

RECENT EVENTS



SOCIETY VISIT TO CULFORD HALL

On 19 April, thirty members braved a bitterly cold wind to walk round the park at Culford Hall, led by art historian Ann Gore and garden designer George Carter. This landscape is the only certain example in the Brecks of work by Humphry Repton, and whilst it has undergone many changes since he compiled his plans for the estate in the form of one of his celebrated "Red Books" in the early 19th century, the bones of his design are still visible on the ground, alongside a wealth of other interesting features.



ART IN CASTLE ACRE

Paintings, ceramics and sculpture will be on show and for sale at an exhibition in the Church of St James the Great, Castle Acre from 11am to 4pm on Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 July, with a preview evening at 7.30pm on Friday 4 July. Proceeds of the sales will go towards the upkeep of the fabric of the church.

Local and county-wide landscapes will be the subject of many of the paintings by artists, both amateur and professional, from across the eastern region.

The Rector, Canon Stuart Nairn, is looking forward to the weekend and has commented, "As the priest in charge of Castle Acre, I am delighted that the Church of St James the Great is able to act as host to the Art Exhibition being arranged by the Friends of Castle Acre Church. It is an important fund-raising opportunity for the Friends and also gives painters, potters and sculptors the chance to share their creations with a wider audience. I wish them every success".

Admission to the Exhibition is £1.00 and refreshments will be available too. For the Preview Evening, payment is 'on the door' and is £5.00 per person. For more details, please telephone 01760 755405



NORFOLK PLANNING CONFERENCE 2008

Thursday 12 June

10am-3.30pm, Swaffham Assembly Rooms

Organised by CPRE Norfolk and the Norfolk County Association of Parish and Town Councils. Speakers to include Bob Mizon (British Astronomical Association), Dr John Constable (Renewable Energy Foundation), Jan Matthieson (British Wind Energy Association) and Terence Blacker (author and *Independent* newspaper columnist).

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.

The conference will cover the topics: Street Lighting and Light Pollution; Parish Design Statements; and Wind Farm Development in Norfolk.

£20 per person (if booked before 1 June). For booking please contact NCAPT on 01603 664869 or email enquiries@ncaptc.gov.uk

**The Choir of
Gonville & Caius College
Cambridge**

will perform in

Stoke Ferry Church

By kind permission of Kit Hesketh-Harvey

on

Saturday 28th June 2008

7.00 p.m.

Tickets £10 to include glass of wine

From: John O'Dwyer 01366 328431

Peter Oddey 01366 347701

All proceeds in aid of the Fabric Fund of St John the Evangelist Church, Oxborough

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at The Breckland Society

**The Hay Barn, Hall Farm Barns
Oxborough, Norfolk PE33 9PS**

Tel 01366 328190

info@brecsoc.org.uk

www.brecsoc.org.uk

Newsletter 20 — April 2008

SOCIETY AWARDED GRANT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE FOR NEW PROJECT ON BRECKLAND WARRENS

Barely has the dust settled after our highly successful Vernacular Architecture Project when the Society has landed yet another grant! The very favourable response to the VAP report and exhibition, with the latter travelling around the Brecks over the last few months, far exceeded our expectations and has enabled us to develop excellent links with a range of organisations. One of these is English Heritage – its Chief Executive Dr Simon Thurley came to see our VAP exhibition when it was in King's Lynn – and so we are now delighted to be the recipient of one of EH's Regional Capacity Building Grants.

The grant has been awarded to the Society to carry out research into one of the most important aspects of the Brecks heritage: the area's famous rabbit warrens. These first came to prominence in Medieval times, when designated areas known as "warrens" were set aside for the breeding of rabbits for their meat and fur. Here they were nurtured, protected from poachers and trapped and culled by warreners.

There are over 20 warrens scattered across the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks, and while some, such as that at Mildenhall, have been studied on a limited basis, others remain almost completely unknown. In particular, there is still no detailed overview of how much remains of each warren in terms of its structure, namely the high banks that were built around each warren to keep in the rabbits, and the lodges constructed so that the warrener could keep watch over his charges. Many warren sites have not been visited and assessed in recent years, nor has any concerted work been carried out in the county archives to collate historical data and references related to the warrens and to the activities of which they were once the focal point, such as the trade in rabbit fur and meat.

English Heritage, working with the Breckland Society and the Forestry Commission, which now owns the land on which many of the warrens are located, is keen to plug these gaps in our knowledge. The grant of £12,100 has been offered to the Society for the following work: the identification and recording of archaeological features of the warrens; research into the documentary evidence for their management and development; and an assessment of the effect that enclosure, the establishment of estates and of the Forestry Commission had on the warren landscape and on those employed in warrening and the fur factories. An illustrated report summarising the Society's findings and conclusions will be compiled, as will a colour leaflet designed to increase awareness of the warren heritage to a general audience. The Society is contributing £500 towards the costs of the project from its own resources.

The first stages of the project will be research into the documentary evidence for the warrens and on-the-ground assessment of all the warrens that are currently accessible. For this to take place we need volunteers – this could mean YOU! All that is required is an interest in landscape history and a willingness to spend a few hours over the next twelve months exploring one of the area's historic warrens in the search for evidence of elements such as banks and lodges and searching for references in documents.

/cont'd on page 2

WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events

Thursday 12 June 6.30pm A private view of the Thetford Treasures exhibition at the Ancient House Museum, Thetford. The museum curator, Oliver Bone, will give us a short introduction to the exhibition, after which we shall be free to wander round the museum.

£5, to include glass of wine. Places strictly limited, and must be booked in advance with Sue Whittleby on 01366 328190.

Friday 18 July Tour of Three Churches of the Three Acres, led by Anne Mason (see page 3). This event is free, but please book places in advance with Sue Whittleby. Meet at 6pm on the grass area (parking here) outside Newton by Castle Acre Church, on the A1065 north of Swaffham, just opposite the George and Dragon pub.

Friday 8 August Warrens Project training day at Oak Lodge, High Lodge, 7-9pm. See page 2 for details.

Thursday 28 August Evening visit to Merton Hall estate, home of the de Grey family. Full details in July newsletter, but if interested please book a place in advance with Sue Whittleby.

LIVING AND BELIEVING IN THE BRECKS



Thetford Warren Lodge

As with the VAP project, this grant presents a wonderful opportunity for members of the Society to learn new skills in archaeology and historical research.

The first training session is scheduled for Saturday 14 June, from 10am to 2.30pm at Oak Lodge, High Lodge near Thetford; it is free, and refreshments will be provided. It will include the historical

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO VIEW THE THETFORD TREASURE

On 12 June the Society will be allowed an exclusive private view of the Thetford Treasure, one of the country's greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century. This magnificent collection of Roman gold jewellery and silver spoons was uncovered at a Thetford industrial site in 1979 and has since resided at the British Museum. It has now returned to its home town for the first time since then, and is on show at the Ancient House Museum as part of a temporary exhibition that also includes finds from a Roman temple site in Hockwold-cum-Wilton, the Roman town at Brampton and a Roman blacksmith's hoard from an organised excavation at Kilverstone. See back page for details of how to obtain tickets.

One of East Anglia's most significant archaeological discoveries, the Thetford Treasure rested underground for more than 1,500 years and, following news of its discovery, was promptly whisked away to London. The beautiful 83-piece collection, which was found in superb condition in the Gallows Hill area of Thetford in 1979, revealed a lot about life and religion at the end of the Roman era in Britain in the late-fourth century.

Almost half of the priceless collection of gold bracelets, necklaces, pendants, rings and silver spoons and strainers, dated between 380 and 390 AD, will be on show at the Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life, 18 months after a top-to-toe refurbishment of this outstanding Tudor building.

Oliver Bone, curator of Ancient House, said the loan, which will include some of the British Museum's most prized objects, such as a gold buckle featuring a dancing satyr and some of the finer engraved silver spoons, would not have been possible before the Thetford museum's £1.6m renovation.

"We are very pleased and it is quite a privilege to borrow something like the Thetford Treasure. The refurbishment has enabled us to receive loans from national collections because we can now protect our objects better and the environment is better.

"The Thetford Treasure is of national and international importance because of what it tells us about the belief system towards the end of the Roman period. The finds are very interesting and the craftsmanship is particularly high. The gold is very soft and pure, but it does not have any wear marks," he said.

The hoard of flamboyant bracelets, necklaces, pendants and rings, many of which are bejewelled with precious stones, and 33 silver

background to warrening in the Brecks, a brief assessment of documents and a practical session looking at the warren banks of the adjacent Downham High Warren.

Later in the summer, on a date to be confirmed, the Norfolk Record Office will be hosting a free day's training for us in how to use the archives in a record office. This will enable members to undertake documentary research into the warrens and the rabbit industry in county archive offices. Interviewing ex-warreners and former workers in the Brandon and Thetford rabbit fur factories is also very important as such first-hand accounts are a valuable part of the information we need to gather together.

On Saturday 18 October we will have a second training day based at Oak Lodge, focusing on how to record banks in the field, using a specially designed form, and including a practical session as a 'try out'.

This new project promises to be a really exciting venture and one in which we hope many members will be interested in taking part. There are various components, so you can select which one you would like to concentrate on. The total amount of time required can be as little or as much as you feel comfortable with.

To find out more, or to book a place on the 8 August training day (on a without prejudice basis – just come along and see what is involved), please contact Anne Mason on 01760 755685.

spoons, which were made in either France or Britain in the late 4th century, were found in a shale box on what is now Fison Way industrial estate, in Thetford, by Norwich metal detectorist Arthur Brooks in November 1979. Unfortunately, he held on to the Roman collection for six months before declaring it, denying archaeologists the opportunity to excavate the area and possibly find more of the collection. Mr Brooks, who died before it was declared treasure trove in 1981, was awarded £87,180 of the £261,540 compensation he would have been entitled to had he declared the find straight away. It is rumoured that hundreds of gold and silver coins at the former Roman settlement have never been discovered or declared by Norfolk's metal-detecting community.

Many of the engravings on the spoons testify to the continued worship of ancient pagan god Faunus when Christianity was the official religion of the time. Remarkably, the gold jewellery was never worn and is thought to have been buried for safe keeping because of considerable unrest in East Anglia at the time with attacks from Saxon pirates and sustained opposition to pagan religious cults.

[adapted from *The Watton & Swaffham Times*, 31 December 2007]



Buckle, featuring dancing satyr

THREE CHURCHES OF THREE ACRES

On 18 July the Breckland Society will be visiting the three churches of Newton by Castle Acre, South Acre and Castle Acre. Although they are very close to each other geographically, their architecture could not be more different.

Newton by Castle Acre's St Mary and All Saints has been described as one of the finest Saxon churches in England and dates from the eleventh century. It retains its original three-cell division, its central tower and triangular window openings, all features of a Saxon church building. Behind the churchyard is the double-moated site of the medieval manor and on the opposite side of the A1065 is the three-storey farmhouse of Newton Manor Farm.

St George's, South Acre is a medieval church virtually unaltered structurally since it was completed in the early fourteenth century. Part of the rood screen and the carved bench ends survive and the Norman font (from the earlier church on the site) has an elaborate cover. The brasses to members of the Harsyke family, the memorials to the Barkham family and the tomb of a Knights Templar add to the atmosphere.

Castle Acre is the largest and most important of the three settlements, with its Norman castle and Cluniac priory and, not surprisingly, St James' Church is the grandest of the three. Its architecture is Perpendicular and the pointed arches, tall slender columns, and many windows of plain glass create a building full of light and space. On the wine-glass pulpit and lower part of the rood screen are the original painted panels, while the fifteenth-century counter-balance mechanism of the font cover is still in working order.



The wine-glass pulpit at St James' Church, Castle Acre

Of the seven churches in the Nar Valley Group of Parishes, six are Grade 1 listed, including the three we shall be visiting on 18 July. See page 1 for details of the tour.

Please contact Anne Mason on Tel 01760 755685 or email at anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk

CPRE NORFOLK LITTER CAMPAIGN

Bill Bryson, the bestselling author and Norfolk resident, has spent many years travelling England to undertake research for his widely-regarded novels. He cares passionately about the way the British countryside is despoiled by litter and fly-tipping and is determined to do something about it. As President of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), he has launched a THREE-year campaign to highlight the scale of the problem and propose solutions.

CPRE Norfolk is equally concerned about the extent of the problem locally. A recent survey by the Government's litter watchdog shows that the litter problem has grown by 23 per cent in the East of England in the last year. CPRE Norfolk has formed a litter campaign team and is working with district councils and litter-picking groups across Norfolk to seek solutions to the problem.

Paul Wiley, CPRE Norfolk Litter Campaign Co-ordinator, says, "Roads, hedgerows and fields all over the county are consistently despoiled by litter and fly-tipping. No one using the A11 or the A47 roads to travel into and out of the county can be unaware of the huge amount of litter dumped along the whole length of these major highways: mile upon mile of plastic water bottles, beer cans, fast food cartons, plastic bags, polystyrene and bubble wrap".

Road maintenance on the A11 and A47 is currently the responsibility of the Highways Agency, but litter clearance is carried out by local authorities. This system does not work, as councils cannot clear rubbish from these busy roads without placing staff at risk from traffic. This ongoing task can be scheduled only when the Highways Agency closes a particular lane for road works.

Cleaning our countryside and road network of litter and fly-tipping will require dedicated effort at all levels of government. CPRE Norfolk would like to see:

- Government transfer responsibility for litter collection on major trunk roads to the Highways Agency;
- Government to introduce legislation to ensure the reduction of fast

- food/supermarket packaging and the enforcement of offenders;
- local councils devote more resources to litter collection and fly-tipping enforcement, with improved government funding for this;
- district councils to take a lead on litter education in schools, as Breckland Council has done;
- parish councils to be pro-active in engaging communities in litter prevention and clearance.

In April, Bill Bryson launched *Stop the Drop*, CPRE's major campaign to highlight the impact made by litter and fly-tipping across England, which gives the public the campaigning tools to demand action. CPRE is also lobbying for a new bottle deposit law.

SOCIETY SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2008 NOW DUE!

April 5th was the renewal date for Society subscriptions – please see enclosed renewal form. 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.