

BAHS Newsletter

Number 10

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For this issue at least there is a new backside warming the Editorial chair – here's hoping I don't make too much of a hash of it all. I will try to keep the formula very much as usual: reports of recent events/meetings that you may have missed, and trailers for those coming up soon which you would be unwise to miss, plus a sneak preview of the proposed BAHS archive and reading room to be incorporated into the village hall extension.

Recent Meetings

David Durst: Industrial Archaeology in North Norfolk (31 October)

Norfolk, largely bypassed by the Industrial Revolution, is not awash with industrial archaeology but there are remains on some of the big estates where self-sufficiency was once much more important than now and where survival of the remains has been better than elsewhere.

Gunton Hall. A landscape built to impress: a 4 mile circuit to the front door – which could actually be done in half a mile – lake, deer park etc. When the estate was sold in the 1970s the old **sawmill** was leased to the Norfolk Windmill Trust who renovated it (extensively) in the 1980s. The mill is worked by two water wheels with cranks giving an up/down motion appropriate for a pitsaw – built in the 1820s it is now the only one of its type still working in Britain. Account books (now in NRO) start from 1829.

It survived an attempted attack by machine breakers trying to save sawyers' jobs, but fell out of use after WWI when the necessary expertise was lost and it became cheaper to import wood. It is now known that the mill was built by a man called Haze, a local ironfounder who fell out with Lord Suffield over a proposed new quay at Overstrand, and whose name was subsequently expunged from the estate records.

Most buildings could once be built from local materials: brick and tile from local kilns, flint and wood, also lime and ironmongery, could be found locally.

A **Brick kiln** at **Blickling** was only rediscovered in the 1970s – it still had evidence of the last firing. Brick making was a fairly standard process – clay was dug and left to weather, then put into a washpit to get rid of stones, and especially chalk which could explode during the firing. The slurry went via settling tanks to the horse operated pug-mill for mixing, and thence to the moulding table where the clay was rammed into wooden moulds. The raw bricks were then taken to the open-sided drying sheds [which existed recently and perhaps still do at Holkham]. Firing the kiln was usually an 8-day operation to allow for gradual heating, firing and then cooling. A firing made in the order of 20,000 bricks at a time.

Lime burning. In the matter of kiln shape Norfolk "done different" from elsewhere: a doughnut shaped chamber around a central column with hearths in it through which the lime descended as the chalk and fuel was burned. Lime was then raked out onto the floor of the doughnut – an almost continuous (and extremely unhealthy) process. Lime was needed for mortar and plaster, and also for soil improvement. It needs to be "slaked" before use: adding water produces heat and fumes, and to the resultant slurry is added sand for plaster, and coarse sand for mortar. Lime mortar is flexible, lets moisture in and out, and walls can be built without founda-

tions; it is generally preferable to cement which is hard, will crack, and must have proper underpinnings. Modern bricklayers generally don't have the skills to use lime mortar, though as its importance in the conservation of old buildings comes to be appreciated, more are acquiring these skills, thankfully.

There were then brief mentions (time was rapidly running out) of the maltings, hydraulic rams, and corn mill (now back in action) at **Letheringsett**, and Cubitt's patent device for controlling windmill sails according to both the direction and strength of the wind. JW

David White: The Woodland of Holt Lowes Country Park (AGM 2000).

Woods are often older than the oldest tree – Links Wood at Cromer has virtually the same appearance now as it had in a late 18th century painting. Former woodland management practice can also sometimes be seen in old woods.

Woodland in the Holt Lowes started (as it did elsewhere) c10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age. Lime became the commonest tree, with oak and hazel not far behind, and there developed the "wildwood" – until much of it was felled by Neolithic people around 4-5,000 BC. The glacial soils hereabouts were relatively easy to work and were used to such an extent that they became impoverished and heathland began to develop. Grazing by animals then removed tree seedlings and so the heathland habitat persisted.

The Enclosure Act of 1807 defined 49 acres of Holt Lowes as common for some 140 "poor householders". This area of heathland survived while the rest was put to a variety of uses – much of it went back to woodland.

Yet there survive some fairly old trees which show evidence of coppicing, a sustainable method of providing small diameter timber every year if properly managed – hence the importance of maintaining internal divisions within the woodland to assist the rotation of coppicing.

Some woodland plants do not colonise new woods very quickly and so can be used as indicator species for the existence of old woodland. On the evidence of such plants, soil structure and earth banks of assorted dates, Holt Wood certainly appears to be "ancient" (meaning medieval rather than "wildwood" survival). Soil structure on bracken-dominated older common land is different from bramble-dominated former farmland.

Horse races were held at Holt in the C18th, probably in the form of a country fair at which an approximately two mile long circuit was laid out for the purpose. Associated activities included the sport of *Yarking*. DW will give a (small) prize to anyone who can tell him, on good authority, what this entailed. Keith Skipper's Norfolk-English Dictionary is silent on the matter.

The first conifers were planted in the 1950s by the then owner after clear-felling all other timber. The policy now is to gradually reduce conifers (and rhododendrons) in favour of native deciduous woodland. However, grey squirrels arrived in 1970 (and had completely ousted the reds by 1975) and these "tree rats" prevent natural hazel regeneration by eating all the nuts before they can ripen and germinate. The increased number of people using the park has also reduced the number of orchids growing there.

Holt Lodge is still a private estate following a sale in c1820. JW

Peter Carnell: Wiveton Project (28 November)

Peter had planned, and produced some beautiful transparencies for, a lecture based on the use of an overhead projector, but unfortunately the bulb and the spare both blew leaving Peter to fill an hour without any of his intended visual material. In the event we hardly noticed as he attempted to pull together the various strands of the Wiveton project, adding in particular some further interpretations of the resistivity survey.

Peter reminded us that the project aimed to tackle wide-ranging questions about the development of Wiveton – what had the medieval village looked like and how come we have the present landscape? The archaeological bones could also be fleshed out by reference to the

illustrations of daily life in medieval times which appear in, for example, the Luttrell Psalter.

There followed a resume of some of the main settlement features. For many centuries, for example, there was a **windmill** but not always on the same site. The 1586 map shows one, to the south of the site shown on Faden's map, which could be that sold by Roger de Hales in 1349. The present **bridge**, a very old one, once had two arches, and until the 1600s there was another bridge across a second river channel on the opposite side of the Glaven valley. This was a wooden bridge on stone piers with multiple arches, and is probably the one shown on the charts prepared by Collins – Peter's justification for this is that the stone bridge would not have been visible from the sea. When the wooden bridge was taken down was it just co-incidence that Eson's bridge was built at Cley immediately afterwards – or was it the one cannibalised to make the other?

The stone bridge is not easy to cross even now because of the angled approach and it seems very likely that the original access was through the former manor site (probably Braunche's) that lay immediately to the south of the present green. The bridge would have had a tollgate or chapel – much the same thing in practice. It is common hereabouts to find churches on knolls, which might have been the case at Wiveton. Architectural evidence suggests that the tower is older than the nave, and it is likely that the nave and chancel (and churchyard) have been extended eastwards – hence the need to erect a retaining wall at the edge of the river valley.

Metal detecting in Wiveton has produced many **coins** – at least 360 – well distributed in date but with concentrations around 1200, 1300 and 1600-50. Other finds, tokens and ampules, suggest that there was pilgrim traffic here, going to and from Walsingham, and no doubt Binham as well.

The resistivity survey in the area north of the church has shown evidence for a cottage, one of several that once existed in the vicinity. Other results are more open to interpretation but they could suggest a manor site, complete with a ship yard, or at least a landing site, just nearby (the Glaven would have been used by fishing boats from earliest times). A roadway seems to go south towards the east end of the church – was there once an access that way to the bridge? Over the whole site can be seen striations which could indicate the direction of ploughing.

Peter's final point was to re-emphasise the importance of connecting up *all* the evidence – documenting individual facets would not tell the whole story. JW

The UEA Course

This year's UEA Extra-Mural course, on the development of the English Parish Church, finished on the 4th December. In masterly style, the tutor, Gerald Randall, compressed a thousand years of church building and furnishing into a coherent and well-illustrated summary – and all in just eight lectures. There was also an outing to three local churches to see in the field what had been described in the schoolroom. His depth of knowledge and lecturing style were much appreciated and all who attended learnt something worthwhile. As always, the Committee had fingers crossed that there would be enough people to enable the course to begin. We need not have worried: the fifteen "locals" were joined by ten more from places as far afield as Scratby and Spalding! The UEA will soon be planning next year's courses, so if you have any ideas about the course you would like to see in Blakeney next autumn please tell Anne Maw. JW

Accounts

As the matter of last year's Accounts seems to be causing a certain amount of misunderstanding let me state here and now that the Accounts presented at the AGM have been duly audited by an outside auditor and *were, and remain, correct*. Any misunderstandings that may have arisen have been resolved. We regret any embarrassment caused to Peter Wordingham. RK

Proposed Archive Reading Room

Blakeney Parish Council on behalf of Blakeney Players has applied for planning consent for an extension to the Village Hall, Langham Road, Blakeney. Part of this extension will be a "Historical Society" room approximately 25 square metres in area plus toilet facilities. The room will be accessed from the car park at the eastern end of the village hall and will be independent of village hall activities. The land required for this extension is being donated by the Parish Council who are 'Custodian Trustees' of the Blakeney Village Hall.

This is extremely good news for the BAHS as now the Society will be able to find a home for the many documents, etc. that we have acquired to date. The timescale envisaged is to have the extension completed before the end of this year, therefore much work has yet to be carried out, and obviously funds have to be found. Apart from building costs, the cost of equipping the room will also require to be raised.

For many years the original Blakeney History Group, which eventually became the BAHS, has been conscious that the documents, books and artefacts which are stored by members at present will need a permanent home if the Society is to continue to flourish. The idea of a modernised village reading room was floated, an archive room that would serve as document or research centre. Perhaps "Archive Room" is the wrong designation – maybe a "Historical Reading Room" would be more appropriate. What do you think? How should it be equipped? Some of the early suggestions have included Computer with CDROM, scanner, and Internet access to Norfolk County Council Libraries and Museum Services, microfiche reader, epidiastroscope, slide projector and screen, reference tables and book cases. Your views would be appreciated.

Whilst building plans are progressing, BAHS has the opportunity to continue the rental of the Portacabin that Blakeney Parish Council have used as their office for the past two years. The Parish Council office has now moved to the new building attached to the Scout Hut at the village hall car park, the new office being of similar dimensions to the proposed Archive room. The Portacabin will be utilised whilst the archive room is being built to store and catalogue many of the BAHS items that are presently stored in members' homes.

The cost of renting the Portacabin has been largely defrayed by a very generous donation of £500 from the Parish Council's Social Fund, for which we thank them. The contract for the Portacabin can be terminated by us at any time with only a short period of notice being required. There will also be a small charge for the removal of the cabin at the end of the rental. **PW**

Clubnights

Recent clubnights have been well attended though there is still room for a few more. These meetings are free to members and their guests, though we do levy a modest charge of £1 for non-members, and you'll have to fork out all of 20 pence for a cup of coffee.

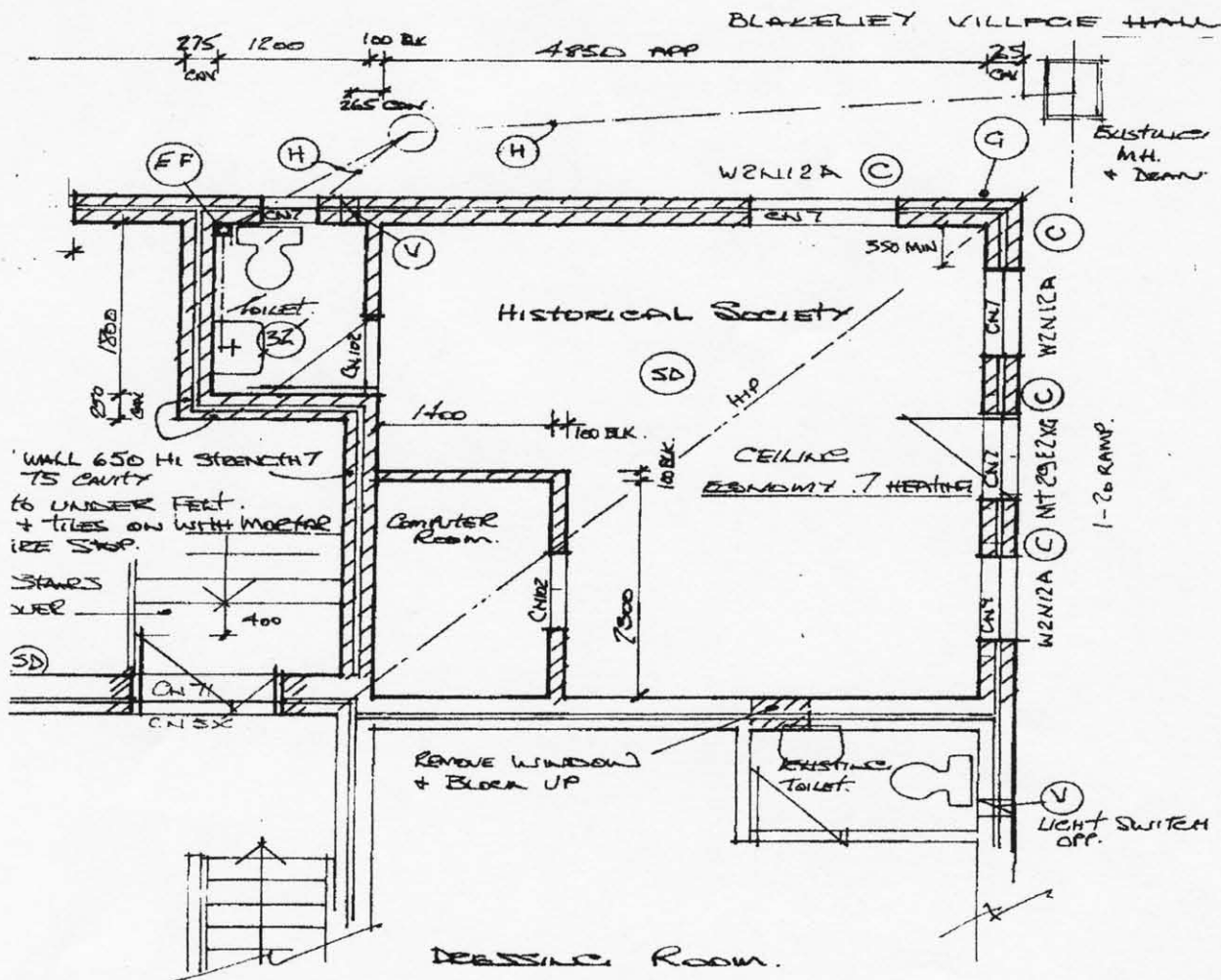
All club nights are on Tuesdays and start at 7.30pm. **The current season continues with two more meetings. Details of the 2001-2 season will be published as soon as they are finalised.**

27th February 2001
Village memories

Philip West from Hindringham has a slide show for us: north Norfolk from 1875.

27th March 2001
Journey along the A149

Gerald Cubitt, back again by popular demand, will show another selection of local postcards, this time covering the area from Hunstanton to Weybourne as seen during the first half of the 1900s.



Plan of Proposed Archive/Reading Room

Some Recent Books

A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History

Edited by C R Cheney Revised by Michael Jones

(A completely revised edition of "Cheney" published this year)

Royal Historical Society Handbook No.4

ISBN 1 521 77845 X 246 pp published 2001 £14.90

This is the bible for anything to do with dating (for historians!); it even includes calendars for all the years between 400 and 2100 – did you know that next year's calendar, Easter Day and all, will not recur until 2063? Should be on every members' bookshelf.

The Blakenys: an Etymological and Ethnological Study – Unveiling the Mysterious Origins of the Balkeney Family and Name.

Dr Lochlainn Seabrook, Director of the New England Blakeney Family Tree Project.

Members might like to know that an American author has made a detailed study of the origins of "Blakeney" both as a placename and as a surname. His 100 page book, self-published and spirally bound, gives a detailed account of his wide-ranging etymological researches. He considers various possible origins and reaches certain conclusions, but it wouldn't be fair to tell you what they are – well, not just yet. After all, he would like to sell a few copies first!

There is already a copy in Blakeney which will eventually be placed in the Society's Library; in the meantime it can be seen by arrangement with John Wright (01263 740589). JW

The Blakeney Esker

The Blakeney Esker is a Geological Site of Special Scientific Interest which runs from Blakeney marshes to Wiveton Downs. An Esker is a long ridge of gravel and sediment deposited by meltwater from a retreating glacier. Roger Thompson and David Anderson (both BAHS members) formed the Blakeney Esker Group (BEG) over two and a half years ago, as a project to convert the 11 acres of a worked out quarry, at the top of Saxlingham Road, for public benefit. The site is adjacent to the Wiveton Downs picnic area presently managed by Norfolk County Council.

The Esker area has become a derelict site over recent years, subject to much misuse. The most serious was the crashing and burning of a car for a television programme. Fly tipping and motor cycle trail biking were also common despite the fact that an SSSI designation is supposed to confer.

J M Gray of the University of London gave an interesting insight into the "Origin of Blakeney Esker" at the Blakeney Parish AGM 1997 that can be summarised as follows:

"Many theories have been proposed to explain the origin of the distinctive ridge that runs for 3.5km between Blakeney and Glandford in North Norfolk. These theories include an erosional remnant of a larger depositional body, an ice-marginal ridge, a crevasse filling, and a supraglacial, englacial, or subglacial esker. Renewed quarrying in the Wiveton Downs Gravel Pit in the 1980s revealed that the ridge is underlain by a system of channels cut into the chalk-rich till. The stratigraphy of one channel infill indicates that meltwater streams flowed through these Nye channels and eventually overfilled them to build the ridge. This evidence, together with the undulating long profile, indicates that the ridge was formed as a subglacial esker. It is designated as a UK SSSI and steps are being taken to develop it as an important educational/visitor resource." GRAY J M *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association, Vol 108, 177-182.*

Our Society's interest began in the early days of the Blakeney Esker Group when we were asked to support the project. We discussed the project requirements with Norfolk Museums Service and English Heritage with a view to contributing to a story of flint, its geological history and use for tools and as a building material. This story will be told on display panels at the site, and prepared as a teaching resource via an Esker web site.

Well, the moment of truth has arrived: the land is in the process of being purchased, and plans are in hand to form a Charity to manage the site for the future. More information will be available as the project develops. Should you wish to contribute to our Society's efforts please contact John Wright on 01263 740589. PW

Some More Recent Books

Recording and Analysing Graveyards

Harold Mytum

(A revised practical guide to recording memorials as well as analysing vegetation and other features of a burial ground)

Practical Handbook in Archaeology 15

ISBN 1 902771 09 5 192 pp published 2000 £9.50

The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey Vol IV 1596-1602

Edited by Victor Morgan (et al)

Norfolk Record Society Volume LXIV published 2000

ISBN 0 9538298 20 394 pp

It is understood that two more volumes are planned.