

A ROUND-UP OF EVENTS

Thomas Paine talk, 24 April

Where better to hear a talk about Thomas Paine than in the very Thetford schoolroom in which he spent the only five years of his formal education? Who better to tell Paine's story than the school's present headmaster, who has long experience of teaching history in sixth forms? Gareth Price's talk was organised by the Society, and took place in Old School, Thetford Grammar School, as part of the town's commemoration of the bicentenary of Paine's death.

With meticulous impartiality and no small wit, Mr Price presented a picture of Thomas Paine as a man of Quaker principles, a free-thinker owing no personal allegiance to the establishments of his day, whether religious or political.

We heard that before he travelled to North America in 1774 Paine had many failures and very occasional good luck in his career. For example, he secured a berth on a privateer, but arrived at the quayside to find that it had sailed without him. It went down with all hands two days later! ...

To read the rest of this article by Society member Jim Norris, see the Society's website at www.brecsoc.org.uk

For details of the programme of bicentenary celebrations, see www.tompaine200.org.uk/programme



Portrait of Thomas Paine

ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM, THETFORD Walks and Talks for June and July 2009

An Introduction to Thomas Paine

Thursday 11 June, 4.30pm

Talk by Curator Oliver Bone on Thetford's revolutionary writer and campaigner.

Normal admission fee applies, advance booking essential

Introduction to tracing the history the history of your house

Thursday 18 June, 4.30pm

A talk by archivist Lucy Purvis from Norfolk Record Office. Gain an insight into the research methods and documents that can uncover the secrets of a building.

Normal admission fee applies, advance booking essential

Thetford Riverside Walk

Thursday 9 July, 2 - 3.30pm

Starting from Ancient House, with Curator Oliver Bone. Discover some of the stories and history behind Thetford's waterways.

£2.50/£2 Museum Pass holders or Friends, advance booking essential

Thetford Now & Then Walk

Thursday 23 July, 2 - 3.30pm, starting from Ancient House, with Curator Oliver Bone. Take a closer look at some of the town's buildings and streets using old maps and photos.

£2.50/£2 Museum Pass holders or Friends, advance booking essential

westacre river studios and summer theatre



She Stoops to Conquer
or *The Mistakes of a Night*
By Oliver Goldsmith
Adapted and directed by Andy Naylor

Bouncers Re-Mixed
By John Godber
Directed by Matt Grist

Shakers Re-stirred
By John Godber
Directed by Matt Grist

West Moon Street
By Rob Urbinati
Directed and produced by Nina Jacques and Joseph Smith
A briskly-paced comedy of manners in the spirit of Wilde's great comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*

For more information please call the box office on 01760 755800 or visit www.westacreatheatre.com



TORRIANO ENSEMBLE
SUMMER CONCERT
in aid of St Mary's Church, Beachamwell
on Sunday 28 June 2009 at 2.30pm
Followed by afternoon tea at Beachamwell Hall
[by kind permission of Mrs Bonning]
Tickets, inclusive of wine
£18 Concert in Church and afternoon tea
£10 Concert in Church
Enquiries 01366 328648

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at The Breckland Society
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WARRENS PROJECT HITS THE HEADLINES AGAIN

The Society's project to research the archaeological and documentary evidence for the Brecks' warrening industry continues to make excellent progress and to attract the interest of the local press, as well as regional television.

Fieldwork surveys have continued throughout the winter, with volunteers tracing the warren banks and lodge sites and recording their condition. The results of all this sitework are beginning to come in and make exciting reading. The documentary research is also yielding a wide range of new information, and we have enlisted the help of two specialist historians to help decipher medieval documents.

The oral history component is underway too, with six volunteers trained in interviewing techniques. Articles in the *Eastern Daily Press*, *Thetford and Watton Times*, *Brandon Life* and *Bury Free Press* prompted an excellent response, with ex-warreners and employees of the fur factories offering to be interviewed. This is a very important part of the project, as these people had first-hand experience of a way of life that will be lost for ever unless it is recorded now.

Adam Gretton, senior reporter of the *Eastern Daily Press*, has been very supportive throughout and it was his article on the progress of the project that attracted the attention of the BBC's *Look East*, which carried a short feature on the project on 23 March. The Society is very grateful to project volunteers Jackie Collins and Richard Ware, who came to Thetford Warren Lodge to meet Adam Gretton, and to Teresa Squires who, at very short notice, agreed to be filmed with James Parry and Anne Mason for BBC television. Needless to say, English Heritage, the project's main funder, is delighted with all the publicity!

The Forestry Commission, on whose land many of the former warrens lie, has been extremely helpful. At the recent annual FC Archaeology Panel, Anne Mason gave a report on the project so far. The professional archaeologists present, including FC's national head of archaeology and the Norfolk and Suffolk county archaeologists, were delighted at what the Breckland Society is achieving through the work of its team of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers.

Breckland Quiz, set by Sue Whittley

- 1 What does the word "breck" mean?
- 2 Which famous figure was born in Thetford in 1737 and died in New York in 1809?
- 3 From whom did The First Earl of Iveagh purchase the Elveden Estate in 1894?
- 4 Whose statue is on top of the Market Cross in Swaffham?
- 5 Which author was appointed as a sanitary inspector in Swaffham in 1912, married the daughter of the Reverend John Hunt, vicar at Little Dunham, and was a pilot in the First World War?
- 6 For which rare bird is Weeting Heath particularly known?
- 7 Which family had their country seat at Culford Park?
- 8 Where in Breckland is a reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon village?
- 9 For which geological feature is Thompson Common famous?
- 10 Where is the story *Babes in the Wood* said to have been set?

Answers on page 3.



WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events

Friday 22 May

6.45pm Society AGM at The Nunnery, Thetford, headquarters of the British Trust for Ornithology. A talk and tour of this fascinating building will be followed by the AGM and a light supper with wine. Members have been notified under separate cover.

Friday 26 June

7pm Visit to The Old Rectory, Fincham, a delightful private garden. £5, to include a glass of wine. Numbers strictly limited, so please book in advance with Sue Whittley.

Friday 21 August

6pm Guided visit to Cavenham Heath, one of the best examples of heathland in the Brecks. Heather should be in full flower, and there is a chance of seeing stone curlews. Free, but please book in advance with Sue Whittley.

Friday 18 September

Evening talk at Oxborough Village Hall by Norfolk County Archaeologist, David Gurney. Details in July newsletter.

WOODLARK WALK IN THETFORD FOREST, 14 MARCH

Society member Delia Cook reports on an expedition in search of woodlarks. As birdwatching usually does not feature upon the writer's weekend agenda it was with a few reservations that she substituted the Breckland Society's lark-spotting walk through the forest for her customary coffee and croissant on Saturday morning. But up with the lark it was, on a dry but somewhat chilly morning to join other Society members and our mentors at an agreed location within the forest. The purpose of our walk? To become more familiar with a rather neglected member of the lark family, the woodlark.

Our experts, Neal Armour-Chelu and Ron Hoblyn, provided vital statistics and information on the forest, the woodlark and other birdlife, before the walk commenced. Happily, managed habitats within the forest provide the woodlark with its preferred conditions, and here it exists relatively undisturbed, in a unique landscape which is helping to ensure its survival in East Anglia. The agricultural land surrounding the forest also provides a habitat for the woodlark's more familiar relation, the skylark, and we were able to compare and contrast the two species, as they were both audible and visible. Nature, very generously, has ensured that these birds differ greatly in song, flight and size. Consequently, it will be impossible to confuse them in the future, one hopes!

During our walk we skirted newly-planted and established forest, including an area which has been returned to natural heathland, as part

Woodlarks show a distinct preference for areas of bare soil or short turf, where they search for invertebrates.



Neal Armour-Chelu of the Forestry Commission points out wildlife on an area of restored heathland.

of a national biodiversity project. This habitat preserves some unusual indigenous species, some barely visible, whilst others are of a rather more invasive nature. Part of the management of the heathland is carried out via the grazing of what was, on that particular day, a very shy flock of sheep! The leisurely pace of our walk afforded members some time to chat and enjoy the peace and tranquillity.

The morning passed exceptionally swiftly and members were able to learn much about this fascinating landscape from our expert guides. Many thanks to Neal and Ron for taking time out to share their limitless knowledge with us and also to the Society for organising this interesting field trip. As ever, the uniqueness of the Brecks landscape and its wildlife were inspirational.



COUNTRYSIDE CAMPAIGNERS SAY "CLEAN UP NORFOLK!"

Countryside campaigners CPRE Norfolk and the Eastern Daily Press newspaper are promoting a Clean Up Norfolk event from 1 to 7 June, as part of national Volunteers' Week. And, according to celebrated author Bill Bryson, this is a fantastic opportunity to give Norfolk a much needed tidy-up.

Bill Bryson says, "It seems to me that Volunteers' Week is a wonderful opportunity to plan a local litter-pick, or take part in an organised CPRE litter-picking event in the county. That's why I'm delighted to support the Clean Up Norfolk initiative and I urge everyone to do what they can".

Bill has already written to all parish and town councils in Norfolk, urging them to organise a clean-up between 1 and 7 June. Schools, local councils, businesses and volunteers of all ages are also being invited to get involved. If you would like to litter-pick for Volunteers Week, then now is the time to plan an event, or work with your parish council to get one organised – and CPRE can help.

Guest speakers for 2009

For those wishing to book a guest speaker for an event, why not contact CPRE Norfolk? The Norfolk Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England has a number of excellent speakers, who can talk on a range of subjects, including Renewable Energy and Green Buildings in Norfolk, Landscapes of East Anglia, Light Pollution or The Vernacular Architecture of Breckland. Speakers can also talk about specific CPRE Norfolk issues, including a

Hints and tips about litter-picking, together with details of already planned litter-picking events across the county, are available from the CPRE-supported website www.litteraction.org.uk. The CPRE Norfolk office can also provide guidance on litter-picking, information on local equipment supplies and posters. The Eastern Daily Press will be running articles to promote the week and featuring groups running events.

CPRE Norfolk would be happy to hear about any groups or individuals that will be litter-picking during Clean Up Norfolk week. Please let us know of your plans and your successes!

Contact: CPRE Norfolk – 01603 761660 / info@cprenorfolk.org.uk

history of the charity, or the CPRE Norfolk Awards Scheme which recognises excellence in conservation, restoration, environment, education and landscape projects.

For a full list of CPRE Norfolk speakers please contact Katy Jones, CPRE Norfolk Membership and Events Manager, Tel: 01603 761660 or email katyj@cprenorfolk.org.uk.

THE JOYS OF BLOSSOM

Has anyone else felt that the blossom been particularly spectacular this year? Abundant, colourful, scented – just glorious! Lucinda Mackworth-Young considers traditional attitudes to this quintessential spring feature.

Since ancient times blossom has been showered over a couple to celebrate their union and, in particular, to wish them fertility. Not only blossom, but any petals were used, as were nuts, grains and seeds with their clear association with the fruits of the earth. Of the blossoms and petals, orange (symbolic of purity) and rose (symbolic of love) have been the most popular.

There was also an association with May blossom and Greenwood Marriages or Handfasting (marriages that lasted for a year and a day). But, as these practices were part of the pagan – or country – celebration of Beltane, in which May blossom was gathered overnight and many a young woman was joyfully deflowered, they fell out of favour. It then became 'unlucky' to pick May blossom, particularly to take it indoors, and 'unlucky' to get married in May. As the more recent saying went: "Marry in May, Rue the day"!

Today's confetti originated in Italy. Meaning 'sweetmeats' in Italian, it referred to the small candies which were wrapped in colourful paper and thrown during carnivals. In England we just used the paper – at weddings! Nowadays, confetti is banned at many churches and town halls unless it is biodegradable. So what could be better than weddings during April and May with nature's own glorious blessing?



Blossom at Clermont House, April 2009

photo by John Davies

UNIQUE BRECKS CHURCH UNDER REPAIR



Repairs are now well underway on one of the most interesting churches in the western Brecks, St John the Evangelist in Oxborough. The church's Bedingfield Chapel was closed two years ago due to an unsafe and leaking roof which threatened to damage the exquisite early 16th-century terracotta screens housed in the chapel. Faced with a repair bill in excess of £125,000, the congregation and local residents mounted an appeal which raised £48,000, an extraordinary result for such a small village. Grants from English Heritage, Norfolk Churches Trust and National Churches Trust, plus two other smaller bodies, have provided the balance. Work started in February, the repairs programme having been designed to provide minimal disturbance to the bat colonies that live in the church roof. The Bedingfield Chapel itself is scheduled to reopen later in the summer upon completion of the work.

Two carved angels from the chapel roof



Breckland Quiz Answers

- 1 The term, of medieval origin, is defined as being an area of heathland that has been broken up for temporary cultivation before being allowed to revert to wilderness.
- 2 Thomas Paine
- 3 The executors of Maharajah Duleep Singh
- 4 Ceres, the Roman goddess of the harvest
- 5 W E Johns, of Biggles fame
- 6 Stone curlew
- 7 The Cadogan family
- 8 West Stow Country Park
- 9 About 300 pingos, circular ponds created in the ice age
- 10 Wayland Wood