



# BAHS Newsletter

Number 16

December 2003



## Old Trees at Bayfield

**O**n a beautiful autumn day John White guided Roger Combe and 16 other members around some of the more remarkable, and old, trees on the Bayfield estate. We started with a large beech tree in the middle of the park (see photo) which was a full 22 feet in circumference, yet dated from "only" 1741. We didn't linger as JW thinks its days are strictly limited and collapse is imminent!

Looking across the estate it was possible to see planting from different periods, right back to the establishment of the park in Elizabethan times. Nearby there is a remnant of semi-ancient woodland. In there is the well-known "Bayfield Oak" the biggest of several oaks that date back some 650 years to the time of the Black Death. The Bayfield Oak itself must have been in a prime position as it easily the largest of the group – or was until one half of the bifurcated trunk collapsed a few years ago. Since then it has been lopped and topped to

reduce the strain on the remainder of the trunk.

Large oaks host large numbers of invertebrates and recent policy has been to leave fallen timber to moulder away to the great benefit of countless species.

JW pointed out that there are only 34 species of tree that can be considered as "native" to Britain: the ones that colonised this land between the retreat of the ice sheets and the destruction of the landbridge to continental Europe. One of the pioneer species is Rowan, a particularly fine old specimen of which used to grow in Hull Wood. Elms, however, are definitely *not* native but are in fact clones of a single tree – hence their tragic susceptibility to disease.

Attempts at dating can be frustrated by practices such as coppicing: there may be only young shoots visible but they are growing from roots that could be a thousand years or more old.

A fascinating tour (my notebook was bulging) in the company of perhaps the foremost dendrologist in the country. If you want to know more, buy the book (review on p.4).

# Decline of the Glaven Ports

*Report on a BAHS lecture given by  
Jonathan Hooton (25 xi 03)*

Such is Jonathan's reputation that the Chapel was full before the start of his lecture and at least a dozen people had to be turned away. His talk covered the latter half of the 1800s when the Glaven ports were reaching the end of their long trading history. The main reasons for their decline are well-known: the silting of the estuary, new ships too big to enter the harbour, and the ability of railways to move goods more cheaply and quickly. But how much is really known about the process of decline? What decisions were the local merchants making?

Many records are available for the 19th century but they are neither systematic nor comprehensive; they were designed for the needs of the day – not for future historians. The records are scattered, and some have gone abroad, but in the Norfolk Record Office can be seen the most important ones: the local shipping registers for 1867-1930. As always, the source should be approached with caution: what information does it contain – and what does it not contain? Where might additional information be found?

The registers describe in some detail the vessels registered each year, their owners and masters, and the reason why any vessel came off the register. Until 1853 boats belonging to Blakeney and Cley were registered separately from those at Wells, but in that year the Cley Customs House was closed and the Blakeney/Cley boats were registered at Wells. In 1881 the Wells area was transferred to Lynn, so for Blakeney and Cley information is easily available only from 1867 to 1880. In this period the numbers of vessels on the Blakeney/Cley/Wells register fell from c.135 to c.60, largely because vessels leaving the register were not replaced by others. This loss was paralleled by a steady decline in tonnage from c.10,000 to c.4,000.

Jonathan had looked at the fate of vessels of over 15 tons which had been on the register in 1867. About 40% were lost, 20% were broken up and as many were converted to lighters, and 10% were sold out of the area. He had also worked out how long each had been in service: 10-20 years was the norm but some had worked for more than 50 years. The *Minstrel* was afloat from 1847 to 1904, and the *Hopewell* of Wells lasted 54 years. The *Bluejacket*, built at Walsoken in 1860, was converted to a houseboat in 1911 and broke up on Morston marshes in the 1930s. The oldest of all was the *Squirrel* which came to Cley in 1780 and was still going strong in 1875 when sold out of the area.

Records kept in the House of Lords library suggest that total tonnage increased from 1841 to 1860, so this may well have been the peak year (there were more boats in 1841 but they were smaller). Classification is difficult because a few

large ships owned locally didn't use the local ports at all. The largest was probably the *Agamemnon*, 869 tons and 48 crew, wrecked in 1872 at Cape Town. The largest boats which could use Blakeney harbour were in the 100-150 ton range.

Another source of information is the Blakeney Harbour Account Book for 1859-1882 recording payments made for boats using the New Cut to reach Blakeney Quay. This shows that 12 boats regularly used Blakeney harbour; of these 3 were broken up, 2 were lost (including the *John Lee* in 1897) and 1 wrecked. Of the remainder, 1 was transferred, 1 was converted to a lighter (*Bluejacket*), and the fate of the other 4 had not been discovered. Another 16 boats were regular visitors after the period of the Account Book. These included the *Sir John Colomb*, a herring drifter from Yarmouth which was wrecked on Blakeney Point, repaired in Blakeney and used by Page & Turner (Sam Breese was the mate). They also owned the *Fiducia*, an ex-trawler. The first steam tug was the *Premier*, owned by Randle Brereton in 1841, and the *Economy* was a steam tug here in 1848. The *Comet*, registered in Newcastle, replaced the paddle tug *Patriot* in c.1890.

Other records are now in Newfoundland, and Jonathan had used them to discover more about individual people; Francis Plumb, for example, sailed on various boats and was master of the *Ann* before buying his own fishing vessel. William Mann's account book shows that he sailed on 15 ships, including his own which he allowed to be broken up rather than conform to the 'Plimsole line' regulations. Further information could be obtained from photographs, and from paintings and models.

Wrecks tended to be well documented, and Jonathan mentioned one example – the *Alert* of Blakeney, a 198 ton brig registered in 1860, with a crew of 9. It was sold to Dartmouth in 1880, but was wrecked the following year at Cley after the crew had been taken off by the *Sheringham* lifeboat.

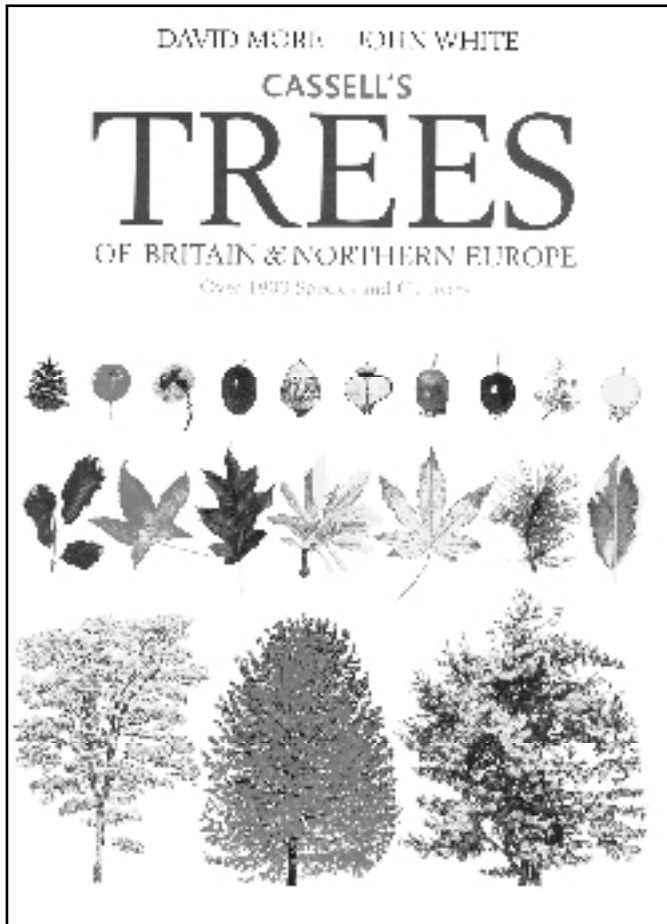
Many boats had more than one owner, especially the larger ones, which provided investment opportunities not easily available elsewhere. Most owners had some kind of maritime connection, although this was less true of Cley than Blakeney or Wells. Jonathan said that according to Catling, 14 local vessels were insured not with Lloyds but with the Blakeney and Weybourne Insurance Association.

In summing up, Jonathan referred to his course in February (details in this Newsletter). A microfilm copy of the shipping registers would be placed in the History Centre before then and it would be helpful if a common format could be used for recording information about ships and their trading activities. The course is intended not only to help participants find their way around information sources but to help build up a bank of information about 19th century shipping.

*John Wright*

*(Reports continued on p.4)*

## Book Review



**Cassell's trees of Britain and Northern Europe**, by David More and John White. London, Cassell, 2003. 800pp. ISBN 0 304 36192 5. £50.00.

A substantial volume with splendid colour illustrations on every page covering over 1800 species and cultivars. We are told that it began as a personal project of David More, well known as a botanical illustrator, to paint "in detail as many tree species, varieties and cultivars as he could find in the British Isles and Ireland ... the private work of an artist obsessed by trees". Emphasis was on painting a portrait of specific existing trees, rather than producing an idealized representation of the species. After several years an offer came to publish the paintings and John White, recently retired as Research Dendrologist with the Forestry Commission, became involved with the project in order to provide accompanying texts, usually of some 200/300 words, for each tree illustrated. The text emphasizes each tree's distinct characteristics of form, growth, history and points of general interest.

The paintings are handsomely reproduced on a 260 x 180 mm page size. For each species there is normally a picture of the tree in leaf, together with detailed paintings of leaves, buds, flowers and cones, bark and sometimes for deciduous trees of the bare tree in winter. The addition of human figures or birds and mammals on some plates helps to add scale. Particularly notable is the inclusion

of illustrations of so many varieties and cultivars (some 30 for example for the Common Yew).

Although not implicit in the title or mentioned in the dust jacket blurb, the text places emphasis on the tree as a garden plant. The introduction discusses criteria for choosing trees to plant, and actual methods of planting, and has a list of "Trees for problem sites [e.g. very wet ground] or special needs [e.g. for interesting bark]". Each entry carries a series of codes which indicate the size a tree will grow to, its hardiness, or cold tolerance, the quality of its wood for timber, and its overall "garden value" with four categories: excellent, good, of lesser garden merit, and not recommended. One reviewer sees the work "becoming the first resort of salesmen in garden centres and tree nurseries" (*The garden*, 128, 2003, 566) but many will turn to it simply for the richness and variety of the illustrations. It is not intended to be used for identification purposes, nor indeed does its bulk make it suitable for this. It will need to be accompanied by some of the many specific field guides which exist, two excellent examples being written by one of John White's predecessors as Research Dendrologist, Alan Mitchell: *Collins field guide to trees of Britain and Northern Europe* (London, Collins, 1986) and *The trees of Britain and Europe* (London Collins, 1988). Identifying a species from one of these and then scanning the more detailed coverage of the More and White volume at leisure offers a very rewarding combination.

*John McIlwaine*

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## Aspects of Norfolk

*Report on a lecture by Cliff Crawley (28 x 03)*

Pam Peake introduced Cliff Crawley and promised us interest and chuckles. She didn't prepare us for the range of subjects covered by his lovely slides which ranged from fantasy to history.

The former included Old Shuck and tunnels everywhere, while the latter took us from the buried sailors in Happisborough who were wrecked on their way to join Nelson before the battle of Copenhagen via memories of both World Wars to Cindy Buxton's flag in the Langham Bluebell which was flown at the start of the Falklands conflict.

As was fitting for such an evening we started at midsummer dawn at Morston and ended with some beautiful sunsets.

*Frank Hawes*

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# Spring/Summer Programme 2004

There will be a modest charge of £1 for members attending the meetings whilst all non-members, that is guests and visitors alike, will be charged £2. There will be no additional charge for Refreshments.

## Lectures

All meetings (unless otherwise stated) are held on Tuesdays in the Methodist Chapel, High Street, Blakeney, and start at 7.30pm.

- January 27    **The Archive Centre**  
*Dr John Alban*  
The new Norfolk Records Office
- February 24    **Rabbits Galore! The warrens of Breckland**  
*Anne Mason*
- March 30    **5000 years on Blakeney Eye**  
*Chris Birks*  
Report on the NAU dig undertaken late last summer
- April 27    **The Port of Lynn and North Norfolk Harbours 1500-1900**  
*Dr Paul Richards*  
Renowned expert on the port of King's Lynn
- May 11    **St Mary, at Houghton-on-the-Hill**  
*Afternoon visit led by Bob Davey*
- Saturday  
July 24    **Annual Summer Lecture: Historically Speaking**  
*Keith Skipper*  
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(£3 admission for all to this event)
- Sept 14    **Annual General Meeting**  
*followed by lecture*  
*(subject/lecturer TBA)*

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## Subscriptions

Have you renewed your subscription yet? The membership year begins on the 1st July and only fully paid-up members are eligible to vote at the Annual General Meeting. Subscription rates for this year are :

Family                    £14  
Individual                £10

Please send remittance to the Treasurer:  
Anne Maw, 2 Wiveton Road, Blakeney.

## History Centre News

The Open Days in the summer period proved very successful with many photographs and postcards being made available for the Centre to copy and add to the collections. Particularly notable were the photographs of Cley in the early 1900s and those of Morston which were more recent. There were also many enquiries from home owners starting to trace the history of their properties.

The short course on Parish Councils proved an interesting way to look at a hundred years of local history (see Report below) in Blakeney and Gresham as seen through the pages of the the Council Minute books. The next course on offer will be:

**Researching Glaven Shipping** with *Jonathan Hooton*. Six weeks starting 25 February 2004. 7.30pm to 9.30pm. Cost to members £17.50. More details from 01263 740388. This is a practical course on ship research, ship owners and mariners, and will explore the range of sources available and how to use them.

During the coming year we will continue with the Open Day and also introduce some Family History topics into the programme. Meanwhile the Tuesday morning opening continue to be popular and we look forward to seeing you there when the Centre reopens on 3 February 2004.

A selection of photographs from the archives held in the History Centre were used in the Glaven Caring Committee calendar for 2004. Hope you have seen it – and purchased your own copy.

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## History Centre Course

*conducted by Peter Wordingham*

"Parish Councils – a hundred years of success" was considered to be a fair statement following the review of the records of two very different communities, Blakeney and Gresham Parish Council Minute Books from 1894.

Subject matter touched on included: Overseers of the Parish, the first Councillors, Poor Law, Workhouses, Parish Awards, Surveyors and Highways, Poor Rates and Property taxes, Charities, Housing, Sewerage, the First and Second World War periods, and the effects of the Welfare State.

Little doubt exists that the Parish Councils provided the essential linkage to the District and Council councils in a system of government born in the heyday of the Victorian industrial revolution and has lasted almost unchanged to the present day; a very different world a century later in 1994, but much the same matters were being dealt with again and again by successive parish councils working within the framework of the 1894 Local Government Act