

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2014

8 May 2014 "Great Yarmouth's Historic Town Wall" – Maurice Joel will speak about the elaborate and unusual construction of the remaining sections of this wall.

22 May 2014 "Lowestoft Archaeological & Local History Society Annual General Meeting"
– All Members are encouraged to attend this important meeting.

11 Sept 2014 "Georgian History of the Fisher Theatres" – Sarah Hiron gives an insight into the origins and successful development of these theatres in East Anglia.

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

Once again I would like to remind members that the Annual General Meeting is almost upon us. The AGM on 22nd May is an opportunity for you to have your say, and vote on who sits on the committee and how the Society is run. So please do attend this meeting. If there are any issues or items you would like discussed, then please speak to me, to the Society secretary, or a committee member.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Members Visit to Norwich

Jenny has booked this for Wednesday 21 May. We start at the Great Hospital at 10.30am and the tour takes one-and-a-half hours with time for questions. Tea, coffee and shortbread will be available as required. They suggest we park at the nearby Adam & Eve pub where those who wish may obtain lunch. After lunch we walk the short distance to meet at the Jarrold Print Museum, at Whitefriars, where our visit lasts from 2 to 4pm. Members should arrange lifts among themselves to avoid taking too many cars into the City. A 'how to get there' map is available.

Members Visit to Lound Church

This visit is on 12 June and starts at 6.30pm. Jenny is trying to organise a meal at the Village Maid pub in Lound to follow the church visit. Please let her know if you wish to attend the latter.

Recent talks and meetings

10 April 2014 – "East Anglia Transport Museum, Carlton Colville" – by John Crisp

Many thanks to John Crisp for stepping in at a moment's notice to deliver his talk on the Transport Museum. This was due to the sudden hospitalisation (N&N) of John Stannard, who was to have talked about Lowestoft

Hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery and his talk will be programmed in at some time in the future. Don Friston ed.

John Crisp hinted that restoration of historic vehicles tends to be a male preserve, but that is not entirely true at the Carlton Museum where a number of the fair sex cope with a variety of roles. This is a live museum where many of the exhibits may be seen, heard and photographed in action, giving rides to enthusiasts of all ages. It is extremely interesting and shows exactly how our parents and grandparents travelled to school, to work, and sometimes to their holidays. Carlton is the only place in the East of England where buses, trams and trolleybuses may be regularly seen running together on the museum's premises, joined on Special Event days by visiting preserved vehicles owned by other museums and individual collectors.

John explained the main differences in these old passenger vehicles – both trams and trolleybuses are driven by powerful electric motors. Trams have flanged steel wheels (like trains) and run on metal rails sunk into the road surface. Trolleybuses are fitted with similar wheels and steering to motor buses, but must follow a pre-arranged route limited by the rooftop arms that collect current from overhead power cables. Motor buses have diesel engines and are able to drive on any route, subject only to road width and height restrictions due to buildings and bridges.

Trams first appeared in America and Britain in the late 19th century, some pulled by horses, some powered by steam, but most by electricity. Electric trams ran in Yarmouth from 1875, Norwich from 1897, and Lowestoft from 1903. The body of one Norwich tram survives in a Norfolk garden but no Yarmouth example has been found. In 1961 a small group of Lowestoft old car enthusiasts, including Mr AV (Dick) Bird, were advised that the body of a Lowestoft tram that had served for years as a summerhouse at Gunton (north Lowestoft) was up for disposal. The friends rescued it in 1958, and in 1960 took it to Hedley House in Carlton Colville (known as Carlton Manor today) where Dick Bird lived, and it became a restoration project for their group. By 1964 a preserved London tram had arrived to join the partly renovated Lowestoft No.14, shown in the photo overleaf. As the vehicle collection grew, through loans and donations, the idea of a local museum had been discussed although the friends had no assets to purchase a suitable site. Hedley House was sold around that time but Mr Bird kept the property next door. He generously set aside the adjacent 2-acre meadow for the Society to develop as the site for their museum and eventually they were able to purchase the land outright. Word spread as more members joined the group and the museum collection developed further. The original two trams had been transferred to the meadow and joined by others on loan. The first buildings were erected and very limited road and tram track installed during 1966.

At that point the museum allowed the London Trolleybus Preservation Society to move some of their fleet to Carlton for restoration. In return, the LTPS helped with donations for, and the construction of, new buildings to give under-cover storage space, and many of the trolleybuses now in use at Carlton belong to them. In 1970 a high voltage generator was installed and Blackpool tram No.159 became the first to be operated under power, at the embryo museum. 1971 saw another major goal achieved when London trolleybus No.1521 moved under power and Carlton became the first museum in the country with the facility to run trolleybuses, although regular operation had to wait for completion of a better road surface. The museum opened to the public on 28 May 1972 and has opened every summer since. Fresh amenities have been added year by year and another milestone was reached when the short tram track extension into the woods at Hedley Grove was opened. Today the museum fills the site, and Dick Bird's house forms the administration centre of the East Anglia Transport Museum Society. The museum freehold is secured and although visitor car parking is limited, a novel and popular park and ride service is operated on special event days. Through the park and ride system, visitors enjoy additional free rides on some of the museums preserved fleet of buses. Free sightseeing trips to Beccles and Lowestoft are run occasionally also using the museum's buses.

The continued success of the museum may be put down to the unstinting work freely contributed by all the volunteer members – the whole enterprise being funded from gate receipts and donations, with no paid staff. The museum is accredited and run to a high standard, being recently listed as the number one local attraction. 2014 is the 50th year since it was formed and the 43rd year of welcoming the public. Recent grants have been awarded for some projects, one of which, from the Lottery Fund, enabled provision of a special building to house the museum's steam exhibits. An ongoing programme is in place to repair and maintain the exhibits that have to be clean, roadworthy and safe before they are allowed to give rides. Their accessories, like the overhead power supply, the buildings and the track are very costly items to install. Also many special components have to be hand-made to keep historic vehicles in use, as well as recovering seats and repainting bodywork – not easy on such large exhibits. The museum grounds contain many examples of old street furniture, road signs and

period items such as telephone boxes, and even a restored air-raid shelter. Some of the smaller buildings, including the bookshop and café, were adapted from post-war prefabs and hold various static exhibits and transport related items.

A working narrow-gauge railway runs along the museum site and, as with the system for operational trams and trolleybuses, the visitor ticket allows as many repeat rides as desired on the day of purchase. **Some unique vehicles may be seen** – e.g. what is currently the oldest serviceable trolleybus in the world, built in Suffolk by Garretts of Leiston in 1926; plus the only traditional HR2 London tram in working condition (saved from the scrap merchants by Peter Davis in 1952) and still giving rides at 84 years old. There's the only double-deck Lowestoft tram – now being fully rebuilt and prepared for running at the museum in the future, and the rare body of the Lowestoft single-deck Winter Car, one of only four ever built. Many local visitors will remember the Lowestoft Corporation brown and cream buses, three of which are at Carlton, along with two Great Yarmouth Corporation blue buses and several different Eastern Counties examples. The last bus built at the Eastern Coachworks is also now in the museum fleet.



On 22 June 1964 a group of the original Lowestoft tram drivers and conductors was assembled by Mr AV Bird in front of the Lowestoft Tram No.14 and its London counterpart No.1858, temporarily placed in the field behind his walled garden at Hedley House in Carlton Colville.

Picture courtesy of Archant,
Lowestoft Journal

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