

# Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

Volume 43 Number 7 – **NEWSLETTER** – Oct 2015

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

## What's On in 2015

8 Oct 2015 "100 years of St John's Ambulance in Lowestoft" – by Tony Curd

22 Oct 2015 "Far Eastern Pavilions – part 2" – by Michael Mills

12 Nov 2015 "Decoding the Morses" – A history of the Crown Street Brewery – by Eric Doré

26 Nov 2015 "The formation of Local Fire Brigades" – by Maurice Joel

**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**

There are two events for your diary:

An extra meeting to be held at Desmond's Coffee Shop, 221 London Road South, Sunday 22 November at 3 pm, including a talk by member Richard Mundy on an aspect of London's history and a buffet tea, costing £4 per person. This is a follow on from the enjoyable event that Richard arranged a couple of years ago.

The winter meal has been booked for Thursday 4 February 2016 in Lowestoft College restaurant at 7.45 pm. The cost will be £22 for three courses plus coffee. Menu choices will be available in due course.

There will be an opportunity to sign up for these events at the next few meetings.

*Marilyn Duerden* – Chairman

## **Recent talks and meetings**

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

Sheila, a retired teacher from Drinkstone, made the lengthy trip from West Suffolk to deliver a very interesting talk that covered both First and Second World Wars. Taking advantage of having worked in the school at Drinkstone until her retirement, she had made a superb collection of historic stories and photographs. These slotted together to make a fine slide show to accompany her talk and covered much of the school's history from 1860 to 1986 when it closed. She began with the story of Henry Gobbit, a salesman for veterinary supplies, who married the school headmistress. He volunteered for the Suffolk Yeomanry as a reservist in the early 1900s where his c/o was SM Giles. Henry went to Gallipoli for the 1915 campaign, but was wounded and transferred to hospital in France. His recovery complete, he eventually returned and with his wife raised 6 children at Drinkstone. Next came Alf Harvey and his wife Sarah. Alf was a veteran of the Boer War but also served in WW1, in the Yorkshire Regiment. Sadly both he and a brother were killed in France. Sheila said 40 men from Drinkstone served in WW1, of which 15 died.

The main residence at Drinkstone was the Hall, owned by Lady Douglas. A number of locals were employed at Drinkstone Park including a coachman, Captain Hargreaves, who was 50 at the outbreak of WW1. The Morse car from the Park was volunteered for the war effort and used in France in February 1915 to drive nurses to the action. Captain Hargreaves was promoted to RSM in the 4th Suffolk Regiment and later led a party of troops into action, for which he gained the DSM. Due to the effects of gas, and later tuberculosis, he was unable to continue work and a new man took over the horses at the Park, the Hargreaves family moving into a cottage in reduced circumstances. Another local, Arthur Lee (born 1901), lost his mother early and suffered as a boy at the hands of an unkind stepmother. Later he signed up for the army and went to India. The school headmistress, Mrs Gobbit allowed her daughter to go to India in 1925, then considered a dangerous place, and by coincidence she was chaperoned there by Sgt Lee. Three years later he had been made up to SM and they married!

Sheila moved on to WW2 at this point. Drinkstone school by then had a new headmistress. In 1939 evacuees arrived, mostly from London, some of whom stayed for the duration of the war. Four airfields were built in the area, Rattlesden probably being closest. The war affected school life and children had to practise hiding under desks if a raid was to occur, and they all carried, and practised using gasmasks – Sheila showed hers to the members, still in its box in fine condition. She recalled school groups collecting rose hips from the hedgerows, needed to produce rose-hip syrup and, due to the shortage of manpower on farms, the Education Authority allowing schoolchildren to do some farm jobs. One family named Bloomfield had 8 children who lived with their parents in a small cottage with two living rooms and two bedrooms. Like many country dwellers in those days they had no running water, no flush toilet and no electricity supply. Locals used battery wireless sets and got their accumulator charged once a week. It was a time of shortages all round. The whole family worked on the farm during harvest time, and to eke out their rations collected waterhen's eggs, pigeons and rabbits – fruit and vegetables were not so rare as 'home-grown' was the watchword for country people, many of whom also kept chickens. The grocer, baker, milkman and butcher made regular rounds to those living in more remote places bringing their ration allowances. Few people had cars, and those who did were not allowed petrol unless their work required it. Some people came from London to help in school with tending the fires for heating and arranging the dinners and the cleaning duties.

At that time Ernest Livens had taken over the horses at the Hall. Rattlesden Airfield was very busy with American servicemen also billeted at Drinkstone Park. Lancaster bombers and Flying Fortresses were a common sight most days – children were sometimes taken to parties at the American base and enjoyed some luxury food items and sweets – they got on well with the American visitors. Dances were popular with the locals and servicemen, and swing music was played everywhere (once, half of the Glen Miller Band provided the entertainment). Sheila remembered the huge formations of UK and American aircraft assembling overhead before special raids were made.

Scouts, Guides and even Brownies did useful jobs during the war, often learning from adults employed on important war work. The WVS organised collecting salvage. Patriotism was encouraged and this helped those who had reached call-up age. The war ground on through major crises like D-day and the raids; later there were the aerial attacks from V1s and V2s to contend with. Finally the joy of VE day and the end of hostilities arrived. It was alleged that country boys were usually practical and adjusted easily to service life. However in combat many experienced dreadful scenes, and others found difficulty returning to Civvy Street where there was often a lack of leadership. The war brought new skills, and for some returning troops, the chance to purchase a piece of land when large country estates were sold off, the owning families having been split, or reduced by the years of hardship.

### **24 September 2015 – "The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha" – by Don Friston**

Member Don Friston gave this talk concerning his father Henry's background and his trip to Gallipoli during WW1, from which he returned with a live Turkish tortoise that he named Ali Pasha. The tortoise lived in Suffolk from 1916 to 1987, outlasting his captor by ten years and gaining a fair amount of coverage in the Press and other media. The gifted, Pakefield-born, artist and author Michael Foreman who had attended Lowestoft Art School with Don in the 1950s also knew Henry (who regularly used his mother's tea room and shop). Michael had always wanted to tell the tortoise's story and produced '*The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha*' in 2013. The book contains his superb colour illustrations and some of Henry's old family photos. The text of this story is based on Henry's war diary, kept while serving as gunner on a battleship.

Henry's father George was born at Corton, Suffolk, in 1856, shortly before Jeremiah Colman, the youngest partner in the famous mustard company, bought a summer residence there, the *Clyffe*, on the cliff top. George

became head gardener at the Colman's house in 1895, and was moved with his family (Henry was six months old) from Mill Lane into the gardener's cottage, Hawthorn Lodge, opposite the *Clyffe*. Don showed slides of the Colmans and of his own family with period images of their homes and the new village school (built in 1895). At school Henry loved maps, learning about foreign countries, and had an Australian pen friend.

In 1908 after leaving school, aged 13, he worked at gardening with his father. During the next winter there was less to do at the *Clyffe* and he was offered a trip on a North Sea fishing boat owned by his friend's father. This awakened a love of the sea and at age 18 Henry volunteered for the Royal Navy. After shore-based initial training at HMS *Pembroke*, Henry became a seaman on the battleship HMS *Implacable*, assisting the gun crew, and prepared for active service in WW1. In late 1914, *Implacable* was ordered to sea to fire on enemy coastal bases in occupied Belgium, then on 13 March 1915 fresh orders came to sail for Gallipoli via Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. Henry looked at his world map to find that Gallipoli was part of Turkey (an ally of Germany) and was involved in the war. Together with HMS *Queen*, under sealed orders, they slipped away into the Atlantic and four days later were near to Gibraltar. Due to bad weather they did not stop there but Henry saw Africa just across the Mediterranean as they sailed on for a further two days. When they reached Malta the grim news came – three British battleships had just been blown up at Gallipoli with many of their crews killed — on 24 March *Implacable* was prepared for battle.

Allied troops had been secretly arriving in the area for some time at the Greek Island of Lemnos and the British battleships took them onward to Gallipoli. Their plan was to land, with the help of small boats, and capture the Gallipoli peninsula while the battleships gave covering fire and took out the Turkish gun posts on shore. Once that was completed, it would allow the fleet to sail into the nearby Dardanelles channel and on up to the Sea of Marmara, opening up a route for further attacks against the enemy. But, as the attack began, it was obvious that the Turks were well prepared, heavily armed, and firmly entrenched on the cliffs above the beach. As the small boats left the shelter of the battleships they came under withering fire and hundreds of men died before even reaching the different beaches. Troops from *Implacable* were sent ashore on X beach at the southern end of the peninsula. The fighting continued for many hours and eventually the Turks were driven some way back into reserve trenches. When a stalemate had been reached, the ship's Captain told Henry and his mates to stop firing and prepare to go ashore with search-and-rescue-parties as there were vast quantities of dead and wounded among both allied and enemy forces.

Henry and his mates from *Implacable* were horrified when they saw the scale of things. They were to spend many days burying the dead and bandaging and caring for the British and also the Turkish wounded, ignoring what side they were on while giving them first aid. *Implacable*'s crew formed pairs of stretcher-bearers to carry the British casualties from the battlefield down to the beach, ready to be rowed out in small boats to the hospital ships lying offshore. It was just before they were ordered to stop and return to ship that Henry stumbled across a live tortoise among the trenches; he loved animals and carefully stowing the reptile in his haversack he carried him on board ship. When his mates asked him for its name he said, cheekily, "I'll call him Ali Pasha, after the enemy leader at Gallipoli". Rules were very strict at that time in the Navy and it is amazing that Henry and his mates managed to secrete Ali in the gun pit to avoid him being discovered and thrown overboard. They were so successful that Ali survived for months while the ship was sent to Taranto, in Italy (for exercises with the Italian Navy) then to Malta, and to Port Said in the Suez Canal. HMS *Implacable* was to patrol the canal, keeping it open for allied forces from Australia, New Zealand and India to travel into the Mediterranean to join the war. A whole year later the ship was sent back to England and Henry arrived home in Corton with Ali, who was given to his mother as a pet. At that point Henry was transferred to the brand new battleship HMS *Repulse* on which he stayed for the rest of WW1.

Henry got married after WW1 and drove Lowestoft trams and buses. From 1927 he lived with his family in a converted railway carriage on the outskirts of Corton; Ali was returned to him just before his mother died in 1952, and Don can remember him arriving at the railway carriage. When the 50th Anniversary of the end of WW1 was celebrated in 1968, Ali was pictured in the *News of the World* as an unusual war souvenir. A copy of the paper went to Australia, and a Melbourne Society for Pet Dogs liked the story so much they sent Ali a medal and made him the only reptile honorary life member. An ex-pat British soldier in New Zealand also saw the article and wrote to thank Henry for the good time his regiment received, when they faced a very uncertain future while being taken to Gallipoli on HMS *Implacable*. After 1968, Ali appeared quite often in the local newspapers, usually mentioned by the *Lowestoft Journal* reporter Trevor Westgate who took a great interest in Henry and Ali Pasha's story. In 1977 Henry died and Ali moved to Don Friston's home at Carlton Colville. Then, in 1986, a reporter from *The Times* heard that Ali might have reached the age of 100. He came to see Don for details first, and later produced a full-page illustrated article outlining the amazing story.

A new series of events was triggered when that article appeared. Editor Biddy Baxter invited Ali to appear on her famous BBC children's TV programme 'Blue Peter' (Ali was taken to the London studio by Don and returned with the coveted badge). HTV West asked him to take part in their Bristol Studio's weekly show 'Pets in Particular', this time accompanied by Don and a friend with his tortoises bred in Lowestoft (Ali and friends stayed at the Holiday Inn, Bristol). Don also did many radio interviews, both live and recorded, including one from NBC Canada. Finally, the Press Officer on the Royal Navy's new frigate HMS *Brave* wrote asking if Ali would like to go to sea again? *Brave* was linked to Lowestoft and was to be moored off the town on an official visit. Ali and Don were taken out with a party of Sea Cadets from Beccles to look round the ship and have lunch aboard. Sadly, that proved to be Ali's swansong as the following year he caught a severe cold virus and died. His tale, however, goes on. Michael Foreman's book was published in time to celebrate the Centenary of the Gallipoli Campaign and Ali's sea journey. Henry's memorabilia from WW1 and Ali's shell are currently out on loan at Newcastle in an exhibition including examples of Michael Foreman's work. In 2016 the exhibition will tour the country and it is hoped that Norwich will be included in the selected venues.

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### ***Book Review by Rodney Duerden***

## **The Angel Roofs of East Anglia – unseen Masterpieces of the Middle Ages**

by Michael Rimmer

In *The Angel Roofs of East Anglia*, Michael Rimmer has achieved the remarkable feat of producing a work which is not only filled with scholarly detail and research but also a guide which every amateur, in its true sense, will want to own and use.

As a carver of wood and stone for over 50 years this reviewer stands in awe of the skill and devotion displayed in these roofs. Previously admired only from ground level as an assemblage of beams and trusses, it is now possible to refer to individual roofs and carvings thanks to the outstanding photography that make this book such a delight. As a resident of East Anglia, it is fascinating to follow the persuasive arguments as to why there is such a concentration of these roofs in this region, and we are doubly fortunate that the conditions which make viewing the angel roofs difficult to grounded viewers, also made it possible for them to escape the terrible iconoclasts of the 17th century.

It is to be hoped that each of the buildings featured in this comprehensive study will possess and display a copy so that visitors who usually might only catch a shadowy glimpse of the roof above them, may be able to appreciate what a wealth of skill and detail is assembled above their heads and see the many splendoured angels smiling at them, almost face to face.

This book has many photos and colour plates and is published by The Lutterworth Press – ISBN 9780718893699

***After reading this book, I for one will set out to visit as many as possible of these magnificent edifices with Michael Rimmer's book as my companion and guide. R.D.***

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