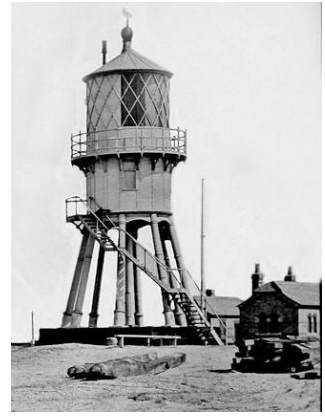


Society News

The Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History
Society Newsletter

November 2022.

Editors:- Ron and Irene Ashman



The Kensington Gardens electric boats

Last month we wrote about the electric boats in Kensington Gardens. A lady sent an email in which she wrote that she was a border at the Convent in the 1960's and on Sunday afternoon as a treat they would visit the boats.



Pots of Interest by Elizabeth Talbot

Having had the need to oversee the replacement of a crumbling chimney pot this month, pre-empting winter storms and possible consequential problems, the presence of chimney pots on site at TW Gaze Diss Auction Rooms, caught my attention. Consigned for the Architectural auctions, their size and character put my modest, fat-bellied little buff pot well and truly in the shade. However, the combined effect of this coincidence suggested a theme to explore; and it seems an appropriately seasonal subject.

A chimney is the name given to the entire structure that carries off the smoke from a fire, and chimneys have been an important part of buildings for centuries. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'Chimney' originally meant a fireplace, and is thought to be derived from the Latin "caminus" meaning furnace, forge, or oven. In Middle English it was "chimenee".

Chimneys have always been particularly significant in colder climates where they are employed not only to remove smoke, but to retain heat and prevent downdrafts. In British architecture, they were first found in castles (often just a simple chute with plain openings, as is hinted at in the remains of Framlingham Castle, Suffolk), and then in manor houses.

It was in manor houses that the first of what today would be called chimney pots appeared. In the Tudor period it became fashionable to have very ornate brick chimneys and stacks on manor houses and estate homes (as at Helmingham Hall in Suffolk), whilst much simpler versions of chimney pots became common on

ordinary homes around the Elizabethan period. It was not uncommon to find chimneys made from wood, until the practice was outlawed by early fire prevention laws.

In modern English, a chimney stack is understood to be the part of the chimney or flue that is visible above the roof. However, originally, these were called chimney stalks, and a cluster of stalks was called a stack. Meanwhile, chimney pots are a superstructure of the stack and sit on top. Chimney pots have been used in Britain since at least the 13th Century and are usually made from clay or tin. Chimney pots are known as 'cans' in Scotland, and 'tuns' in southwest England, but whilst they were in place to serve important purposes, it was common in East Anglia for chimneys to be used without pots on top.

The Victorian era (1837 – 1901) is considered to have been the 'Golden Age' for chimney pots in Britain and there was a huge manufacturing industry associated with their production. Not only was there a burgeoning population to keep warm and fed via the use of domestic fires, but the prosperity brought by industrialisation during the 19th Century engendered urban generation and development, with the need and ability to build more and more housing. Literally thousands of designs of chimney pots were developed and marketed, and some people suggest that the vast number of identical terrace houses that were built during this period led homeowners to use chimney pots as a way of personalising their dwelling. Certainly, there are regional variations in terms of colour and style, and many producers vied for customers by the artistry and daring of their creations. Many were specially commissioned and are not traceable to any pattern book or tradesman's catalogue. Combined with a parallel growth and productivity in the coal mining industry, "hearth and home" generally was an area of big business into the early 20th Century.

Clay pots tend to come in three main finishes: terracotta red and terracotta buff (where terracotta is Latin for "baked earth") or salt glaze, the latter created by throwing salt into the kiln at the hottest point during firing, at which point the sodium in the salt combines with silica in the clay to form a glassy coating of sodium silicate, which acts as a weatherproofing and extends the life of the pot. There were rarer colours, too, such as black and Staffordshire Blue.

For some enthusiasts, tracing an old or even antique chimney pot is a labour of love, the perfect finishing touch to a restoration project. For others, collecting chimney pots is a modest hobby, a way of literally planting interesting features in a garden. For a few, amassing chimney pots is a compulsive/ obsessive conservation project. All of these are admirable motives. Certainly, the sheer number of different designs makes the quest potentially life-long.

Many pots down the ages have not been recorded. Lots of those that have been logged bear creative names like Weemac, Spiral Captain, Smoke Cure and Champion; and sometimes the same design is named differently by different manufacturers. The National Clayware Federation's catalogue of 1964 still contained nearly 500 designs of chimney pots, all of which had been in use for a century or more. So, there is plenty to captivate a collector. Meanwhile, Valentine Fletcher produced the first specialist book on the subject, 'Chimney Pots and Stacks', in 1968. Ironically, the publication coincided with the Clean Air Act and the arrival of domestic gas fired central heating, which meant log and coal fires in homes were rapidly going out of fashion, as was the need for chimneys and pots.

Hence, the appearance of lovely chimney pots at TW Gaze's regular Architectural Salvage auctions, along with hundreds of other highly attractive feature pieces for house and garden.

The Lowestoft Bridge.

By Ron Ashman

Having written about two local anniversaries this year in the September Newsletter, there is a third to record. The present Bascule bridge is 50 years old this year. The first bridge on this site was opened in 1830. The local townspeople complained for years that it was narrow, single track and operated by four men turning two cranks.

In 1897 it was replaced with the swing bridge which lasted until 1969 when the bridge suffered a major breakdown when it stuck in the open position. This was good for the fishing and maritime trade, but not for anyone wanting to cross the river into Lowestoft. For six weeks the traffic had to seek an alternative route until the army erected a retractable bridge. This temporary bridge was in its turn replaced by the present bascule bridge in 1972.

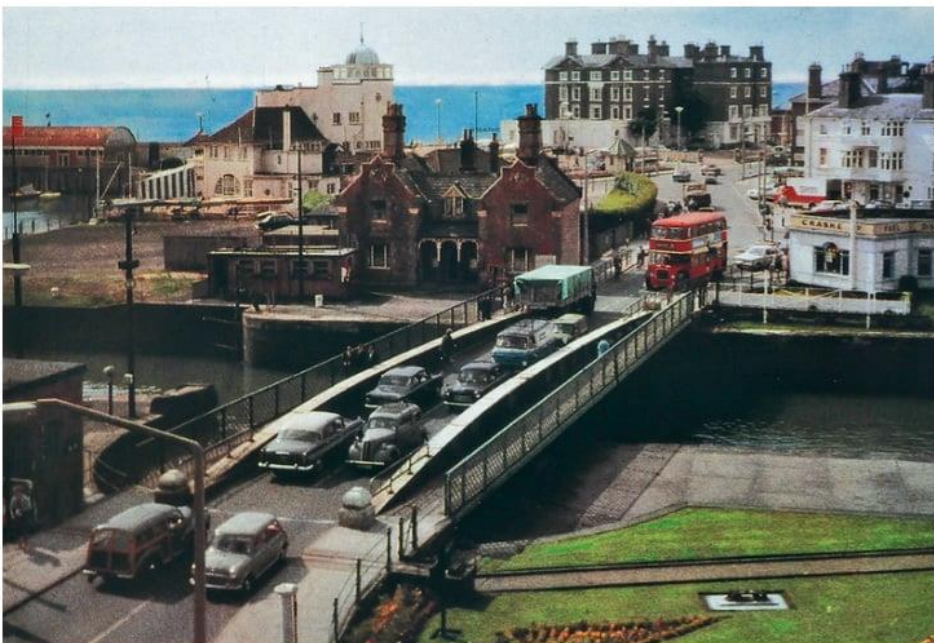


The first bridge.

The building on the right is the Customs House that is there today.

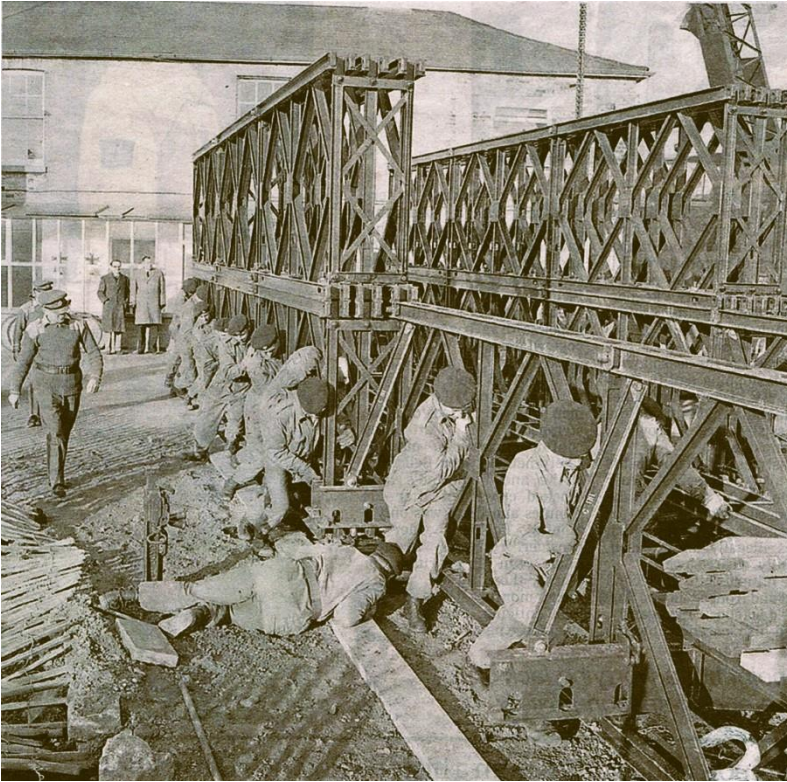
The ornate building to the left of the Customs House was the Harbour Masters residence which was destroyed in a WW2 bombing raid in February 1941.

The long building was a Great Eastern railway workshop.



The swing bridge opened by turning clockwise onto the quay on this side of the river.

One feature of this bridge was that pedestrians could cross the bridge on both sides along footpaths segregated from the road traffic by a barrier.



The Army erecting the temporary retractable road bridge.

In 1985 the deputy County Surveyor said “There is no doubt that Lowestoft has a great need for a third crossing. It will not be less than 5 years and you will be lucky if you can get it inside 15 years.”

The Lowestoft Museum move into Broad House (Part 3)

by Ron Ashman

With the new premises, W.D.C took the opportunity to put on display the town’s collection of Lowestoft Porcelain in the Museum. This collection had been the property of the Borough of Lowestoft and when W.D.C was formed the ownership was transferred to the Charter Trustees. The collection was looked after by an officer of W.D.C.

To move the Museum exhibits required transport. A Society member who was a local builder provided his builders lorry, the late Lord Somerleyton, the Society President, supplied a Land Rover and trailer, and the company where I was employed loaned a pick-up truck. To move everything meant numerous trips for all vehicles.

With the late occupation of the building it had resulted in a great deal of work in getting displays ready for the opening on 1st August by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The biggest job was unpacking everything, then setting out the display cases with their display items and producing labels. The mill had to be re-assembled (with two very heavy mill stones) as it was too heavy to move in one piece and it was too big to go through the Museum door. Also, racking needed to be installed in the store rooms for items not on display, the office with all of the records set up, with this work being carried out by many Society members.

Due to the short timescale, the porcelain display had not been completed in time for the opening. There were many pieces in the collection to unpack and set up in the display cabinets, although help was provided by some local collectors.

However, in the two month period after the official opening the Museum had 6,500 visitors.

The work within the Museum after the first season was carried out by a small team. During the closed months the 'team' usually met on Tuesday evenings with some extra visits at weekends. It should be noted that all of the members of the team were in full time employment so could not attend during the daytime. Also, two ladies carried out the cataloguing and recording the exhibits on record cards. (before the days when everything was on a computer) This was a continuation of the way the Museum in the Prairie had been organised, with the Society committee managing the Museum.

Before the opening of the Museum there was much discussion between W.D.C and the Society over a proposed agreement for the Museum. W.D.C were to have all of the admission money with the Museum retaining any donations and revenue from the Museum shop sales. W.D.C issued numbered tickets for adults and children, and accurate records had to be kept and the exact money paid to the council.

It was also agreed that a Joint Consultative Committee be formed to oversee the administration of the Museum, with five Trustees, five W.D.C members (two Conservative, two Labour and one Lib/Dem or Ind), plus officers of the Council. These meetings were held twice yearly and maintained a close relationship between the Trustees and W.D.C. The meetings continued until Malcolm Berridge retired from the role of W.D.C Chief Executive, when his successor discontinued the Joint Consultative Committee.

For many years W.D.C nominated one councillor to be their representative to the Trustees.

For the 1996-1997 season the Museum became free entry and it was agreed that W.D.C should have half of the donations in place of the admission money. Following the introduction of the free entry to the Museum there were 23,000 visitors.

Next meetings.

24 Nov The Lothingland and Mutford Half-hundreds: Domesday and after. by David Butcher

2023

26 Jan The 1960's Lowestoft music Scene – part two by Richard Mundy

9 Feb The Roman Town of Caistor St Edmunds – an update on recent research by Mike Pinner

23 Feb Excavations at Court Knoll, Nayland by Jo Caruth

9 Mar Connections: The Man with the Gun by Ivan Bunn

23 Mar In Search of Boudica by Natasha Harlow

27 Apr Bronze and Silver: Two short talks on objects in the Lowestoft Museum by Rodney Duerden & Ron Ashman

11 May A Long Way from Home : Lowestoft Evacuees- 80 years on by Sandra Delf

25 May Annual General Meeting

If you have any articles that you would like published in this Newsletter, please contact the editors at a meeting or send your piece to email address LALHS@btinternet.com.

Items do not have to be typed, they can be hand written and do not have to be very long.

If you wish your name can be attributed to the article, or it can be left out.

Have you been to any interesting place or building in this country that might be of interest to other members that you could write about. Or, could you write a review of an historical book you have read.