

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 43 Number 5 – **NEWSLETTER** – May 2015

Society website: [www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk](http://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

10 Sept 2015 "A Suffolk Village in Wartime" – by Sheila Wright

24 Sept 2015 "The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha" – by Don Friston

**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**

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday May 28<sup>th</sup>.

I would like to ask members to please consider if they want to make suggestions about the running of the Society which can be done by speaking to me, the Secretary or any Committee member.

The Curator of Southwold Museum has invited Members to make a morning visit to the Museum. If there is sufficient interest, I will contact her and find a suitable date which is likely to be late September or early October. Please let me or another Committee member know if you are interested. A date will be fixed in September.

Reminder of our summer church visit to Great Yarmouth Minster, 6.30 Tuesday June 23<sup>rd</sup>, followed by a meal at the Foxburrow Inn. Please let Jenny know if you have not already done so.

*Marilyn Duerden* – Chairman

## **Recent talks and meetings**

**23 April 2015 – "Lost Villages of Norfolk" – by Richard Mundy**

Before Richard started, he displayed an outline map of Norfolk with lost villages marked in red and existing places in black, and it was amazing to see how many lost ones there were. He commenced by asking "Why Norfolk?" The reply was that in the 11th century, it was the most densely populated county in England and that over 150 villages known then have subsequently disappeared or been noticeably changed. Before going on to explain the reasons that had been responsible for this, he asked "What is a lost village?" In Norfolk, it applies not only to settlements destroyed by coastal erosion but also to deserted, shrunken or shifted villages, for which Richard outlined the factors which were most influential.

Richard's talk continued under nine headings as follows:

**Climate change resulting in crop failure.** The 13th century enjoyed stable and warm dry weather but colder and wetter conditions in the 14th century caused failed harvests in 1315 and 1316. Years of poor harvests and widespread food shortages, undermined the stability of many rural communities.

**Disease and pestilence.** During poor climatic conditions between 1319 and 1321 came cattle disease, then The Black Death in 1349, followed by further plague outbreaks in 1361-2, 1369, 1379-83 and 1389-93. Norfolk's already declining rural population was badly hit. Little Ringstead was one of the lost villages identified as having been directly affected (with 17 tax payers in 1332 but needing massive tax relief after 1349) and never recovered.

**Farming practices.** Partly as a result of falls in population and partly in response to the demand for wool, there was a change from the traditional three-field system, which required a lot of labour, to grazing sheep. Richard gave several examples of "flockmasters". These were men who bought up land that had once been open arable fields and converted it into enclosed sheep pasture. Thomas Thursby (1450-1510) was one of the most well documented as he was mayor of King's Lynn several times, also Lord of the Manor of Gayton and an ancestor of Prince William through the Spencer family. Others were Henry Fermur in Thorpland, William Day in Alethorpe, Edmund Jermyn in Sturston, and William Fermur (son of Sir Henry) in Pudding Norton. The behaviour of these, and others like them, towards the landless peasants was often very poor and one of the main causes leading to Robert Kett's rebellion in 1549.

**Embarking.** The practice by the lord of the manor of building stately homes and enlarging landscape gardens on land that was once part of a village's field system, either after natural wastage or by ruthless acquisition (similar to Engrossment, below). Houghton is a good example of a village lost when Sir Robert Walpole built his Hall, and Wolterton suffered similarly when Horatio Walpole commissioned a Hall there.

**Soil quality in Brecklands.** With over 30 identified locations, the Brecklands was renowned for having the highest concentration of deserted villages in Norfolk. In prehistoric times, the light, workable soils encouraged a very high residency level. The early farmers practised a 'slash and burn' technique and the 'broken' plots of land became known as Brecks, which after a dry spell could be seriously affected by wind erosion. After a visit in 1677, John Evelyn recorded a local joke: "Which county is your farm in, Norfolk or Suffolk? Well, that depends on which way the wind's blowing". Sheep and rabbits contributed to the removal of vegetation leading to further erosion of the fragile soils.

**Coastal erosion.** The removal of the soft glacial deposits which make up the East Anglian coastline has been an on-going process due to isostatic recovery following the most recent glaciation, and when it affected settlements, was the one most likely to be highlighted in the news. Just offshore from Cromer was the village of Shipden, submerged in the 14th century. In 1888, a coastal passing tug struck the ruined tower of St. Peter's church. Further south along the coast was once the famous village of Eccles-on-Sea. Much of it was washed away in a violent storm of 1604, but the church tower remained on the beach to be gradually removed by subsequent storms and high tides, finally disappearing in 1895. Clare near Mundesley, Keswick near Bacton, Wimpwell near Happisburgh and Waxham Parva near Horsey are further examples on this stretch of coastline.

**Engrossment.** This was the gradual enlarging of the lord of the manor's lands from the 16th century onwards. Unlike embarking, the lord often purchased the land of his tenants, usually after they had died. Ultimately, this process would create an estate consisting of a sole manor house, a home farm and a church.

**Military requisition.** Some Norfolk villages were "lost" more recently. During WW2 the Stanford Military Training Area (known as STANTA) was established after a public meeting, in June 1942, when villagers from Lynford, Langford, West Tofts, Tottington, and Stanford were given one month to move out. Nearly 1,000 men, women and children were forcibly evacuated from the 17,500-acre site. The promised return after the war never took place. Some of the churches (only visitable by permission of the MoD), remain as reminders of the lost settlements. In September 2009, William Hancock, one of the evacuees, was interred next to members of his family, by special dispensation, in the churchyard of St. Andrew's, Tottington, the first for 50 years to be buried at the church in which he had been christened.

**Proximity to Norwich.** As Norwich, the second city of England in the Middle Ages, continued to prosper, it may have sucked in the population from surrounding marginal villages. See Neil Batcock *The Ruined Churches*

*of Norfolk*, where he suggests the abandonment of Markshall, to the south of Norwich, may have been due to its closeness to the city. Bowthorpe, Earlham and Bixley may have suffered a similar fate in later years.

For each of his nine listed categories, Richard produced examples with diagrams and photographs, mostly of ruined church towers, often all that remains visible of what were once thriving settlements. One location well worth a visit is Godwick, between Dereham and Fakenham, in the care of English Heritage and possessing some of the finest surviving earthworks for a medieval lost village. It suffered from several of the problems listed above, also weather, disease and heavy clay soils. It declined in the 15th century and was virtually abandoned by 1595.

Richard ended with a selection of photographs of the delightful round tower church of St. Margaret's at Hales, now at some distance from the resident population. With the many other examples described, these should encourage those who heard the talk to visit this, and as many of the other "lost villages" as possible.

### **23 April 2015 – "The Mappa Mundi" – by Ron Ashman**

What is a Mappa Mundi? Mappa means 'cloth or chart' – Mundi means 'of the world'. In other words it is a map of the then known world. Mappa Mundi is actually a generic term and there are more than one Mappa Mundi. However, the one on display in Hereford Cathedral is unique as it is the only complete wall map of the world known to have survived since the Middle Ages. The map is drawn on vellum, a type of leather that is fine and strong. A single skin has been used meaning there are no seams or joins. The map measures 64 inches top to bottom and 54 inches across. It is dated to the end of the 13th century, probably about 1280, and was thought to have been a teaching aid. The original text was in Latin and Norman French, but all the pictures shown in Ron's talk were taken from a copy of the map that was available to view afterwards, and used an English translation.

There had been a larger and older map, called the Ebstorf Map, but that was destroyed in an allied bombing raid in 1943. It measured 11 feet by 11 feet and was possibly dated to 1235.

The Hereford Mappa Mundi has a number of style differences to maps of today and can look primitive and inaccurate. It was never meant to be used for navigational purposes – the land mass and seas were 'sketches'. The British Isles are rather elongated and kidney shaped with Scotland being shown separated from England by the river Tweed. There are also some geographical inaccuracies as Durham is shown to be to the west of York. Cities are marked by a castle-shaped building symbol. The Paris castle is much larger than that depicting London, which tends to indicate that Paris was the more prominent city. Containing more than a modern map the Mappa Mundi is packed with information including history, legend and stories from the bible. For example, there are: 420 cities and towns; 15 biblical events; 33 plants, animals, birds and strange creatures; 32 images of people; 8 pictures of classical mythology.

Having been drawn according to the Tripartite plan, it shows a world of three continents enclosed within a circle, with east at the top. Asia is shown at the top with Africa in the bottom right hand segment and Europe in the left hand segment. Some thought there should be a fourth continent, the Antipodes, but to suggest this was considered at the time to be heresy. Unfortunately this method of drawing placed limits on the designer, forcing them into distortions of scale and distance. At the centre of the map is Jerusalem, the City of God in the centre of the known world.

The Hereford map is thought to have originated in Lincoln and to be the work of Richard de Bello, who in 1283 was a senior churchman at Lincoln Cathedral. However, in 1305 there was a Canon Richard de Bello at Hereford Cathedral, therefore it is possible that this is the same man and explains how the map came to be in Hereford. The first recorded mention of the map in Hereford is in 1682 when it was listed as 'a map of ye world' which was found among other 'curiosities'. It was described as being kept in a frame with two doors, suggesting that it could have been used as an altar screen. In 1862 it was put on display at an international exhibition in London where it was viewed by thousands. After that it was returned and exhibited in the South Choir aisle in Hereford cathedral.

In 1990 disaster nearly struck the map. Hereford cathedral is constructed of soft sandstone that had deteriorated due to the weather and air-borne pollution. Expensive repairs were required and help was not forthcoming from the government, so it was decided by the Dean & Chapter to raise funds by selling the Mappa Mundi. This controversial decision was strongly opposed by many people. However, in 1991 a generous donation was

received that not only paid for the building repairs but also the construction of a new building that would house the Map and the Chained Library (the historic library of medieval books) in a controlled environment.

At the very top of the map is the Doom, and in the centre is the son of God, Christ in Majesty, seated in the clouds, a figure with both hands raised, showing the nail marks in his hands and feet. Below him, inside the gates of Heaven is his mother Mary with attendant angels – she is pleading with him to have pity on the souls of the dead and allow them into Heaven. On Christ’s left-hand side one batch of condemned sinners, having been roped together, is being dragged by a horned and winged devil towards the head of a monster with gaping jaws – this is the gateway to hell.

Ron showed detail pictures from the map of biblical events including Noah’s Ark, Adam & Eve, the destruction of Sodom & Gormorrah and the passage of Moses through the Red Sea: various animals and plants and some strange creatures. One of the drawings shows two men indulging in a ‘cannibal’ feast, one eating a human leg and the other an arm. Around the map are strange creatures. There are people with no heads and their eyes in their chests, horse-footed men and bat-eared men. These are the monstrous races, weird fantastical, beyond belief as they appear to us, but must have meant something to those who lived in earlier times.

Ron finished by showing pictures of the Chained Library, the preserved and restored library of medieval books that can also be seen in Hereford Cathedral.

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**Obituary: Jon Reed**

Jonathan (Jon) Reed was born in London on 30 June 1931 and died in James Paget Hospital on 10 April 2015. He qualified as a Chartered Mechanical Engineer and worked for Pye Electric, later TASC Drives, on the design of electric motors and their control systems.

As a member of the Society’s Committee from 1980 he served in various roles including Editor of the Newsletter. He also arranged fieldwalking and many summer outings, including some by coach to places such as Colchester, Woodbridge, Sutton Hoo and Norwich. In 1995 he became Honorary Curator at the Lowestoft Museum, a position he held until he retired in 2002.

A nice man, Jon was well thought of and respected by Society members and the Museum team. He did much for the Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society and for the Lowestoft Museum in his various roles. In recognition of this work he was made a life member.

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

