

Society News

The Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society
Newsletter

March 2025

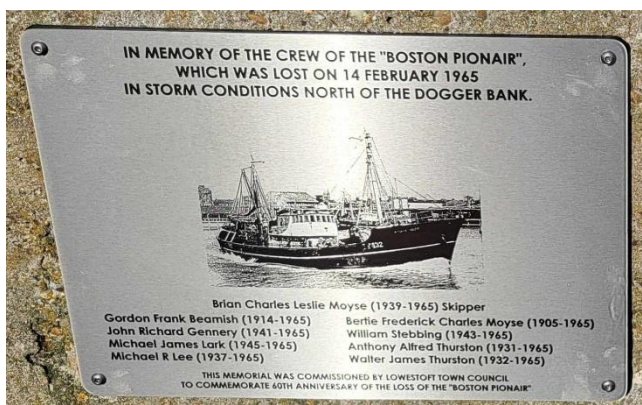
Editors:- Ron and Irene Ashman



Boston Pionair Memorial Plaque Unveiling By Richard Mundy

On 6th February 2025 I ventured down the South Pier at 1:30pm to represent the society in attending a plaque unveiling to honour the nine crew members who were pronounced 'lost at sea' on the Boston Pionair 60 years ago.

As you can see from the pictures the short ceremony was well attended and included a few words from the current Lowestoft Mayor and contributions from Lowestoft fisherman Keith Mayall (whose fishing job, in the early 1960's, was on the Boston Pionair) and representatives from the Fisherman's Mission.



The plaque was commissioned by Lowestoft Town Council and names all nine crew who lost their lives when the vessel was lost at sea in February 1965. It is the latest in a series of plaques commissioned by the Town Council to remember some of the tragedies encountered throughout Lowestoft's maritime heritage.

Recycling Bins

Having read in the Lowestoft Journal about the proposed issue from East Suffolk Council of another green wheeled bin as part of a "Twin-Stream" dry recycling collection system, it got us thinking of how different it was in the 1960's. and 1970's.

There was only one bin for waste collection which would most probably have been a galvanised bin with a capacity of about half that of a black wheeled bin as used today. The galvanised bin had a lid and if it was blown off on a windy night it made a lot of noise.

The dustbin was often kept at the back of the house and the Dustbin men came once a week to collect it, then they carried it on their back and emptied it into the dustcart. When they came round at Christmas they would stop at the back door to wish the occupant a Merry Christmas and hope to receive a Christmas tip.

Milk was delivered in glass bottles that were collected and returned to the dairy by the milkman to be cleaned and refilled. Drinks bottles were also made of glass and when purchased a deposit was paid of, we believe 3d (old pence). The deposit was returned when the bottle was taken back to the shop. We believe a similar charge was applied to beer bottles. For those who serviced their own cars, engine oil was sold in 1 gallon metal cans or in one pint glass bottles.

Vegetables and fruit were bought loose, (no plastic bags), after weighing out they would be put into brown paper bags, with items such as potatoes going into an old shopping bag that was kept for this purpose. These items were bought from a corner shop, a Greengrocers, at the stalls on the Triangle Market (much of the produce was grown on local Market Gardens) or grown in peoples garden or allotment. Clean white or brown paper bags were kept for various uses.

Drinking water came from a tap, not in a plastic single use bottle.

Some people saved newspapers which were given to a collector who when they had a reasonable amount would take these most probably to a recycling yard in Victoria Road, with the money raised being given to the Scouts or another charity. Newspapers were also recycled by being used to wrap fish and chips, or scrunched up under kindling in the fireplace to light the fire.

Most people had coal fires for heating which also provided a means to dispose of some burnable items such as shoes, but doing this sometimes resulted in the chimney catching fire. (Ron's mother burnt his father's football boots after he received a nasty leg injury during one game, however, he was not pleased).

Instead of taking old clothes to Charity Shops these would be mended at home by the lady of the house and when not fit to wear were torn up and used as cleaning rags.

Suffolk Family History Society: Lowestoft Branch 50th Anniversary By Richard Mundy

On 22nd January 2025 Janis Kirby (A valued member of our Society) invited me to The Victoria Hotel on Lowestoft's seafront for a celebration event to mark, to the day, the formation of SFHS: Lowestoft Branch, of which Janis is the chair. I was attending to represent LA&LHS.

The event began with a presentation by Joe Thompson, who used his digital technology to illustrate Lowestoft's history.

Then one of the founding members, Trevor Gower, who joined as a teenager in 1975, shared his memories of the society's early days. He also paid tribute to individuals who were crucial in forming the society, including Katherine Bardwell and Hugh Lees.

The audience then heard from local historian, David Butcher. Mr Butcher shared his first journey to Lowestoft from Bungay in the 1960's. He had just finished university and his reason for visiting Lowestoft was to go to his interview for a teaching post at Harris Girls school (for which of course he was successful) He told us a funny story about quickly visiting a barber, before his interview, as he had become a bit of a beatnik and

required a haircut before the interview! He also explained his deep connection with the town, and his passion for Lowestoft Parish Registers, Manorial Records, and Probate Material.

The afternoon concluded with the cutting of a 50th-anniversary cake by the society's patron, Doug Howlett. I must admit during the whole event I was making mental notes of what Janis had put together, as in 2026 our society celebrates its 60th anniversary and we have plenty of great plans. I will check if Mr Butcher is available!

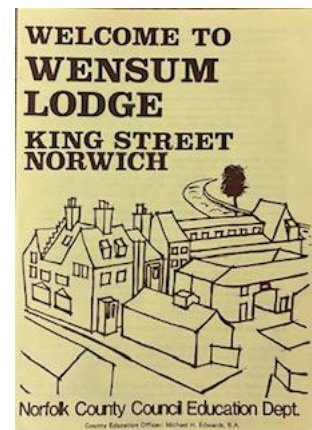
The Lowestoft group of the Suffolk Family History Society meets at 7pm on the first Tuesday of each month in St Margaret's Church Hall, Hollingsworth Road. I have attended many of their talks, as a visitor, I find them a lovely group, and you even get a tea and a biscuit.



What next for Wensum Lodge – Norwich and Norfolk's former historic Adult Learning Centre?

by Dr Susan Steward

In February 2024, six weeks after Wensum Lodge - Norfolk Adult Education's base and key learning centre - had closed its doors to adults learners for the last time, I took a series of not-very-good photos that would help me (and others) remember why this adult learning centre had been so special. This short report makes use of these photos and combines them with subsequent research carried out in the Norfolk Record Office and Heritage Centre, and with memories from learners and their tutors over the years so as to piece together this brief '*history of Wensum Lodge as an Adult Learning centre*'.



The Wensum Lodge site in King Street Norwich was well-known to me (as I had lived in the same street, used its undercroft bar for community events, studied briefly there in the past and been a tutor in the 2010s) but even I struggled to understand how the complex of buildings with their different histories, owners and previous uses made up the 'whole' that had been Wensum Lodge.

I had entered the empty site through an open entrance owned by the Wensum Sports Centre – a modernist block that had been home to the Lodge's well-used squash and badminton courts since the late 1960s. This entity was very much still 'open for business' and 'not for sale' as it was no longer part of the adult learning centre having been leased by a group of volunteers some 15 years earlier as the County Council had (reportedly) not wanted to fix the roof.

As I wandered round the empty site signs pointed me to classrooms, workshops and reception areas found in the four main buildings that had been Wensum Lodge the adult learning centre: the Stable Block, the Maltings, the Tuns, and the Art and Craft Block (previously storerooms by the river). These names clearly

indicated what the functions of these buildings had been during the period before Wensum Lodge – when the Crown Brewery owned the site (from 1807 until 1958) and when dray horses, barrels of beer, and malt barley could be found there rather than teachers, students and computers. These buildings housed classrooms named in honour of those who had previously conceived of and then developed the site into a thriving and busy adult education centre – Lincoln Ralphs, Chief Education Officer in the 1960s who realised his vision for a hostel for county further education students, the Davis's (Ken and Brenda) the first Wardens appointed to look after the young people lodging there and who saw the potential of the site for other education and learning groups to use during the day, Michael Edwards who took over as Education Officer and oversaw the running of the Lodge during its most successful decades, Chris Barringer who led the King Street History Group and who managed classes for the Cambridge University Board of Extra Mural Studies (latterly The Centre for Continuing Education at UEA); as well as other names of people whose roles I have yet to uncover.

There is currently a glossy brochure for the site detailing that these four substantial buildings are up 'for sale' by Norfolk County Council because, despite their rich history and heritage as part of the brewery site, they are not listed and so can be repurposed, redeveloped or even demolished by new owners with different visions. But the glossy brochure fails to mention the other buildings that are integral to the Wensum Lodge site (not owned by the County Council and so not for sale) and these are the previously mentioned Sports Centre and the very famous Music House that is, amongst other noteworthy facts, a Grade 1 Listed Building, one of the '*Norwich 12*' that designates '*buildings of historical importance in the city spanning 1000 years*' and a site of significance for the Jewish community nationally; its outside plaque claims it to be '*the oldest dwelling house in Norwich*' and other records note that it was the '*meeting place of the City Waits [musicians] which were established in the reign of Elizabeth*'. In the 20th Century the upper rooms of the Music House were leased by the Brewery to cultural organisations such as *The Norwich Players* and *The Music House Guild* and, in the 1960s when Wensum Lodge came into being as an adult learning centre, to the *International Club* – an organisation supporting cultural activities for young students from abroad. But of most significance, as it was brought back into life in 1980s was *Jurnet's Bar and Club* a functioning bar and one-time food venue run by a volunteer management group that provided food and refreshment to students on break from their classes, a place for local groups needing a meeting venue, a host for music nights featuring local and emerging artists and a venue that could be hired for special events like a wedding or other party by anyone living roundabout. The Music House was acquired by the Norwich Corporation in the early 1960s and to this day remains in the hands of Norwich City Council (who, up until 2024, had leased it to the county for activities to do with Wensum Lodge) and are now looking for a community group or other entity to take it on to preserve its heritage (the fate of the bar has only recently been vacated is unknown). It is *The Music House*, in particular, that makes selling, developing, preserving or even managing any of the other buildings on the Wensum Lodge site a headache for anyone trying; it also means that any change of use or rebuilding for those buildings currently on sale is not a straightforward proposition (even services such as water and electricity are still linked).

But what is the relevance of this Norwich site, even though archaeologically, architecturally and historically interesting, to Lowestoft's people and life? As said earlier, I am an example of a newcomer to the town who has brought their experiences and passion for Wensum Lodge with them. In the course of doing this research I have found others who have relocated from Norwich to our most easterly seaside town and who carry on their art work here, who have set up a ceramics business here and who carry on working for community empowerment and change – all were involved in Wensum Lodge (although on different courses and during different time periods). But also I have met Lowestoft people who have made use of the Lodge during its six decade history, some travelling the 30 miles to Norwich every week over a number of years; these include someone who attended a 'youth weekend' at the tender age of 14 in the late 1960s, someone who finished her Open University degree there and then decades later returned to Continuing Education that gave her the confidence to undertake a university masters elsewhere, and an artist who returned to life-drawing under the tutelage of *Norwich 20* artists and rediscovered her dormant passion.

So what now - not only for Wensum Lodge but also for adult education and learning in Norfolk and Suffolk as a whole? For us in Lowestoft Wensum Lodge might have been a long commute but at least it was there and it was affordable and accessible. How do people today learn new skills, particularly arts and crafts that they have never studied before? how do they pick up learning again? how do they revisit previous passions learnt at universities and colleges elsewhere? how do we even research our own local history with no structured course to guide us? While there was a large campaign to *Save Wensum Lodge* that ultimately failed there is an even more urgent need to document what was there, to record how extraordinary it was and to reflect on what we have lost now that it is gone.

If you have any memories of Wensum Lodge that you would like to share then please get in touch so these can be recorded for the future; Wensum Lodge will not come back in its previous form but a version of it might if we can learn from the past and how it impacted on so many people during the last 60 years.

Editors note:- If you have any information for Susan please send this to email lahs@btinternet.com. or contact the editors at a Society meeting and we will pass these onto Susan.



The Three Tuns



The Music House



The Maltings



The Courtyard



The Arts and Craft building



The alley between buildings



The building by the gate

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 lahs@btinternet.com.