

PLANNING AND HOUSING IN NORFOLK – GETTING IT RIGHT

Those interested in the future of Norfolk are being invited to the Norfolk Planning Conference 2006, as organised by CPRE Norfolk and the Norfolk County Association of Parish and Town Councils.

The conference takes place on Thursday 15 June at The Assembly Rooms in Swaffham, and the subject is planning and housing. Sessions on planning help, the local development framework, affordable housing and energy-efficient new building will be addressed by some of East Anglia's leading experts in the field. All those with a personal and professional interest are invited to attend.

James Frost, CPRE Norfolk's Manager, says "This is a critical time for Norfolk with over 78,000 new houses scheduled in the planning system. We'll be looking at it from all the angles and hear from planners, developers, architects and local councils. If you are interested in the future of Norfolk, this is an opportunity to meet other like-minded people and hear from some of East Anglia's leading experts on planning and housing".

Leaflets and booking forms are available from Sue Lake on 01603 664869. Booking is through the Norfolk Association of Parish and Town Councils and places can be reserved for £15 per person or £25 when booking every two places. The venue opens at 9.30am for coffee; conference sessions begin at 10am and finish at 3.30pm. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF DRAGON HALL

This year's CPRE Norfolk Annual General Meeting will be held at Dragon Hall in Norwich on Thursday 18 May. Wine will be served from 7.00pm, admission is free and all are welcome

Dragon Hall is a Grade I listed trading hall, built in about 1430. It is a unique legacy of medieval life and is one of the most important historic buildings in Norwich and Norfolk. Since January 2005 Dragon Hall has been undergoing a £1.8 million programme of restoration and development. Dragon Hall is reopening in April 2006 and this evening will be one of the first opportunities for the public to revisit the Hall.

Our main speaker for the evening will be Chris Barringer, a well-known and well-loved Norfolk historian and a renowned speaker on the historic landscape of the county. He is a Trustee of the Norwich and Norfolk Heritage Trust, who have been responsible for the Hall since 1979. *The History of Dragon Hall* will be a suitable title for the talk of the evening and Chris will also bring the audience up to date on the recent restoration work.

Friends, non-members and members of the public are welcome to this event. There is limited car parking at the Hall for people with disabilities and a public carpark nearby on Rouen Road. Please phone James Frost on 01603 761660 for more information.

Summer Concert

in aid of
All Saints Church, South Pickenham
at

The Houghton Centre
Saturday 27 May at 7.30

featuring a wide variety of light classical music,
with pianist Lucinda Mackworth-Young and the Campbell family

Seats £13.50, inclusive of wine and light refreshments
Tickets from The Houghton Centre, tel 01760 441444

WHAT'S ON

Forthcoming Society events

Saturday 20 May

Society AGM. This will be kept as short as possible, and will be followed by a ploughman's supper and the opportunity to visit St Mary's Church for a tour and talk by Bob Davey. There will be no charge to Society members. See enclosed agenda for AGM. Houghton Centre, South Pickenham at 6pm.

Sunday 11 June

A field visit to see butterflies and wild flowers at Narborough Railway Line. This section of the disused King's Lynn to Swaffham railway is now a nature reserve owned by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and managed by Butterfly Conservation. It is one of the best sites in Norfolk for butterflies and, led by expert Rory Hart, we hope to see both dingy and grizzled skippers, as well as brown argus and a range of interesting plants and birds. This will be a lunchtime/early afternoon visit, picnics welcome. Please contact James Parry on 01366 328676 by Monday 5 June for more details, or to book a place.

Monday 3 July

An evening visit to Thetford Forest (meet at 8.15pm) for nightjars and glow-worms (hopefully!). Led by Ron Hoblyn, formerly conservation officer at the Forestry Commission. Please contact Anne Mason on 01760 755685 by Wednesday 28 June for more details or to book a place; precise venue to be confirmed (it depends on where the nightjars choose to nest).

Churches Conservation Trust

Saturday 1 July Summer Serenade: a song recital for voice and harp with music by Monteverdi and Vivaldi.

Andres Hernandez-Salazar (tenor) and Joy Smith (harp), at St Mary's Church, Barton Bendish at 7.30pm.

Tickets £8 from 01760 755685 or 01366 328676.

The Breckland Society

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SOCIETY VISIT TO HENGRAVE HALL

A cold mid-March afternoon saw 30 Society members pay a visit to Hengrave Hall, one of the most important historic houses in the Brecks. Located a few miles outside Bury St Edmunds in the valley of the River Lark, Hengrave has an illustrious history and yet remains little known, even locally. The south front, gatehouse and inner court are superb examples of sixteenth-century domestic architecture, but the most breathtaking feature of the house is the oratory, which contains beautiful linenfold panelling and a window of superlative stained glass. This was manufactured in Picardy in the 1520s and brought to Hengrave in three great chests by boat to Ipswich and thence by cart. The window depicts biblical scenes and is regarded as one of the finest examples of its type in Britain. Also notable is the banqueting hall, complete with minstrels' gallery, and the dining room, which has a superb Jacobean fireplace.

Hengrave's origins lay in the manor of Hemegrede, which is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being in the ownership of St Edmund's Abbey. The manor was later granted to a certain Leo, whose grandson, Thomas, assumed the name de Hemegreth or Hengrave. The Hengrave family later fell from favour and sold their land to Thomas Kytson, a wealthy merchant originally from Lancashire. Kytson dealt in luxury textiles and traded extensively in the Low Countries, where he maintained a fine house. Such was his wealth and status that he decided he also needed a country residence in England and so he commissioned the building of Hengrave Hall, on which work was started in 1525. The house was not complete however until 1538 and cost £3,000 to build, a sizeable sum by contemporary standards. Both brick and stone were used, the latter doubtless removed from demolished local abbeys and monastic houses following their dissolution by King Henry VIII. By this time Kytson had been knighted and had also served as Sheriff of London, but he only enjoyed the completed Hengrave for a short period before his death in 1540. His son, also Thomas, inherited the estate and in 1578 entertained Queen Elizabeth at Hengrave in considerable style, earning himself a knighthood in the process. Such royal favour notwithstanding, Sir Thomas and his wife were in constant trouble for their adherence to Rome and were listed as recusants in 1588.

Hengrave later passed to the Gage family, also Catholics, and with whom it remained for nine generations. Their period of ownership was characterised by the demolition in 1775 of one wing of Kytson's original hall and the filling of the moat, as well as by popular stories surrounding the family's development at Hengrave of a new type of plum – the 'green-gage'. In the nineteenth century the family restored much of the house and landscaped the garden, pleasure grounds and wider estate. Hengrave passed to the Earl of Kenmare in 1887 and during the First World War was used as a hospital. It remained more or less empty thereafter until a big sale in 1952, when most of the once



renowned contents (which had included a portrait by Holbein of the first Sir Thomas Kytson) were sold at auction and the house itself was acquired by the Sisters of the Assumption for use as a school.

Adjacent to the Hall is the delightful Church of the Reconciliation. Although this building has Saxon origins, most evident in its round tower, and the nave is mostly thirteenth century, much of what one

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SOCIETY SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2006 NOW DUE!

April 5th was the renewal date for Society subscriptions.

The continued success of the Society depends on the involvement and support of its members. We therefore encourage you to let us know about areas of activity in which you think the Society should become engaged, and to suggest visits and lectures that you would like to see us organise.

sees today dates from the 1400s, when the building was enlarged and embellished. At the time of Sir Thomas Kytson the church – then serving as the parish church to the local village – was enclosed within the grounds of the hall, and became a private chapel for the Kytson family. Although Anglican services were ostensibly performed there during and immediately after the Reformation, the Catholicism of the Kytsons (and subsequent owners) has effectively meant that the church has served as a place of Catholic worship more or less continuously throughout its life. Sadly, the plainer style enforced by the official Protestant faith meant the loss in the sixteenth century of the rood loft and screen, but the church remains notable today for the extraordinary collection of marble and alabaster tombs and monuments it contains. The most striking of these is the 1608 memorial to the second Sir Thomas Kytson, flanked by – rather incongruously to modern eyes – his two wives (the first died, and he later married again). A monument to his father, also Sir Thomas, and the builder of the hall, lies nearby in the north chapel.

The Church of the Reconciliation



Sir Thomas Kytson, flanked by his two wives



Hengrave Hall remained in the ownership of the Sisters of the Assumption from 1952 until the end of March 2006, when it was sold. In recent years it had been run as an ecumenical centre, but a combination of high running costs (£30,000pa on fuel bills alone) and the prohibitive expense of complying with health and safety regulations and new disabled access legislation meant that the centre was no longer viable financially and the decision was therefore taken to sell up. Hengrave is now in private hands and it is not clear whether the hall will be opened at all to the public by its new owner, although apparently assurances have been given that the church will continue to be accessible. Details, when available, will be given in future newsletters .

COUNTRY ROOTS OF OUR MAY FESTIVITIES



What does May make you think of? Increased sunshine? Young leaves on tall beech trees with bluebells underfoot? White May blossom in the hedgerows? Sap rising? Birds hatching? A spring in your step – being in love (“Sweet Lovers love the Spring”)? Maypoles and morris dancing? Lucinda Mackworth-Young examines the ancient origins of our customs.

To our ancestors May was the time of year to celebrate the evidence of the renewed life force and to ensure the continuation of the fertility upon which all life depends. The Celtic festival, Beltane, celebrated from May Eve through to the end of May 1st had fertility, creativity and fire as its themes. By joining in with all that was going on in the natural world around them, people felt that they helped to increase and perpetuate fertile and creative energy through “sympathetic magic”. Energy was raised in the usual ways (still evident in our church services today) by gathering greenery and floral decoration, singing and dancing, using fire and water, and communing with each other and through each other to the goddess and gods who embodied the spirit of the time.

A Puritan observer, Phillip Stubbes, noted in 1583:

Against May ... all the yung men and maides, olde men and wives, run gadding over night to the woods, groves, hills and mountains, where they spend all night in pleasant pastimes; and in the morning they return, bringing with them birch and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withal... And we marvel, for there is a great Lord present among them, as superintendent ... but the chiefest jewel ... is their May-pole which they bring home with great veneration ... twenty or forty yoke of oxen... draw home this Maypole which is covered all over with flowers and herbs... And thus being reared up ... then fall they to dance about it ... I have heard it credibly reported that of fortie, threescore, or a hundred maides going to the wood overnight, there have scaresly the third part of them returned home againe undefiled!

The great lord would have been the representative of the god of fertility: the Green Man or the Horned God. The Green Man can be found as a foliate head decorating many churches today. He was Lord of the Forest and symbolised the spirit of vegetation: life, death and resurrection, as renewed life springs out of death. He has come down to us under many guises, including Jack in the Green and Robin Hood.

The Horned God, from the Celtic Herne, meant the Horned One, the Wild One and Lord of the Herds. Such a horned figure has been found carved into a pillar at Beachamwell Church, the horns, greenery and sticking-out tongue clearly marking him out as a fertility figure.

Reverence for the life force, in particular the act of procreation and all that flowed from it, was entirely natural and necessary to our ancestors for whom the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual were completely intertwined and interfaced. In order to be fully creative physically,



The Thompson Green Man: photo John Davies

emotionally, mentally and spiritually they felt that they needed to be deeply in touch with every aspect of themselves.

The act of mass union between the sexes in a natural setting has been practised by ‘primitive’ people in many parts of the world. They instinctively understood a significant truth which modern man is once more beginning to apprehend: that the human mind is inextricably linked to the physical world around it and is capable of producing and directing tremendous effects on the physical level. By concentrating all their mental and physical energies into an act of procreation they were literally able to cause the natural forces to respond in empathy – Janet and Colin Bord.

Rock carvings in Scandinavia depict the “sacred marriage” or ritual mating between the human representatives of god and goddess in the spring to fertilise the land, encourage vegetation growth, and ensure the pregnancy of the Mother Earth who, in the depths of winter, would give birth to the Sun God once more.

Having nothing to do with immorality in the profane sense of the word, these Rites of Spring were deeply misunderstood by the early Christian missionaries for whom there was a mind-body split (mental = spiritual = heavenly, good: physical = sexual = earthly, bad). And, in their efforts to discredit the old gods and promote the new, the Horned God was cast as the devil and the Beachamwell figure, when discovered early last century, was known as the “demon”. From then, the divinity of creative energy was increasingly split into the beauty of the artist’s muse on the one hand and the dirtiness of red light districts on the other.

Now, as we renew our understanding of the traditional May festivities, it becomes unmissable that they involve a May King and Queen, greenery and horns – however sanitised! The maypole, originally a living tree, then a freshly cut tree and finally a permanently standing wooden pole, was seen as a conductor of fertile energy from Father Sky to Mother Earth (as were standing stones). Birch was traditionally used, being sacred to the goddess and representing fertility, birth and new beginnings. Maypole raising was closely linked with morris dancing, ceremonial ritual dancing to “celebrate the renewal of Spring and promote fertility in field, flock and mankind”.

With this purpose in mind, The King’s Morris annually dance the dawn up at 5.15 am on Knights Hill Roundabout, South Wooton, Kings Lynn, the highest point in the borough. They then process about the town, starting at St Margaret’s Church at 12 noon, with the May Garland, a pole crowned with a large globe of flowers, greenery and beads



The Beachamwell “demon”

surrounding a doll (representing the May Queen or Goddess), all accompanied by the blowing of ox horns (notice the ox horns in the picture, below).

An important part of the Morris ceremonies are their Dragon (a symbol of sexual energy) and Hobby Horse. The ‘Oss might stop and “drink” from a bucket, possibly flinging water (associated with spring and fertility) onto the onlookers. And he is very likely to dash into the crowd, catch a young woman under his skirts and rub soot on her – believed also to bring both fertility and good luck! The “sooting” is a remnant of the Beltane fire festival, in which young women and couples jumped over the cooling embers of the fires lit on May Eve to have their wishes granted for the safe delivery of children, or to plight their troth.



Dancing up the dawn: by kind permission of the King’s Morris

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust has in its care some of the most architecturally and historically important churches in England. Its knowledgeable regional staff have arranged a series of one-day tours to a selection of its churches, where you will be able to learn about their history and about the conservation work of the Trust. Some tours will follow a particular architectural or historical theme, but there will be time at each church to explore the building at leisure.

The Trust is a national organisation, but there are two tours in our area coming up in June and July this year. On Tuesday 13 June, Anne Mason, together with leading archaeologist Andrew Rogerson, will be leading a tour of churches in Shingham, Beachamwell, Barton Bendish, Oxborough and Oxburgh Hall Chapel. All these buildings have early features: Shingham has a Norman doorway; Beachamwell a Saxon round tower and medieval graffiti; the two churches in Barton Bendish have Norman work; and at Oxburgh are the unique terracotta tombs of the Bedingfields who have lived at the hall since 1482. Lifts can be arranged for those without their own transport. Tickets cost £25, which includes lunch at a village pub and admission to Oxburgh Hall.

On Thursday 13 July, Anne will be leading a tour called *Rider Haggard in Norfolk*, visiting Shipdham, East and West Bradenham, and West Bradenham Hall Gardens. Shipdham Church has one of the earliest

surviving wooden lecterns in the country and a 17th-century minaret-like addition to the tower. East Bradenham is a gentle, peaceful building with a rare Samuel Green organ of 1786. West Bradenham has monuments to the Haggard family, while the Hall has links with Nelson, Rider Haggard and L P Hartley. Tickets for this tour are also £25, which includes lunch at a village pub and tea.

Each day is self-contained. The churches are chosen to present as wide a selection of the Trust’s buildings as possible, and occasionally non-Trust churches are included to give an overview of particular local styles and types.

Anyone interested in joining either or both these tours should contact Anne Mason on 01760 755685. She will send an explanatory leaflet and a booking form.