

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 42 Number 3 – **NEWSLETTER** – Mar 2014

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2014

13 Mar 2014 "More secrets from the Anglo-Saxons" – Joanna Caruth reveals further details of the archaeological dig at RAF Lakenheath.

27 Mar 2014 "How well do you know Lowestoft?" – our Chairman, Ron Ashman, shows us yet more of the unusual and interesting historical features secreted around our town.

10 Apr 2014 "Lowestoft Hospital" – John Stannard reveals details of this interesting building, presently the centre of some controversy concerning its future use.

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 Report

Remember that Suffolk Local History Council's '**Societies Day**' is on Saturday 15 March at the Blackbourne Hall in Elmswell, near Bury St Edmunds. This event starts at 9.55am and finishes at 4.00pm. All Society members are welcome to attend and there is no entry fee. Tea and coffee will be on sale there, but you need to take your own food. We will have a manned stand and our theme is to be the *Bombardment of Lowestoft during World War I*. Programme and travel details are available from the Secretary at the 13 March meeting.

Following this, on Tuesday 18 March, Richard Mundy will talk on the *History of the Esplanade 1850-2014* at the Tides Reach Tea Rooms, starting at 7pm. There is no entry fee, just bring some money for a cup of tea and a piece of cake. If possible, please let Richard know you will attend, so that he can plan the evening.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Recent talks and meetings

13 February 2014 – "Medieval Legacy in the East Anglian Landscape – pt 2" – by Derek Leake

Derek altered the format of the evening from part 1 by starting with an additional, non-medieval, item showing early pictures of the Broads. These were taken by three Victorian photographers; George Christopher Davies, John Payne Jennings and Peter Henry Emerson; the men differed widely in character and technical ability, were all born outside the area and quite probably never met up when undertaking their work in the Broads area.

First to feature was George Christopher Davies – who came to Norwich when training to become a solicitor. During his short stay he got married, and also fell in love with the Broads scenery, before leaving to continue his career. In 1876 he wrote a book for boys entitled *The Swan and her crew*, the exciting action of which was set in Broadland; this became an instant success, stimulating interest in the area and eventually leading to his major work *Norfolk Broads and Rivers*. The latter described Broads life, landscape and characters and contained a dozen of his photographs – it also was a big seller. In 1884 Jarrolds published a portfolio containing 24 of his images of Broadland, taken during visits to his in-laws in Norwich and these generated more public awareness of the area. He then became a partner in his father-in-law's firm in the city and later was Clerk to Norfolk County Council. He spent his leisure time in retirement visiting Burnt Fen Broad, which he owned.

John Payne Jennings was never a writer (so far as is known) but his photography was far superior to that of Davies, added to which he was an astute businessman. In the late 1880s he was commissioned to photograph the Norfolk Broads by the Great Eastern Railway Company, producing a series of superb prints that would be displayed in the compartments of their carriages for many years. Jarrolds published *Sun Pictures of the Norfolk Broads* in 1891 containing 100 of his photographs, with a G.E.R. advertisement at the back. A later edition had extended captions supplied by ER Suffling, who earlier had published his own book on the Broads. Jennings had a studio in Surrey; he later took commissions from two other railway companies and ended up a very wealthy man, dying in 1923.

Peter Henry Emerson (born of wealthy parents in Cuba) was brought to England by his widowed mother and read medicine at Cambridge, becoming FRCS at the age of 29. His other interests embraced writing, photography and meteorology; he was a keen naturalist and a champion at billiards. He first used his camera to make scientific studies when bird watching, but his interest in composition and the artistic development of photography led him to give up his career as a surgeon. In the 1880s he set out with his artist friend TF Goodall to tour, paint and photograph the Norfolk Broads. They produced *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* – forty elaborately set up photographs published as a limited edition in 1886, with actual photographs stuck in by hand. He and Goodall did the semi-documentary text. In the next four years he produced four more photographic titles on East Anglia, its scenery and life – then, disillusioned, he dropped the artistic side of photography although continuing to record rural life that engaged his interest – a brilliant technician and an intelligent man, he carried the largest camera he could manage so as to avoid enlargement when printing off his images.

Derek pointed out that the Broads were formed as the result of peat digging in medieval times, but as this was not confirmed definitively until the 1950s none of the photographers would have been aware of that fact. He included a number of photos by Davies but sadly few from his more able contemporaries.

Part 2 of the Medieval Legacy Talk, with musical interludes, began by looking at the destruction of Dunwich. This was caused by a major encroachment of the sea in March 1287, with huge loss of land and much of the town fell down the cliff. Today outlines of the old streets on the seabed are visible to underwater cameras but the remaining buildings on the cliff-top date from after the 1287 storm. Derek then showed slides of the extensive Abbey Gardens Benedictine ruins at Bury St Edmunds. A Norman gate survives there but the Great Gate is a later replacement.

Switching to the North Norfolk Coast he drew attention to Salhouse, once a port with harbour, where the old shoreline is still visible well inside the land reclaimed when Sir Henry Kelthorpe built embankments in the 1640s. Nearby Cley and Blakeney also lost their seaboard when the estuary of the River Glaven was altered and Wiveton church is no longer near the water. Further east, the tidal exit from the harbour at Great Yarmouth shifted several times before the 17th century, while Buss Creek at Southwold also silted up forcing the River Blyth to exit further south via the Blackshore. The harbour at Aldeburgh disappeared completely leaving boats working from the beach.

In the mid-12th century Henry II erected a castle overlooking the Ness, at Orford, and slightly later the Bigod family built their own castle inland at Framlingham, with its curtain wall and thirteen towers. The medieval farmers in mid Suffolk grew rich from the wool trade and great sums were expended on the aptly named wool churches, and also on attractive towns such as Long Melford, and Lavenham, with their thatched and timber-framed buildings. From time-to-time disasters led to loss of life – settlements could disappear leaving churches remotely situated, as at Pudding Norton. Creek Abbey was dissolved after plague left only one surviving resident. Walls and internal roadways from medieval times are still apparent in some places – Norwich and

Yarmouth are just two examples. Decorative and commemorative medieval glass windows have also survived, along with church brasses, carvings and monuments.

27 February 2014 – "The Lowestoft Players" – by Malcolm Berridge

Explaining that he was a music-loving and dedicated theatre fan, Malcolm gave us the history of 'The Players', starting from their formation as the *Lowestoft Operatic and Dramatic Society* up to the present day. In the early days they produced yearly shows at May, September and Christmas, traditionally two musicals and one play – all held in borrowed premises. Then a local fish merchant, Albert Catchpole, invited them to use a wooden building at his premises in Stradbroke Road for rehearsals. This arrangement stood for forty years, being invaluable while the company developed in size and skills. In 1967 the company decided to call itself *The Lowestoft Players* but were still using loan premises for their shows including the Sparrow's Nest with its (at times) leaky roof. This was to change in 1986 when the rather run down Marina came up for sale. The Town Council decided to purchase and renovate this building (which proved to have really excellent acoustic properties) as a community project. £100,000 was required for the major renewal to put all in order with new seating and improved accommodation for the stars and cast, although space in the wings was still rather limited. Musician Rick Wakeman performed the opening ceremony in 1987 – nominally a community theatre, the Marina could then also host films and professional shows.

Since its renovation, the number of community groups has dwindled until only *The Players* remain, and the Marina has become host to more and more theatre shows and concerts. Thankfully there has been a resurgence of interest in films and today's audience has a wide choice of entertainment.

In 2008, due to changing circumstances, the Bethel Church in Whapload Road came up for sale. Wisely, since Mr Catchpole first offered his building, the committee had regularly set aside funds roughly equal to what they would have paid out for renting accommodation. After forty-years, they had sufficient reserves to be able to purchase the church outright in 2009, having fought off rival commercial schemes and won planning permission to use it as rehearsal premises. Importantly, the previous owners liked the change as parts of the church interior were preserved.

Since 2009, trade professionals among the society members have completed the rewiring, carpentry, decorating and many other tasks needed to get the theatre up and running. Luckily, the stages in the Bethel and Marina matched in size, greatly simplifying practise of on-stage routines. There was also space for a small studio, a costume store, and a green room for social use by performers. In 2012, the building was changed from a rehearsal room to a small theatre, although flying is not possible due to space restrictions. The Christmas Spectacular presented for 2013 was the very popular '*Calendar Girls*'. To help with publicity and promotions for the shows, planning permission has recently been granted for signage and banners outside the Bethel theatre.

Having mentioned publicity, Malcolm revealed his personal collection of programmes and posters for the members to view some of the amazing range of production titles covering the last forty years. They included historic musicals like *Rose Marie* (1971) and *White Horse Inn* (1974) through to Richard Rodger's *Carousel* (for which the horses were hired in); *Brigadoon* (1982), *Hello Dolly*, and in 1993 *The King & I* with Stephen Wilson as the King. The latter was repeated in 2008 with Judy Mars as *Anna*. Later came even more adventurous shows like *The Full Monty* and *My Fair Lady*. Awards have been won in regional competitions: for *Chess* (2009) and later for *South Pacific*, "*Madness*" and the *Sound of Music*. Stephen Wilson's designs for posters and programmes have also won prizes.

The larger Pantomimes and Musicals are still to be held at the Marina, but Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Aspects of Love* will be presented at the Bethel during 2014. *The Players* are currently fund-raising and working with undiminished energy to secure grant aid for improved lighting and sound equipment to further improve facilities at the Bethel.