

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 43 Number 2 – **NEWSLETTER** – Feb 2015

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2015

12 Feb 2015 "Verdun 1916 – the death of an army" – by military historian Richard Mann

26 Feb 2015 "A Local Thatcher" – related by Nick Walker

12 Mar 2015 "Recent archaeological digs including Barbers Point near Aldeburgh" – by Jezz Meredith

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

On January 22nd, three members of the Society went to Covehithe to take part in a field walking investigation under the aegis of Cambridge Archaeology as part of the 'Touching the Tide' project which is investigating many aspects of the Suffolk Coast.

Quite a lot of finds, mostly pottery and flints, were picked up but the results are still being assessed.

A display on this subject will be part of our contribution to Societies Day on March 7th. A fuller report will be given later.

Marilyn Duerden – Chairman

Recent talks and meetings

22 January 2015 – "Lowestoft's lost Churches and Chapels – by Terry Weatherley

Terry began his talk by saying that in the Lowestoft Journal a couple of weeks ago there had been an announcement that the Methodist Hall in Barnby was to close its doors, a sad end to over a century of Methodist worship in the village. Originally the hall had a Chapel next door but the latter was demolished some years ago and houses built on the site. At one time such halls were not uncommon.

As a starting point in his research for this talk, Terry had found a survey of Non-Conformist Chapels in the 1977 LA&LHS Annual Report carried out by Mrs Jean Julings useful. Another source of information was the census carried out on Sunday 30 March 1851 to find out the provision of religious worship.

On researching Lowestoft, Terry started with St Peters Church, which was consecrated in 1832 and located on the corner of St Peters Street and Alexandra Road. The church was built as a Chapel of Ease to St Margaret's and replaced an earlier chapel that became part of a former town hall. It was an impressive building without a tower and, although apparently in excellent condition, was declared redundant in 1974 as the housing all around was being demolished to make way for the inner ring road complex. St Peter's Church was not in the way of the new road but at that time was not considered important enough to be saved. People are sometimes confused by a nearby church-like structure in Alexandra Road – this is St Margaret's Institute, a parish mission dating from the late 19th century.

Next Terry talked about St John's church, which stood on the corner of London Road South and Belvedere Road, built in 1853 with the spire being added in the 1860's. One of the former parishioners had been the composer Benjamin Britten, whose mother had been the organist there. The church was used for civic services, and in 1914 Suffragettes interrupted the proceedings. This made the News worldwide, for *The Bendigo Advertiser* (in South Australia) on Tuesday 14 April 1914 wrote:

Church Service interrupted by Suffragettes. There were continuous suffragette interruptions

in St John's Church, Lowestoft, yesterday. Twenty suffragettes were ejected.

The demolition of the church was well recorded and the weathercock can now be seen on display in the Lowestoft Museum. Levington House, containing sheltered flats, stands on the site today.

Probably the most unusual church was St Matthew's that stood in Clifton Road until 2007. This was a Mission church to St Peter's, Kirkley, built in 1899. Later it was known as Colville Hall. (Clifton Road was previously known as Colville Road). In 2012 the Society took charge of a red leather-bound book that had been presented to the Rev Hedges on his departure from St Matthews Church, Kirkley, in 1906. The book was in recognition for his seven years of faithful service to the local community. In wonderful calligraphy, it lists the names of all those who contributed to his leaving collection of £100 (or Purse of Gold as it is referred to in the book), a considerable sum in 1906.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, visited Lowestoft 14 times. The first meeting place being a room near the The Old Blue Anchor pub; then in 1776 Wesley came and opened the new Meeting House. This building, in the High Street, was itself demolished and Wesley House constructed in its place. There were several different branches of Methodism, which included Wesleyan, Wesleyan reformed, Free, and Primitive. The Primitives were also known as Ranters. Some built their chapels in brick, but others used corrugated iron, and the latter were popularly known as 'tin tabernacles'. In Lowestoft brick seemed the most popular. A Methodist Chapel in St Peters Street, built in 1876, had been used by the Elim Pentecostal since 1961, but is now closed. Oulton Methodist chapel has been converted into a home. Kendal Road Methodist chapel was sold to the Congregational Church as a Sunday-School room, but for many years now has been used by the Scouts.

The Flensburgh Street Methodist Chapel was used by Chadd's as a carpet store and is now replaced by houses. An imposing chapel once stood on the corner of Lorne Park Road and Lawson Road. That closed in 1963 with the congregation moving to the then new South Lowestoft Methodist Church in which we hold our Society meetings.

Shops now occupy the site of the Free Methodist Church that stood in London Road North. Opposite the library is a Reformed Wesleyan Methodist Chapel building (on the corner of Raglan Street and Stanley Street).

The Congregationalists first met in Lowestoft in 1655 in a barn in Blue Anchor lane, then in 1695 they used a chapel in the High Street next to Devereux stores. In 1852 they moved to a new church and the old chapel was used by the Methodists until it was demolished.

The Baptists had an old meeting house in the High Street on what is now the site of a filling station. The inside was described as having a pulpit at one end of the building and at the other end was a gallery for the choir. They did not have an organ but a scale box. From here they moved to London Road North, where in 1852 they built the Arcade Chapel on the site now occupied by Beales Department store. Having outgrown the Arcade Chapel in 1899 they moved to a splendid church further down London Road North towards the bridge. In the 1970's the site was sold to Boots Chemists and a new church built on the corner of London Road South and Kirkley Park Road. In Richmond Road today stands a house that was once a Particular Baptist chapel. Having been built in 1878 it later became a store, and was eventually converted to a house.

It was in a net loft off Clapham Road that the early Catholics first met. The present Our Lady Star of the Sea Church was built in 1902. A building in Blackheath Road was used more recently as a Catholic church.

In 1903 the South Cliff Congregationalist Church was built in Kirkley, on the corner of Pakefield Road and Morton Road. In 1961 the Congregationalists became part of the United Reformed Church. When they closed the building in Kirkley it was unused for a period until being re-opened as the St Nicholas Catholic Church.

Arnold Street once had a church which was the home of the New Jerusalem Church of the Swedenborgians. It had been the writings of the Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Baron Swedenborg that had influenced five ex-Wesleyan ministers to found this church.

The Seventh Day Adventists once had a chapel in Regent Road, now Tesco's car park. Also, their chapel in St John's Road was sold and became Jeckells the Sailmakers shop.

Many Missions have been lost which include the Railway Mission in Denmark Road, the Mission Hall in Crown Street and the Missions to Seamen in Commercial Road.

The Fishermens Bethel is now the Lowestoft Players' theatre.

The Brethren bought a number of smaller chapel buildings and at one time used Colville Hall (previously St Matthews).

Terry finished by saying all is not doom and gloom, as in recent years Trinity Methodist and London Road Baptist churches have been built and the Brethren have been building in Long Road, Fairfield Road, and in a field at Gisleham.

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Fence Wire Telephones by Ron Ashman

Today, we take telephones for granted. In this modern world we have a number of choices, for not only do we have landlines, GSM mobile phones and for the news-media, military, and ardent travellers, we have satellite telephones.

However, things were very different in the past.

The first telephone patent was taken out by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, although the credit for its invention is frequently disputed as a number of people were experimenting at the time with devices by which people could talk directly across long distances.

When the American telephone network was being installed it was mainly in urban areas, the rural areas were left until later. Infrastructure is the main cost of any utility, and early phone company investors saw no profits in stringing hundreds of miles of expensive wire and poles to connect sparsely populated areas of the American West.

In the early 1900's someone living in the American rural west came up with an enterprising scheme. What the rural west had was miles of wire fencing, some of which was barbed wire. It was discovered that by connecting telephones to the fencing wire that the top strand was suitable for use in a line of communication, and was reportedly as clear as the standard telephone service. This meant that bespoke telephone lines did not have to be installed, and best of all the user did not receive any telephone bills.

There was one disadvantage however, in that the wire needed to be isolated (insulated) from the post, especially when it rained. When it was wet, the wire nailed to the top of the post grounded (earthed) the whole line, which was then unusable until the post dried out. One type of insulator was obtained from the local Saloons that provided empty beer, whisky or wine bottles. The bottlenecks were broken off and wooden pegs fitted inside. A hole was drilled right through the peg and it was then fixed to the post with a long nail. The wire would then be wrapped around the bottleneck, glass being one of the best materials for an electrical insulator. Where bottles were not available they resorted to the use of leather, rubber from tyres, and corn cobs.

As the early system did not have a switchboard, every telephone along the line would ring at the same time. Therefore, each house would have its own distinctive ring, i.e one ring, two rings, one short and one long ring (a

bit like customised ringtones of today). However, everyone connected to the line could listen in on any conversation, although it was considered to be impolite to do this. But for those in isolated areas when they felt lonely it was easy to listen in on other peoples' conversations. It should be remembered that at that time many did not have a daily newspaper, there was no radio or television, and to listen in on others talking was probably the highlight of the day. Having said that, sometimes many people could be on the line at the same time for an arranged group discussion.

One wily old farmer had a solution to ensure a private call. At the start he would announce, for example, that he was about to explain in detail how to castrate a horse and anyone not wishing to listen should put down the receiver. This would be followed by a series of hang up clicks which made his conversation virtually private. To illustrate how fast the gossip spread, another farmer once said his neighbours knew his wife was pregnant before she did. Later, as the network expanded, switchboards were to be introduced into the telephone system.

As this network was completely independent and could not connect to the standard telephone system, if someone needed to call anyone in town they would have to find a farm or ranch that was connected to both systems and get them to relay the message. Calls over a long distance sometimes required the user to call a farm, or ranch, part of the way down the line to relay the message to the end user.

In the 1920's the fence lines started to be replaced by formal telephone systems, although some barbed wire lines were still being operated in the 1970's. The USA was not the only country to use the barbed wire system it was also employed in the Australian outback. The longest line there stretched some 700 kilometres (about 440 miles). This network served many farms up to the 1960's when the lines were eventually replaced with a microwave radio relay system.

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