

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2015

14 May 2015 "A Kirkley slide show" – by Chris Brooks

18 May 2015 Annual General 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

As the month of May approaches, I would like to remind members of the AGM to be held on Thursday May 28th. This will offer everyone an opportunity to express opinions on the running of the Society and to vote for the members of the committee for the coming year. Please consider joining the committee, as at least one current member will not be standing for re-election. If anyone has items which they would like to be discussed at the AGM, please speak to me, the Secretary or any committee member.

Visit to the Minster Church of St. Nicholas, Great Yarmouth. This has been arranged for Tuesday June 23rd with the tour starting at 6.30 pm and lasting about one hour. If you have not already indicated that you would like to go, please be sure to sign up as soon as possible. Jenny has booked us in for a meal at the Foxborrow Inn after the visit and menu choices are now available.

Marilyn Duerden – Chairman

Recent talks and meetings

12 Mar 2015 "Barber's Point Excavations 2013" – by Jezz Meredith

Jezz gave a very comprehensive talk on the recent excavations at Barber's Point in the Alde estuary as well as referring to previous work there and a lot of background information about the archaeological setting. The most recent dig was undertaken as part of the three year "Touching the Tide" project (under whose auspices three members took part in field walking at Covehithe in January) which aims to involve members of the public in exploring their home area. Guided by 5 experts from Suffolk Archaeology, 20 volunteers from Aldeburgh and District LHS and up to 140 children from 7 local Primary Schools, plus some students on "work experience" were able to achieve a large amount in just 3 weeks. The inclusion of children at the dig was an encouraging effort to develop an interest in archaeology at an early age.

The talk was illustrated not only with maps, diagrams and photographs of work in progress but also oblique aerial photographs which brought out the relationships of the site to the surrounding coast and estuary. One of the most revealing was taken in December 2013 just 3 months after the dig when the tidal surge which flooded parts of Lowestoft, turned Barber's Point back into the island it had probably been when first settled. It is difficult to give a full impression of these valuable visual aids in this written account.

Two irregular shaped areas were excavated in the sandy soil, one of 240 sq. metres and the other 55 sq. metres. The main discoveries were of 18 graves (dating from c.550 to 900 AD) with the remains of about a dozen

skeletons which were unusual for the frequency of young, mainly female, adults and children. It was thought that there might be another cemetery nearby with more male burials.

Also unusual was the large amount of Roman pottery found but only a little of Anglo-Saxon origin. Jezz explained that it was likely that the site had been used by the Romans as a saltern, using ceramic briquetages, and he showed a reconstruction of one from Lincolnshire. He posited the idea that the broken Roman pottery had been collected and placed on the site to raise it higher above the waters of the Alde. Some of the Roman remains and especially the waste oyster shells had increased the pH value of the soil and helped to lessen the destruction of the grave contents.

Another theory, which derives from the finds associated with the graves, is that it was a religious site linked to St. Botolph's Abbey across the water at Iken, and similar to Lindisfarne in its isolation. The character of the objects found in the graves also suggested a change from pagan to early Christian beliefs. The objects might have been interred when they were no longer appropriate in a Christian setting.

One grave which made headlines contained what was called a teenager's "keepsake" box. At first, one object looked like a damaged duck egg shell but after complete removal it turned out to be a cowrie shell probably from the Red Sea or Indian Ocean. The other objects in this assembly included a piece of Roman glass, a lump of amber and an Iron Age ring and a much corroded key.

At the end of the talk, there were several questions which reflected the unusual and enigmatic nature of the finds which will no doubt raise further questions in the future. You can find out more from the Aldeburgh web site (aldhs.org.uk) and their concluding talk on the dig will be on May 7th at 6.30 pm in the Jubilee Hall.

26 Mar 2015 "Pakefield Coastwatch, A Short History of Pakefield Lighthouse" - Di & Phil Humphrey

The Pakefield lighthouse has often been described as the forgotten lighthouse. The coast here has been subjected to erosion over the decades and much land has been lost near the lighthouse. In the mid 1600's a navigational aid was established at the end of Arbor Lane. This was a brazier, complete with a keepers hut, which was not very effective, so it was moved to Kessingland. This must have been quite a task as the structure weighed 70 tons and had to be pulled along the turnpike by horses.

Sandbanks had always been a hazard to shipping and in the 1820's local vessel owners partitioned Parliament for the provision of a lighthouse at Pakefield to guide vessels through the narrow seaway.

The present lighthouse was constructed in 1831/2, having been funded by Trinity House, complete with keepers' cottages, in the grounds of Pakefield Hall. The cliff on which it stood being 34 feet above sea level and the circular tower 30 feet high. On top was a lantern containing two Argand lamps which exhibited a fixed light that had an effective range of 9 nautical miles. The construction cost was £821.9s.4d. and it opened in May 1832. The land had been owned by Mr Morse, and a sum of £200 was offered for land for an access road to the lighthouse, but the owner declined the offer. The dispute was handled by solicitors for a period of 15 years, first with Mr Morse, then with his heirs without being resolved. Eventually the £200 was accepted.

Sandbanks are continually shifting and the light became ineffective. So, 32 years after it opened the lighthouse was closed. For the next 50 years the buildings remained unoccupied.

The property was sold back to Pakefield Hall in 1929. The owner, Howard Barrett, opened a holiday camp on his land with accommodation in tents with a marquee serving as a dining room. As the camp became more popular in the 1930's the tents were replaced by wooden chalets. Many of the campers came from the industrial areas of the country, the Midlands and the North of England. Part of the lighthouse and the keepers' cottages were used as a bar for the campers. The cost of a week's holiday in 1935 was £2.2s.0d per week, including meals. One picture showed campers leaning on the tower hand rail watching the activities below.

In April 1938, with the impending threat of war, the lighthouse was taken over by the Royal Observer Corp, who removed the roof and lantern to allow them better visibility of approaching aircraft. During World War 2 the camp was taken over by the military and gun emplacements and other defences were constructed along the cliff and beach. The keepers cottages became the billet for the ATS girls stationed there.

A gate in the beach defences provided the local fishermen with access to sea, but they had to return before it got dark as no lights were allowed. On 12 May 1943 the lighthouse was hit by machine gun fire during a German air raid on Lowestoft.

The area around the lighthouse has a ghost called Crazy Mary. Mary was married to a fisherman who put to sea from the beach at Pakefield. When he did not return from a fishing trip she continually went to the cliffs, looking out to sea for her husband, wringing her hands and bemoaning his fate. She is said to have refused to move out of the gully below the lighthouse, a place now called 'Crazy Mary's Hole'. Eventually she became deranged and walked into the sea.

During the war a solitary sentry on one occasion sensed some form of presence, but saw nothing, after which they patrolled in pairs. A paranormal group recently surveyed the lighthouse and found three 'hot spots' (a spot where there could be some ghostly presence).

After the war the property returned to being a holiday camp and a new roof was installed on the lighthouse. People came to the camp before the barbed wire and mines had been removed from the beach. In 1958 the camp was bought by Pontins. In the 1960's the ground floor area of the lighthouse was used as the camp photographers darkroom and the keepers' cottages demolished as they were in a bad state of repair.

In 1999 local volunteers having gained permission from Pontins, started to renovate the lighthouse and in 2000, having passed rigorous tests, it became part of National Coastwatch.

The closure in 2013 of the Coastguard Station in Gt Yarmouth now means that Maritime Rescue & Co-ordination is controlled from Humber (East Yorkshire) in the north and Walton on the Naze (Essex) to the south. Local knowledge is important when dealing with incidents at sea and the Coastwatch provide this information.

The National Coastwatch was founded in Cornwall in 1994. This followed the deaths of two local fishermen who drowned right below a recently closed Coastguard station. Following a campaign to re-establish a visual watch along the coast, the first Coastwatch station was established on the Lizard at Bass Point in November 1994.

The Pakefield team watch the beach and coastal waters from Lowestoft harbour to Benacre and monitor radio channels for distress calls and liaise as necessary with the Coastguards. The station is manned 365 days of the year.

The staff are all volunteers and income comes from fund raising events, there is no funding from the Government. Recently new windows were fitted, which were financed by Adnams Brewery and a local authority grant.

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The Visit of the Lucy Lavers

A Norfolk charity called Rescue Wooden Boats are restoring a lifeboat called Lucy Lavers. She has an interesting history. Her first shout as a newly commissioned boat at Aldeburgh in 1940 was to help with the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk. This May they are taking her back to Dunkirk with the Little Ships and she will be calling at Lowestoft from 8th-10th May, where you will be able to visit her.

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