

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2014

10 Apr 2014 "East Anglia Transport Museum – Carlton Colville" – John Crisp gives an insight into the origins and successful development of this major attraction on the edge of our town.

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.

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

It's that time of the year again when I would like to remind members that the Annual General Meeting is next month. This meeting on 22nd May is an opportunity to have your say on who sits on the committee and how the Society is run. If anyone has any issues or items they would like discussed, then please speak to myself, the Society secretary or a committee member.

On Saturday 15 March, Marilyn and Rodney Duerden, Janis Kirby, Richard Mundy, Irene and I took a display to the Suffolk Local History Council's 'Societies Day' event held at Elmswell, near Bury St Edmunds. This year we had a display on the bombardment of Lowestoft in 1916.

So far this year Society members have supported two enjoyable social evenings. The first in February when we had a meal at the College restaurant, and the second on Tuesday 18 March when we met at the Tides Reach cafe on the Esplanade, where Richard Mundy presented his talk on the development of the Esplanade from 1850. This is the first time that we have tried this format and I believe it is worth doing again.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Recent talks and meetings

13 March 2014 – "More Secrets from the Anglo-Saxons" – by Joanna Caruth

Joanna first visited the Society in 2010 to bring news of this exciting discovery that included a warrior buried with his horse. This meeting allowed her to review excavations from earlier years and explain post-1987 excavation studies and analysis of the finds from the Lakenheath American airbase site.

Due to the sandy nature of the soil in the area there had been little farming in early times so the archaeology had not been disturbed. Some parts were covered by wind-blown sand, and the many buildings erected after the site was developed as an airbase were constructed on large but shallow slab foundations. The latter actually protected the burials and original settlements for many years meaning newly developed and improved excavation methods could be used. The new techniques enabled many more artefacts to be preserved, thus revealing additional clues as to how the Anglo-Saxons lived and worked. By good fortune the main settlements were contained almost entirely within the airbase, and with very good security in place excavations could safely be left overnight.

Caudle Head Mere and the adjoining river formed the centre of an early Iron Age to Roman habitation and this was overlain by a prosperous early- to mid-Saxon settlement from 650–850AD working away to SE of the mere. Early-Saxon cemeteries were positioned further south towards an ancient trackway known as Lord's Walk. Close to the latter were two big ring ditches, three barrows and further burials. The very light soils in many areas were acidic so not many bones survived, but with the number of graves being in excess of 400, sufficient samples were found for analysis. In some places, including the horse burial, there were patches of limestone that neutralised the acidic soil allowing bones to survive, meaning that the ornate copper and silver fittings from the horse's harness could be identified from their positions relative to its skeleton. British Museum conservators removed some finds (including the skull of the horse) to their laboratory, moving them while still encased in soil. This allowed the painstaking recovery and reassembly of the decorative harness, and the iron and brass bit, to be done in the best conditions. The warrior (found to be local, fit and aged about 30 yrs) and his iron sword had been in a coffin, with his spear and shield laid across the top. The sword, spear head, and the shield boss with its silver mounts survived, but the organic parts (probably alder and hazel wood) had been destroyed by the acidity of the soil, leaving only stains to show their size and position. Fragments were found of a 30cm-high wooden stave bucket (identified by its shape and fittings, as it had not collapsed) and were radiocarbon dated to 500 AD and so helped date some other items. A ditch surrounded the horse burial to show its importance, and there were no male burials found close to it.

Research is still ongoing re the graves as it seems males were buried in separate areas to females and children. It is hoped that DNA evidence will at some time allow relationships to be established across the various cemeteries. It seems juveniles (under 18) were often buried with a spear, even small infants. Analysis of skeletons revealed men averaged between 5ft 7in and 5ft 8in, while women were some 4in less in height. Incidence of death was high for the very young and gradually lessened with age. An adult was unlikely to survive much beyond 55 years. Skeletons showed few traumas but there were some affected by osteoarthritis, abscesses and leprosy. Despite the spears and swords, the absence of wounds suggested a relatively peaceful life style. Clothing was mainly made from skins of domesticated animals but small samples of woven cloth have been recovered where preserved due to being buried in contact with other materials and are being analysed. Decorative glass beads in beautiful colours have been found in numbers, as grave goods, and cruciform brooches with stone and glass decoration.

Many graves from the different periods contained pots and potsherds (some wheel made) that were used for storage, cooking, or as funerary urns. An assessment of husbandry and food remains showed the predominant meats were sheep and cattle, with some pigs. Cereals probably barley, with emmer and spelt wheat, but little evidence of cultivation suggests much of the cereals could have been bought in or traded. Remains of Sunken Featured Buildings showed in the excavations, some of them surrounding pits. Due to the relatively good condition of the floors it has not been settled as to whether they were used for work or living accommodation.

18 March 2014 – "The Lowestoft Esplanade & Marine Parade" – by Richard Mundy

Richard and his family live in Marine Parade, Lowestoft. Since moving there he has studied how Sir Morton Peto set about developing the waste land south of Lowestoft to link up with Kirkley. Born in Surrey in 1809 and educated in the London area Peto was apprenticed to his uncle, prospering in the building industry and later developing an interest in railways for East Anglia. In the early 1840s he lived near Norwich, but then purchased Somerleyton Hall with its extensive estate as a convenient and comfortable local base for his business activities.

At the same time, this ever-industrious entrepreneur was reviving the fortunes of the failed Lowestoft harbour project, having purchased it from the consortium that built it. A sea-lock linked Lake Lothing to the North Sea, and the bridge carrying the turnpike across the lock had opened in 1830. In 1843 Peto proposed building a new railway (opened in 1847) to enable fresh fish landed at Lowestoft to be speedily sent inland; he also thought of making the town a holiday resort, and after buying the Lamp Lands (an area of undeveloped, low-lying ground between Lake Lothing and the village of Kirkley) from the Trustees, for the bargain price of £200, soon had plans drawn up. His first task was to prevent the Lamp Lands from flooding – he did this by employing the Lucas Brothers to first erect the Royal Hotel, in 1849, and then the sea wall and Esplanade, with 20 large semi-detached villas all having stone porches. These were probably intended for sale to well-off people for use as seaside retreats, and Richard found that originally Thomas Lucas owned no.15 and James Peto was at no.17. Parallel to the Esplanade, but further back from the sea, was Marine Parade, an imposing terrace of 50 three-storey houses (also built by the Lucas Brothers) that were equally suitable for large families or for holiday accommodation – surprisingly, John L Clemence (architect for Lucas Bros.) lived here at no.14 rather than in the Esplanade villas.

All these buildings were well patronised by the Victorians for over sixty years until the arrival of the German Naval Fleet, some eight miles offshore on 25 April 1916, when the Cruisers used their 12-inch guns to shell Lowestoft. British Forces engaged the enemy who turned tail and disappeared after about twenty minutes of action. Substantial damage was caused to properties along the sea front and in the town – two men, a woman and a child were killed, and 21 people injured. Richard discovered nos. 1–4 on the Esplanade, including the home of Col. W Cadge, had been damaged in the raid and were demolished by the 1920s. Others fell into disrepair as living standards dropped post World War 1 with nos. 8–10 and 13/14 going in the 1930s and no.7 used as Lowestoft Tourist Information Centre. Nos. 11 and 12 had vanished by 1948, and no.16 went circa 1954, but both nos. 5 and 6 survived until 1958.

In the 1950s the Royal Hotel ran musical events and dances, while various public amenities came and went in the gaps along the Esplanade, including a miniature steam railway, later replaced by a boating lake. No. 17 became the Vicarage for St John's church from 1910 to 1959 – today it is the Tide's Reach Café. No.18 opened as an Ice Cream Parlour in 1930 and still functions as such. No.19 is in private ownership and no. 20 became the 'Scotsman' Hotel, for many years hosting the Lowestoft Jazz Club on Monday nights. It later changed hands (and names) more than once and is currently the 'Hush' Night Club. Sadly the Royal Hotel was closed, it being too costly to bring up to modern safety standards – in 1993 the 'Pavilion' was erected on the site and the Royal Green established nearby.

Marine Parade contained mostly lodging houses by the 1930s but some professional people were established there. At no.50 was the doctor's surgery; no.42 housed the dentist; no.25 a photographer and no.19 a hairdresser. What is now the KFC takeaway was originally the 'Olympian Gardens', provided for the use of residents of Marine Parade. After World War 2 it opened as a filling station, remaining so for a number of years until the takeaway 'took over'. The façade of Marine Parade remains virtually unchanged in appearance, but now overlooks the sea front car park.

Richard produced his own large-scale maps of the buildings along with classic period adverts and photographs and this interesting talk was presented at Tide's Reach Café, no.17 the Esplanade, by courtesy of the current owners.

27 March 2014 – "How well do you know Lowestoft – part 3" – by Ron Ashman

Ron kept to his regular format, asking members to identify puzzle pictures. First was the upper façade of Kirkley Hall, in London Road South. Built 1897 this was an entertainment centre of some 500-seat capacity for a mixture of events, including lectures, socials, school, auctions and religious gatherings, it was owned by auctioneers Titcombe & Few until 1914, when it was sold to Brett's House furnishers and the ground floor entrances altered to a showroom. From 1948 until 1952 it served as the temporary outlet for F W Woolworth while their blitzed main store was rebuilt – it was used later by builder's merchants, another house furnisher and more recently for hiring evening and formal wear. In nearby Waterloo Road (in the early 1890s) were the Victoria hot and cold Sea Water Baths owned by Thomas Hubbard Leggett – some members might remember it as Labany's Restaurant. Next was the building constructed circa 1896 as the Public swimming baths, later to be South Lowestoft Swimming & Private Baths, then the Grand Cinema for much of the second half of the 1800s. The Kirkley Centre now occupies the site.

From the older part of town Ron showed the Crown Street Hall. David Fisher had joined Norwich Theatre Company in the 1780s as a singer. By 1810 he ran the Norfolk & Suffolk Comedians Co. touring E Anglia in hired halls. Success enabled him to start building his own Fisher Theatres – in Lowestoft and Wells in 1812, followed by Eye, Woodbridge, East Dereham, Sudbury, Thetford, Beccles, Swaffham, Newmarket, North Walsham and Bungay – the latter still remains. David Fisher died in 1842, passing the theatre chain to his family. The Lowestoft theatre closed in 1844 and has been used for various purposes since. It is currently much in need of repair.

Switching to three buildings just north of the bridge, Ron said they also had earlier owners. Members remembered Lowestoft Women's Social & Political Tea Room, later to be Ford Jenkin's photographers. Also the Amusement Arcade long supervised by ex-tram-driver 'Shiner' Wright, became Sudbury Carpets and is currently under consideration for use as a lap-dancing club. Moving north to the corner of Beach Road we saw Jarrold's Stationery, Art and Book shop that originally was a luxury private dwelling for a prominent local dentist (shop shelving was donated for Lowestoft Museum when Jarrolds reorganised their basement store in the late 1980s). The next building in Beach Road was once Floods Printing works, and has a 'Suffoche Villa' Town sign still in position at the top corner, but sadly now painted a dark colour that disguises the design.

Today, Old Nelson Street has nothing to suggest it was once home to well-off Lowestoft professional persons and tradesmen. In 1881 some half of the premises employed servants, as did those in adjoining Herring Fishery Score and Frost's Alley Score (the latter was later to be demolished). It is written that Bow House, at the corner facing the Battery Green was once a tavern but there is some uncertainty over the name. This road formed the south end of the old town until the harbour and bridge at Lake Lothing were built in the early 1800s. The lower end of Old Nelson Street faced what is now Hamilton Road (originally known as Bath Road) where public baths and bathing machines were for hire. Apparently hot and cold seawater could be carried from there to any part of the town. The Town defences were rebuilt in 1782 on a green opposite Old Nelson Street with a 30-foot long underground magazine for ammunition also with room for 300 barrels of gunpowder. This area was severely damaged in World War 2 and many replacement buildings put up after the 1960s.

Regent Road housed the old Police Station for over a century and after war damage this was patched up and stayed in use for some time, finally being replaced by a modern building at the top of Old Nelson Street opposite the Old Spread Eagle pub. Further north from there is St Peter's Street and the Triangle Market. This was set out in 1898 with the intention of building a new Town Hall but lack of funds meant this never happened. Nearby St Peter's church was built of white brick in 1833 as a chapel of ease to St Margarets, Lowestoft. It was declared redundant and demolished in 1974, although in fine condition, the site being bypassed by the inner ring road complex.

Further north in White Horse Street was Cooper's Bakery. The company had various outlets in Lowestoft, also dealing in china and glass, ship chandlery, grocery, tobacco and confectionery. The building acted as a temporary store for artefacts and furniture belonging to the Lowestoft Museum during its move to Broad House in 1984.

The final photos were of the Carnegie Library opened in 1905 in Clapham Road. This received a direct hit in a 1941 air raid but three-quarters of the books were salvaged. The Library moved twice before settling at Suffolk Road in 1951 in what was originally a Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen and is now part of Godfrey's premises. The present Public Library & Record Office was built on the original Clapham Road site, opening in 1975.

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 the 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 in preparation.

Members Visit to Lound Church

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

Anglo-Saxons in Carlton Colville – the excavation of Bloodmoor Hill early Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery saw important artefacts discovered at this site. For the first time, some of these finds are to be displayed to the public at Lowestoft Museum. A programme of event times and dates will shortly be published as a separate printed flyer.

Programme change

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 sudden illness of the advertised speaker. The talk on Lowestoft Hospital will be rescheduled. ed.

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