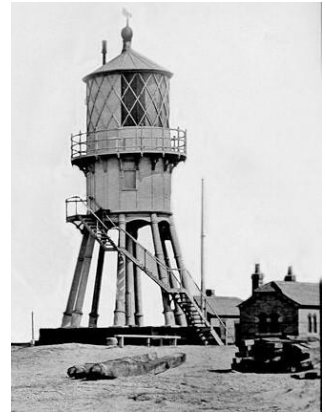


Society News

The Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History
Society Newsletter

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Editors:- Ron and Irene Ashman



Royal Plain fountains.

By Ron Ashman

The fountains in Royal Plain are not the first water feature to have been there. In 1890 Mrs E Franey handed over a monumental fountain she had erected in memory of her cousin, Richard Henry Reeve, the late Lord of the Manor. Richard Reeve (1821-1888) was a local solicitor who had purchased the lordship of the manor of Lowestoft.

I would suggest that the monument should have been called a water feature rather than a fountain, for as far as I can see it only had four outlet spouts that discharged water into a basin.

A newspaper report at the time declared - "the fountain had been unveiled and great was the disappointment of the people. It is neither ornament nor useful and the construction of the basin is dangerous to children."



The picture on the left, although not that good a picture, shows the monument with a rail around the basin. This had been installed after local people complained that children could fall into the unprotected basin and possibly drown. However, after a rail was built around the stone basin to prevent such accidents, it was said that this would increase the danger to children as they would swing themselves into the water.

In 1893 there were complaints which were reported in the Lowestoft Journal about the cost to the ratepayers and a suggestion that the water should be turned off as it only trickled through the spouts into the basin that became of "no earthly purpose excepting the creation of a stinking pool, and the expenditure is nothing more or less than wanton, wilful waste".

The council took note of the problems and carried out modifications to the memorial. In May 1896 the work was completed and the following appeared in the local newspaper.

The work of raising and altering the Reeve Memorial Fountain which has been in progress for some time, has now been completed, and the fountain stands forth in all its glory with added lamps and drinking fountains. A carved stone horse drinking trough has been placed at each of the two sides, and at each end of the other sides is a tap and cups by which humans may slake their thirst. At the top, just below the griffin, are two globular lamps held by ornamental iron brackets.

(The council plans for the monument were for it to be raised about 5 feet and have 4 lamps fitted, it was raised but only two lamps were fitted according to this article.)

The week following the article above, a resident of Lowestoft who identified him/herself as “Ratepayer” did not agree with the reporters description. The Ratepayer agreed that the monument had been improved, but it reminded them of an antiquated candlestick, the stick being out of proportion to the surroundings. The removal of the iron railing was questioned as it was “a source of great amusement to girls and boys to show off their gymnastic capabilities, and the only thing of the sort in the town for which no charge was made”

The monument was moved to Kensington Gardens in 1922 when the newly commissioned gardens were laid out. It was moved from the Royal Plain as the site was required for the War Memorial to those who had been killed in the First World War.



These photographs were taken a few years ago when you could see the green verdigris on the area where the water spout had been. If you look at this today those parts of the monument were removed and replaced with new stone blocks a few years ago.



This picture shows the original decoration around the water spout.

Recent Finds

The finds from a 1,400 year old palace complex discovered at Rendlesham in Suffolk are on display at West Stow. There are a silver gilt horse and rider brooch, coins, gold and garnet accessories and remains of food.

There is a new exhibition at the British Museum ‘Legion: Life in the Roman Army’

The Path of Hope

by Ray Collins

The Tony Thurston's talk in January on the War Graves Commission reminded me of the book I read about a year ago where the author walked the WWI front line and in describing this he tells of many events and stories of where he was walking through, also his own personal battle with a new life emerging.

The idea of the path came from a soldier in 1915 writing home in which he saw after the war a route in which pilgrims could walk in peace with some of destruction preserved to remember what had happened. It grieved him very much that the landscape had been destroyed and he looked forward to this being restored. The soldier was Douglas Gillespie a Second Lieutenant with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders posted to Vimy Ridge in northern France and the Belgian border. He wrote :

"when peace comes, our government might combine with the French government to make one long avenue between the lines from the Vosges to the sea....I would make a fine broad road in the 'No-Man's Land' between the lines, with paths for pilgrims on foot and plant trees for shade and fruit trees, so that the soil should not altogether be waste. Then I would like to send every man, woman and child in Western Europe on a pilgrimage along that Via Sacra so that they might think and learn what war means from the silent witnesses on either side."

Douglas was killed in action just days later at the Battle of Loos on 25th September 1915. His parents had already lost their elder son not far from where Douglas died.

His vision of a '*via sacra*' (a sacred road), is a route for peace between the battle line.

The route, Western Front Way, became a reality a hundred years later and is over 1000 kilometres long stretching from the Swiss border to the coast of Belgium. This war claimed over 10 million lives so it roughly equates 10 people for every step you make. Those *silent witnesses* accompanying you on your journey. Add to this those who had their lifestyle devastated by injury, mental and physical health, loss of loved ones and other serious losses, the numbers are enormous. The gravestones look so clean and neat, they hide the horror of the back story.

The author Sir Anthony Seldon was initially prevented from doing the walk by the COVID restrictions so in August 2021 with the lifting of travel controls he had a tight window to do the walk. This was not ideal as the hospitality industry had not fully recovered and proved to be a problem in many areas. He also was at a crisis point in his life having lost his wife recently and having poor health so he gave up his main jobs apart from writing for the papers and a bit of consultancy work which he continued to do on the walk.

Anthony had rediscovered Douglas' letter in 2015 and was a driving force in getting all parties together to make it a reality although not finished. At this time many areas were not well signed and in places he had to walk beside busy roads at great personal risk. Although he followed the original 1914 front as well as he could there was not much evidence of what had gone before, it has been reinstated as well as it could be but a few ghost towns have been preserved in memory of the destruction. He gives some figures of the destruction for France, 11,000 schools, town halls and churches were destroyed, plus over 350,000 homes. 2.5 million hectares of farmland were devastated an area larger than the size of Wales, as was the transport system: 1,800 kilometres of canals, 5,000 kilometres of railways and 62,000 kilometres of roads all required rebuilding.

He started his walk in the south at the French, German, Swiss border meeting point in 1914 , called 'The marker of the three states' and the three stones markers are still there today although the border with Germany is now 40km to the east at the Rhine. Many stories are related, most tragic and although this was generally recognised as a quiet part of the front, on Easter Sunday 1917 one happened here. The Swiss kept an eye on things as they didn't want the fighting on their land or the shells over it. Their neutral bit jutted out so the French and Germans thought they were safe and no one would fire over it. However on that Sunday the Swiss had a military band playing and the Germans began to sing and dance in the open when a Portuguese soldier on the French side opened fire not knowing the rules. A bullet hit a German in the stomach and he later died of his wounds. Many other stories of single and mass slaughter are recounted and of how these soldiers coped with day to day conditions, boredom and daily fear even when the main actions were quiet. Also we don't think of the many other nations that were there doing their bit and the British were only at parts of the line. One especially hard fought place was Verdun where the German strategy was

to drain French blood dry as they thought this was place they couldn't afford to lose. An excellent talk was given on Verdun by our regular speaker Richard Mann in 2015 and can be found on our website in the Newsletter dated March 2015 or the 2016 Annual Report. It was said that no-where was destruction so great as at Verdun.

He finished his walk on the 38th day at Nieuwpoort in Belgium although he did return in February 2022 after meeting the present day family of Douglas who had found some more letters among which were some of the last he wrote to his sister and parents. Also there was a letter from a medical orderly who saw Douglas charge the German trenches alone and going over the top into the German trench.

If this has stirred your interested to read the book it is – **"The Path of Peace"** – "walking the Western Front Way" by *Anthony Seldon*. For the author this proved to be a pilgrimage as Douglas had envisaged for all the nations for peace and helped him to decide his life going forward. He donated all proceeds from the book to the Western Front Way.

In my school days I met many of the 'Old Comrades' who had fought in WWI and although seeing lots of black and white photographs I didn't begin to understand what they had been through. This book was for me a sobering sight into what they had seen and how lucky we are to live in the times we do.

Memories of the past.

by Diana Coad

Your recent article in the Lowestoft Historical Society newsletter reminded me of my childhood growing up in the East End of London. We had an outside toilet and one of my jobs was to go and collect newspapers from the better off homes to cut up and put on the meat hook in the outside toilet.

We were quite proud and one the ladies thought she was rather grand and because we were slightly proud and also because a lot of my learning came from these very newspapers we would read them before applying them! One day I marched up to her front door to ask if she had any newspapers. She said "no, but I have some nice magazines" I said "no thanks missus we only like reading the newspapers!" We didn't want the magazines because they were shiny and therefore not porous!

The story though reminded me of our bungalow bath which hung on a hook in the outside toilet and was brought in once a week on Friday Night. My mum would have the radio on playing Friday Night is Music Night catch phrase of Stanley Black being "old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones", as we used the bath.

Mum boiled kettle after kettle to put about 6 inches of water in the bath. We kids went in first. Then mum would skim the scum, off the surface of the water. (Which was probably from the home made soap which mum made with lye and ashes, mixed with the hard water area that the East End of London was. Then mum and Dad would take their turn.

This reminded me of my Gran, most families lived in the same street, so we had us, two of my aunts and our gran. Gran had an old fashioned copper, not the law and order kind! Which was how I imagined a cannibals cauldron. The fire would be lit under it to do all the washing. Then the fire was put out and us kids if we had made the mistake or being in the vicinity would be put in the copper to scrub off. This was somewhat perilous as the bottom was still hot from the fire. My dancing skills came from this I learned a kind of two step but it also helped with my Irish Dancing.

Gran would scrub us with a hard brush and carbolic soap. How I hated the sting of that soap. She would make us stand still whilst she scrubbed saying Cleanliness is next to Godliness. The discomfort of hot feet and raw skin was made up by my grans bread pudding when we got out,

Editors note:- I can also remember the use of newspaper in the toilet, an alternative was to use IZAL Medicated Toilet Tissue. The sheets were rough on one side and shiny on the other side which was impregnated with disinfectant , being non-absorbent it made the product disliked by most who used it. The tissue could not only be found in homes but also in public toilets and schools.

Museum Report

by Paul Durbidge.

In the Museum the work has finally begun to try and solve the water problem in the cellar. A compact tracked machine has begun taking a number of core samples at the rear of the museum in an attempt to find out what the soil content consists of and also what depth the water table is.

In the building an inspection was made to see if there was any evidence of asbestos in all the rooms and we were relieved to get a clean bill throughout the Museum

Work has begun in the waterlogged cellar beginning with the removal of all the asbestos covering the ceiling joists and fibreglass insulation. Unfortunately this revealed decay at the end of one of the two beams that support the floor above where it rests on the external brickwork. It is thought that the beams, formed by two timber sections bolted together with the actual floor joists coggged into them were installed during the alterations to the seller several years ago. It is probable that the continual damp has resulted in this set back but hopefully it can be resolved as we move on

Sutton Hoo

A new archaeological dig in June is to take place at Sutton Hoo to investigate some mysterious features which were found during a survey, to find out if these features are geological or archaeological.

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 jalhs@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. Could you write a review of an historical book you have read. Or could you write about childhood memories. (e.g shops, wash days or school days).