Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

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Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

What's On in 2013/14

14 Nov 2013 "Mutford Half Hundred – A Domesday evaluation**"** by David Butcher, who gives us an outline of his companion volume to *The Island of Lothingland*. (See note at end of Newsletter.)

28 Nov 2013 "Education and family life in Corton in the late 1800s" by Society member Don Friston, whose family lived in the village during that time, and also into the next century.

23 Jan 2014 "Just Over the Border – some churches of south Norfolk" by Terry Weatherley, one of our regular speakers, who turns his attention northwards for this talk.

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 Column

I was contacted recently by William Robertson about the history of Oulton Village. Mr Robertson has been an Oulton Parish Councillor for the past 25 years and has created a website www.awalkaroundoulton.weebly.com which gives details of the village's history. If you have access to the internet it's worth a visit.

Society's Annual Winter meal: Your committee has negotiated a February 2014 date with Lowestoft College, and places are almost all taken. If you are too late, let us know if you would take any cancellation that may arise.

Just to remind all members that the talk by Don Friston on 28 November will be the last one for 2013. We meet again on 23 January, 2014, when Terry Weatherley will tell us about churches in South Norfolk.

Ron Ashman – Chairman

Recent talks and meetings

August 2013 – Medieval boat found buried alongside the River Chet

The following information was extracted from the Beccles & Bungay Journal:

Environmental Agency workers discovered a boat in the peaty soil while working on the River Chet floodbank near Loddon, in summer 2013. A digger driver spotted the timbers and work was suspended while archaeologists were called. On investigation, they declared the boat to be between 400 and 600 years old. "This is an extremely rare and important find, said Heather Wallis, an archaeologist working there, "no boats of this date have previously been found in Norfolk so this is a unique opportunity to record and recover a vessel of this date and type." The team worked for three weeks, finding it was a small boat about six metres in length that would probably have had a sail. It was skilfully assembled and because of its light frames and thin planking probably carried local produce such as butter, eggs, chickens and vegetables, to market. Wooden pegs, iron nails and copper alloy nails, as well as animal hair, plus tar for waterproofing, were used in its construction. The boat will be preserved by freeze-drying and, after detailed study and research at York or Peterborough, may eventually be placed on display in a Norfolk museum.

10 October 2013 – "Benjamin Britten and his time at Lowestoft" – by Chris Milton

Chris Milton is the Learning Officer at the Britten Pears Foundation and set up the exhibit about Britten's centenary on display in the Lowestoft Museum. The talk started with Chris playing four short extracts of Britten's music to show the diverse variety of compositions that he produced during his lifetime. He was a central figure of 20th century British classical music, with a range of works including opera, other vocal music, orchestral and chamber pieces. He also took a great interest in writing music for children and amateur performers, including works like Noye's Fludde, The Little Sweep, and Saint Nicholas, all hugely enjoyable to listen to, and included in a year-long event by fifty musical and arts groups under the Familiar Fields banner.

Conductor and pianist Benjamin Britten (full name Edward Benjamin Britten) was born on 22 November 1913 (on St Cecilia's Day, the patron saint of music) at 21 Kirkley Cliff Road, Lowestoft and christened at St John's church. His father, Robert Britten, was a dentist originally from Berkshire, who moved first to Ipswich, then Lowestoft. Chris said Robert Britten had his first practice in the town in Midland Road, but it was actually in Marine Parade, before moving to Kirkley Cliff. Benjamin was the youngest of four children, Barbara, Bobby (Robert), Beth (Elizabeth) & Ben. It was said that Robert had overstretched himself in moving to 21 Kirkley Cliff, but they still employed a cook, a nanny and a maid so they were not that badly off. Apparently the present owners of the house, now a hotel, still occasionally receive toothpaste samples. Benjamin's mother Edith (nee Hockey) was a talented amateur musician and was secretary of the Lowestoft Musical Society. She also helped in the canteen for the herring girls and encouraged her children to assist her there and generally to help others.

At the age of 5 Benjamin had his first music lessons from his mother. He then entered Southolme school run by the Astle family at 52 Kirkley Cliff Road, and began regular music lessons with the principal Miss Ethel Astle ARCM. When he was 7 these included the pianoforte. Three years later, as a day pupil at South Lodge Preparatory School, he began viola lessons with Audrey Alston of Norwich. At this school he became head boy and was active at sports, being captain of cricket. During his schooldays, Benjamin composed many pieces of music (140 in 1925 alone). In 1926 Benjamin passed the Associated Board Grade VIII (Final) pianoforte examinations with honours, under Miss Ethel Astle's tutelage. However, as his interest in sport increased his compositions declined. His father did not allow a gramophone in the house so Benjamin would visit the local Morlings shop to listen to his favourite music.

His mother took him to hear Frank Bridge the composer/violist/conductor at the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival in 1926. The following year he was introduced to Bridge who took him on as a pupil, where he began composition studies. In 1928 Benjamin moved to Gresham's School in Holt. Apparently he was not very happy there and did not get on with his music teacher. He even faked illness to avoid sports.

In 1930 he attended the Royal College of Music in London. Benjamin lived with his sister Beth in London, but he did not like it there and often came back to Lowestoft as he loved being near the sea. On his business cards he put Lowestoft as his address up until his father died in 1934, and at which time his mother moved to Frinton.

Britten's friend W.H. Auden influenced him with his left-wing ideals. They wrote many pieces of music together and in 1935 Auden got him a job writing music for the GPO film unit (a position he held until 1939). Together they worked on the documentary film 'Night Mail'. Chris showed a sequence from the latter. In 1937 there were two events that had a major effect on Benjamin's life. His mother died, and later in the year he met Peter Pears, who became his close friend. In April 1939 Britten and Pears sailed to Canada and then moved to New York. They had decided to leave England due to their pacifist beliefs in an increasingly war-like Europe. Although he was quite successful in the USA, Britten became homesick and in 1942 he returned home with Pears. When back in Britain, Britten and Pears both applied for recognition as conscientious objectors. Britten was initially allowed only non-combatant service in the military, but on appeal he gained unconditional exemption.

After the death of his mother in 1937 he had used money she bequeathed him to buy the Old Mill in Snape, which became his country home. He spent much of his time there in 1944 working on the opera Peter Grimes. Britten outgrew the mill, so in 1947 moved to a house on the seafront in Aldeburgh. Later he was to move to the Red House, which formed his final home with life-long companion Peter Pears, as it was much quieter to work there. 1948 saw the start of the Aldeburgh Festival, which was initially held in the church and local halls.

One of Britten's best-known works is the War Requiem that he wrote in 1962 for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral (the old cathedral having been destroyed during a wartime air raid). Britten's vision of a concert hall in Snape for the Festival was achieved in 1967, when HM the Queen came to open the converted maltings building that formed the initial stage in the development of the Snape venue. During the course of his life, Britten travelled to many countries in Europe and the Far East. He was influenced by many different music styles, in particular by the Russian composer Shostakovich, and musician Rostropovich, and his music performed by world-renowned musicians, including the Halle and BBC Symphony orchestras.

Britten stamp issued in 2013

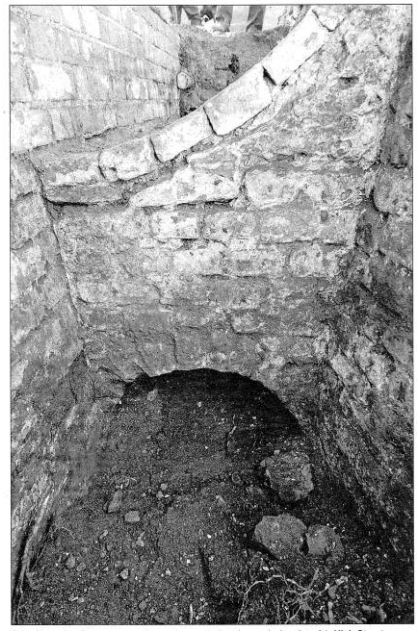
Britten at work *Photos copyright Archant Ltd*

In 1951 Britten was made a Freeman of Lowestoft and in 1976 he was granted a life peerage, when he became Baron Britten of Aldeburgh. He was the first musician to be granted a life peerage. Britten had heart surgery in 1973 and died on 4 December 1976. He is remembered not only for his music, but also through the Britten Pears Foundation (a charitable trust based at The Red House, Aldeburgh) and in a memorial window in Aldeburgh church. He also featured among nine 'Great Britons' in a new set of Royal Mail postage stamps in April 2013.

This year a new building has been constructed to house the Britten archives. Britten was a compulsive hoarder throughout his life and did not throw away any of his working papers – a great help for those recording his history. Part of The Red House has been put back as it was in 1965, and the studio where Britten worked has been recreated.

October 2013 – Further excavations at No. 1 High Street, by our members and friends

Full details of their recent findings at this dig will appear in future issues of the Newsletter.



From left: John Stannard, Ron Ashman, Paul Durbidge, Steve Lovewell and David Butcher – Right: some ancient brickwork

Photos copyright Archant Ltd

24 October 2013 – "A picture story of Margaret Catchpole" – by Pip Wright

Pip revisited the Society with a well-illustrated, lively presentation on this feisty Suffolk woman, whose adventures startled her 18th-century friends. Richard Cobbold, of the Ipswich brewing family, for whose mother she worked, published her story in 1845. Margaret Catchpole, the central character, was born in 1773, probably in Hoo, Suffolk, but as a child lived at Seven Hills near Nacton. More recent study of the original manuscript has led historians to question its accuracy of detail concerning her life in Australia. Pip gave the current interpretation to our members.

On leaving school, instead of going into service, Margaret stayed at home as carer for invalid sister Susan, while her mother worked at a nearby farm helping Mrs Denton, the farmer's wife. When Margaret arrived at the farm one day to collect a bowl of soup promised for her sister, she heard cries that Mrs Denton had collapsed and was dead. On examination, Margaret said, "She is not dead!" and made the woman more comfortable. She then took a farm horse and rode post-haste to alert Dr Stebbing in Ipswich. The doctor left for the farm immediately,

taking her in his gig, and finding the woman improved, praised Margaret, saying she should contact him again if ever she required help.

Later, Margaret went to a christening in place of her sister, and met Stephen Laud, a ferryman, and relative of the baby's parents. His son Will was also invited and quickly befriended Margaret. Sadly, although she knew this keen young sailor had been tempted into smuggling, she saw only the good in him despite the warnings from her invalid sister. A local boat owner then offered Will Laud command of a ship with John Luff as mate, and after the voyage Margaret was sent such rich gifts she knew them to be smuggled. The Revenue later confronted Laud who was shot but escaped – Margaret then nursed him back to health, unseen, over so long a period that he was assumed dead.

Margaret was now working in service at Pond Hall close by the River Orwell. She got on well and was courted by a young man named John Barry, whose brother, by coincidence, was the Revenue man responsible for Will's earlier wound. When John pressed her to marry him she became confused and revealed that she was promised to Laud who was still alive. The rejected Barry, refusing to believe Laud was alive, decided to seek a new life abroad and got his father to lend him money for the venture. At that time the fugitive Will Laud was subject to a deception by John Luff, who suggested Laud kidnap and take Margaret abroad by force to be married. In reality Luff intended to kill her, thus removing any chance of her reforming Laud's character. At the point on the estuary selected for the kidnap there was a confrontation, when by chance Laud's rival Barry appeared. The latter was severely wounded in the ensuing melee, while Laud and Luff escaped by boat, leaving Margaret to explain everything. In Laud's absence she nursed Barry, who when recovered asked again for her hand without success. He then made firm plans to emigrate.

Margaret lost her Pond Hall job and she began working for her uncle Leader at Brandiston. Will Laud reappeared at that point but would not quit smuggling, so they argued, and he went away again. After problems with Leader's new wife, Margaret returned to Ipswich and sought advice about work from her old friend Dr Stebbing. He advised her that the Cobbold family, with some 14 children, were seeking a second nursery-maid. John Cobbold was proprietor of the Cliff Brewery on the banks of the River Orwell. Dr Stebbing would write a recommendation to Mrs Stebbing for Margaret, but warned the latter she must never encourage Laud to make contact while she was in service there.

The job suited Margaret and she enjoyed a period of uninterrupted happiness, respected by her mistress, and family, and a favourite with her fellow servants. Mrs Cobbold felt she had a responsibility for all her staff and finding that her new nursery maid did not know her letters, offered to teach her and was rewarded by her rapid progress. The children were Margaret's life and she took pleasure in caring for them, even saving them from danger on occasion. One special event was when young William Cobbold took a boat to go duck shooting one wintry afternoon. His father raised the alarm when he had not returned for tea and search parties went out, Margaret included. They all searched along the shore and found the boat but not the boy. Not giving up they continued far down the river and at last Margaret saw a man in the shade of some trees who she recognised as Will Laud, and asked him for assistance. Not long after she spotted something near the water's edge and Laud crawled across to find the frozen youth up to his neck in mud with no signs of life. He lifted him to safety and with the help of some staff carried him towards the house. With the help of Dr Stebbing the boy regained consciousness and was saved, so great praise was heaped on Margaret, and Will Laud. After the rescue Will told Margaret he had become a sailor and, having taken the King's shilling, would be absolved of his previous crimes should he stay to complete three years service in the Navy.

Shortly after, the Cobbolds moved to an Ipswich mansion, with Margaret's life improving daily due to having more responsibility in the kitchens. In 1794, the news came through that Will Laud had distinguished himself in a Naval victory over the French and would bring home a share of a splendid prize. On the same day, Margaret heard a shriek in the garden and discovered Young Henry Cobbold had fallen into a deep pond when running from his sisters. Margaret grasped an overhanging branch and, swinging down into the water, grabbed the child with her other hand, holding him up until they were rescued by the coachman and gardener. She was then at the summit of her reputation with the family, but still worried and fretted over the long awaited return of her lover Will Laud.

As time passed, sailors would call with messages purporting to be from Will. Eventually Mrs Cobbold found them a nuisance and stopped the visits. Later a servant told Margaret a sailor was asking for her but she replied "Tell him to be off!" The sailor heard her shout, threw a bag into the kitchen, and left immediately. Margaret quickly realised her mistake and ran into the darkened street. Thinking a sailor standing opposite was Will Laud

she rushed over, only to discover it was the hated John Luff who asked her for the whereabouts of Laud, saying he wanted him dead or alive. She refused to answer so he dragged her away and contrived to throw her into a well, but luckily her screams were heard and she was saved. Mr Cobbold took charge of the bag (it was full of money) to keep it safe on her behalf.

She then asked her young brother to search locally for Laud, whom most local people assumed had gone back to smuggling. While searching, her brother Edward met up with a revenue man Edward Barry and heard that a trap had been laid to secure smugglers. The trap worked, and in the ensuing battle between revenue and smugglers Luff was shot and later died, but Laud was not present on that occasion. Margaret had by this time lost her place with the Cobbold family and returned to work for her uncle Leader, the difficulties with his wife having been resolved.

Much later, amid rumours that Will Laud was involved again with smuggling, Margaret received a number of false messages as to his whereabouts. Finally she received a more reliable note that he was in London, and decided to follow him there. She needed to steal a horse for the journey from her previous employer Mr Cobbold, and would dress as a hostler to avoid being recognised. The journey, with only one stop, took over 8 hours, leaving her and the horse exhausted. Mr Cobbold issued reward posters for the arrest of a "Boy thief". One of these reached London, so Margaret was caught trying to sell the horse and returned to prison in Ipswich. Horse stealing then carried a hanging sentence, but the Judge remitted it to Transportation for seven years in Margaret's case.

Three years later Margaret was still in Ipswich prison, a popular and well-liked inmate, carrying out many useful tasks without fuss. At some stage she discovered Will Laud in an adjoining yard for debtors – they met and made up a joint plan of escape, for which she secretly made herself a sailor suit. The attempt was successful and they headed towards Woodbridge on foot. This time Mr Ripshaw the gaoler had offered a reward of fifty pounds for her capture. The fleeing couple were seen, and after a fierce chase were challenged on the foreshore, Will Laud being killed in an exchange of gunfire with Edward Barry, and poor Margaret returned to prison. The sentence delivered at her second trial also required a hanging but once again, this time due to her excellent answers in conversation with the Judge, the given sentence was altered to Transportation, but this time for life. The system allowed no delay and Margaret was soon on her way to Botany Bay. Over the years a number of letters passed between Margaret, who ended up living in Hawkesbury, near Sydney, and her previous friends and employers. It seems she had worked hard and prospered in Australia, and sent occasional gifts to those at home. When she died aged 57, in 1819, she was a well-respected member of her community, even having streets named after her.

The Half-hundred of Mutford – *Domesday Analysis and Medieval Exploration* – by David Butcher

ISBN 1-904413-33-1 – 138 pages in A4 size – retail price £10.

This publication is available from the Lowestoft Heritage Workshop Centre (Old Schoolhouse, Wilde's Score, and 71 High Street) and also the North Suffolk Record Office, Central Library, Clapham Road, Lowestoft.

Annual Report: Ray Collins still has copies of the 2013 Annual Report for sale to members at just £2.00.

Society's Annual Report for January 2014: Please provide any items you have prepared for this in writing to Ray Collins at our meetings or, if by email, send to, ray93@talktalk.net (preferably Word document) before our last meeting in 2013.
Ray is also your contact regarding the Winter Meal bookings.

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

BRITAIN AND THE SEA – the David Dimbleby Series on BBC1 – starting Sunday 17 November at 9pm

This series should include the visit, earlier this year, on which the Team came to film the Lowestoft Porcelain collection at Broad House Museum.

David Dimbleby views our Lowestoft Porcelain with Mike Chester