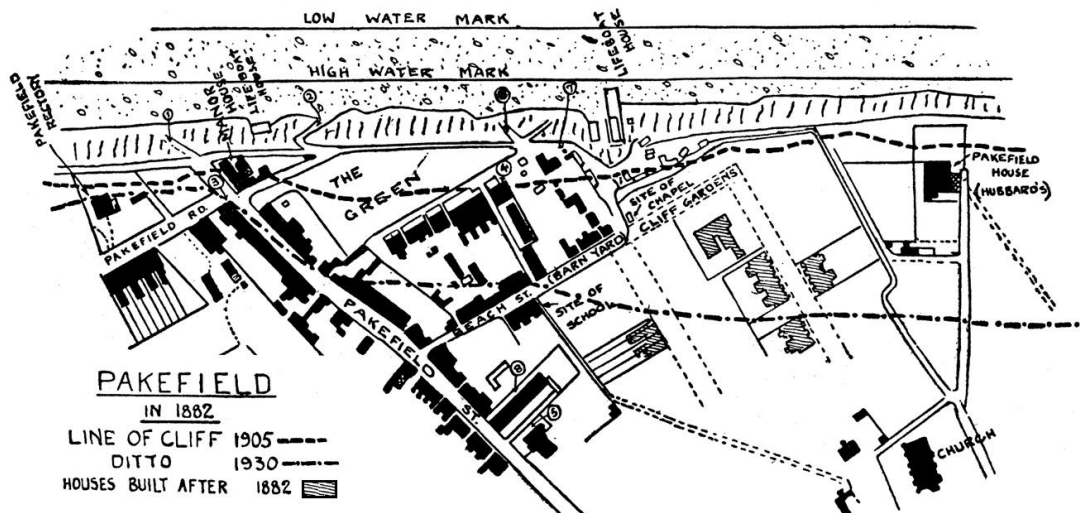
## Recent talks and meetings

**12 September 2013 – "Memories of Pakefield" – by John Holmes**

John gave his usual relaxed presentation of this subject in which he is so well versed. Always coming up with new information, excellent and varied photographs and maps, he brings our members great entertainment. In this slide show he covered the period from 1842 through to the 1950s, starting with some maps that showed the coastline of Pakefield prior to the particularly heavy erosion of the cliffs between 1903 and 1927. The conjoined

church of All Saints & St Margaret's was separated from the cliff-edge by a field, and John had a picture to illustrate the amount of land lost because the cliffs had been undermined. Two lifeboat stations marked on the beach did sterling service, particularly in winter, the boats having oars and sail, and crews prepared to turn out in all weathers if there were souls and salvage at stake. The railway brought more visitors and new hotels went up. In next-door Kirkley once stood the huge, Empire Hotel, built where the junior school now stands by Kensington Gardens. The major one in Pakefield was the Grand, now part of CEFAS. Not far from the Jolly Sailors, and opposite the now lost, Ship pub, was the Cliff Hotel, to the east of Pakefield Street. The Cliff Hotel was lost to erosion between the wars, along with the Manor House and most of The Green. Happily the Trowel & Hammer, said to be the oldest pub in the area was far enough from the cliff to have remained safe. Many of the very old, dilapidated houses were pulled down to re-use the materials, rather than let them fall into the sea. The problem was resolved by the construction of the sea wall extension after WW2, since when the beach has greatly increased in width.

John described a host of Pakefield characters from his own childhood, many captured in photos. Mr Potts, owner of two cinemas, rode a motorcycle combination – there was a flourishing quoits club and two football teams – Walter Page took visitors to sea in summer, using his rowboat with adverts on the side, and he was also a talented amateur artist. Foulger's blacksmiths shop stood for many years in Pakefield Street, opposite the Causeway leading to the church, and there was a garage at the end, at the junction with the A12. The Corporation trams and buses used to turn at this point for a short break and cup of tea at Gladys Foreman's shop before starting their return trip to north Lowestoft. The Tramways pub is a reminder of that time. In the 1800s many customers called personally at village shops, but those further off had their goods delivered by horse and cart. From the early 1900s trade bikes made local deliveries and motor vans began to appear. Pakefield's best-known shops were probably the Glendower Bakery, Dew's Store and Lang's the chemist, but sadly John's slides, and memories, were far too numerous for us to mention them all individually in this report.



## 26 September 2013 – Duplex Tanks Drive at Fritton Lake – by Stuart Burgess

Stuart, former Manager of Fritton Lake Country Park, has spent the last few years delving into the history of the Duplex Drive Tanks, and delivered an extremely interesting talk. Whilst locals will be familiar with Somerleyton Hall and its gardens and maze, few may be aware of the important part it played in World War Two. In particular, Fritton Lake had a special role, developing amphibious tanks that would see their debut at the Normandy Beaches on D Day. These, as Stuart explained, were conventional tanks fitted with collapsible screens enabling them to be buoyant, and to swim ashore, driven by propellers at the rear. Special experts trained the drivers at Fritton, who, with those machines, gave confidence and close-fire support to the first wave of troops landing on the beaches.

Hungarian designer, Nicholas Straussler, invented the collapsible canvas screen and metal framework. This was quite capable of keeping a 30-tonne tank afloat when needed, and was supported by inflatable tubes. When in the water, the tanks looked similar to innocent canvas boats, with only about three feet of the screen showing above the surface. The propellers could be swivelled to steer the swimming tank, and were disconnected when it

came ashore. The optional track or propeller propulsion methods gave rise to the name Duplex Drive (DD for short).

Between the spring of 1943 and summer of 1945, over 2000 men from a number of British, Canadian and American regiments/battalions came to Fritton Lake to be trained in the operation of these hybrid machines. This involved a two-week intensive course using 17-tonne Valentine DD tanks, where troops learned maintenance, servicing and repairs, navigation techniques and emergency escape routines. The 'school' was known as Fritton Bridging Camp, in an attempt to disguise its true use, as Water Assault Wing A – the first training camp for DD tanks in the country.

Part 1 of the training involved escaping safely from a submerged tank. Wearing Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus (DSEA) the trainee crew took their positions inside a Valentine tank at the bottom of a concrete-lined pool. The pool was then flooded from an elevated water tower and, once the tank was fully submerged, the crew made their escape through the hatches. In trials, the bulky DSEA kit gave problems, and so was superseded by the smaller Amphibious Tank Escape Apparatus (ATEA). Prior to its first immersion, the tank had to be waterproofed. The men used a tar-like pitch to paint the hull and the tank was driven into a wading pool to test for leaks. If all was well they inflated the screen, then used a ramp built of bailey-bridge components to drive the tank into the lake for swimming trials.

The Valentine tank served for training until spring 1944 when the larger, 30-tonne American Sherman superseded it, and it was the latter that were employed on D Day. Five French beaches were each allotted 2 tank regiments. A total of 128 machines was launched during the early hours of D Day, 6 June 1944 – and of these, 78 made it successfully to the beach. The American units, launched 6km off shore, suffered heavy losses with 28 out of 32 being sunk. Despite the mixed results, these tanks proved themselves invaluable and were used in later military operations, including Operations Plunder, and Dragoon.

Recent surveys found remains of at least 30 buildings in the woods surrounding the lake at Fritton, and lots of detail, now declassified, on the construction and use of these tanks. Display boards at Fritton Lake now chart their history.

Since leaving Somerleyton, Stuart has been working with Norfolk Museums Services at the Great Yarmouth Time and Tide Museum, and has been able to continue his research and interest in Fritton Lake. He is preparing for D Day celebrations next year, and plans to publish a book shortly on these amazing tanks and their very brave crews.

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

**Society's Annual Report for January 2014:** 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 2013.

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