

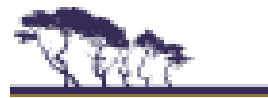
ROUND-UP OF RECENT SOCIETY EVENTS October to December 2004

The run-up to Christmas last year saw a series of highly successful events. In early October, Hugh Lupton and company performed their spell-binding *A Songline for East Anglia*. This cycle of stories and songs, a celebration of the Peddars Way, proved to be quite magical, and conveyed beautifully the spiritual quality of this ancient pathway. The words and music were accompanied by images of sculptures that were specially commissioned to be placed along the Way as part of the project.

Dr Andrew Rogerson, from Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, came to Barnham Village Hall in November to speak to members about archaeological work in the Norfolk Brecks. Technical breakdown notwithstanding, Andrew gave an interesting overview of what is one of England's most productive areas, in terms of digs, and showed us pictures of some of the most dramatic finds.

Christmas was celebrated in grand style when over 80 members attended *Comfort and Joy: Christmas Through the Ages*, a miscellany of poetry and songs performed by Patience Tomlinson, David Timson and Helen Crayford. This proved to be one of several highlights of 2004, and we look forward to an equally exciting programme of events for 2005.

NEWS FROM THE BRECKS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



Brecks Walks and Cycle Rides

The last of the Heathland Events will be a cycle ride on **10 April** from 10am to 1pm. The ride, which follows forest tracks, starts at Weeting and visits two of the newly created heaths. This should be a lovely spring outing with the Brecks Heathland Officer.

There will also be a series of guided walks using local guides, and the first of these is in Oxborough on **5 May** with James Parry. The next one will be at Eriswell on **9 June**, with Alan Benton and Yvonne Leonard (£2 per head including refreshments).

If you are interested in leading a local walk, please contact the Brecks Countryside Project on 01842 765400. Equally, if you know your area but feel unsure about leading a walk, please get in touch and we can give you support/ training.

Surveying for otters in the Brecks

Otters are increasing in the Brecks, and twice a year 25 otter surveyors visit 65 sites looking under bridges for otter spraints and other signs of activity. Volunteers should phone Abby Stancliffe-Vaughan on 01842 761569.

Pine lines

There has been considerable press coverage of the restoration and replanting of pine lines in the Brecks, and the Brecks Countryside Project will be working on this with volunteers this spring and next winter.

If you know of any landowners in the area who would like assistance with this, please phone 01842 765400 for information.

WHAT'S ON

Forthcoming Society events

Saturday 19 February

Joint event with the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group: Dr Tom Williamson speaking on *Great Estates of 19th-century Breckland*. 7.00 for 7.30pm, Houghton Centre, South Pickenham. Admission free to Society/NHBG members, non-members £2. Refreshments will be available.

Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 February

Training days at Oak Lodge (High Lodge, Thetford Forest) for members wishing to carry out fieldwork for the Vernacular Architecture Survey. See front page for details.

Tuesday 1 March

Joint event with the Thetford Society, a thriving amenity and local history group with over 200 members. This will be an opportunity to discuss the Breckland Society's Vernacular Architecture Project, as well as other topics of interest to both groups. 7.30pm, United Reformed Church, Earl Street, Thetford. Admission free.

Sunday 20 March

Jenifer Roberts, author of the recent book *Glass: The Strange History of the Lyne Stephens Fortune*, will give a talk on the Lyne Stephens family, in particular their association with Lynford Hall (see further details on p. 2). To be held at Lynford Hall Hotel, 7.00pm. Numbers limited; tickets must be purchased in advance from Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190. £7.50 including wine.

Thursday 28 April

Morning field trip to hear woodlarks and, with luck, see goshawks at Mayday Farm, Brandon. Phone James Parry on 01366 328676 for time and meeting point.

Wednesday 22 June

Evening field trip to site near Newmarket to see chalkland flora, including a colony of the very rare lizard orchid. Full details will be in April newsletter.

The Breckland Society

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VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE PROJECT SET FOR LAUNCH IN FEBRUARY

Plans are well advanced for the launch of the Society's Vernacular Architecture Project in February. Recent weeks have seen much activity, including the appointment of Anne Mason, a leading authority on the heritage of the Brecks, as Survey Manager. Anne will be responsible for planning and overseeing the ten month-long survey stage of the project, during which every town and village within the Brecks ESA will be covered by teams of volunteer fieldworkers recording vernacular buildings dating from before 1920. This is a huge task, but absolutely central to the project as it will equip us with the data and knowledge required to produce an illustrated report on Breckland vernacular building types and styles and an exhibition which will tour local libraries, community centres and village halls.

There has been a lot of media interest in the project, with several local newspapers — including the Eastern Daily Press — running articles on what the Society is doing, as well as an illustrated feature in the February issue of the Norfolk Journal & East Anglian Life. We hope to continue attracting such positive publicity, and have also placed information about the project on the Society's website at www.brecsoc.org.uk.

Meanwhile Anne has been working on the logistics of organising the survey. She has prepared a buildings recording form for the fieldworkers to use, based on a tick box system which will enable non-specialists to record a building's approximate date, main construction features, materials and other aspects of interest. Only the exterior of buildings will be recorded, and all survey work will be done from the public highway unless the permission of the householder is forthcoming to enter gardens, etc. Digital cameras will be available for fieldworkers to make a visual record of the buildings.

Fancy helping out with the survey?

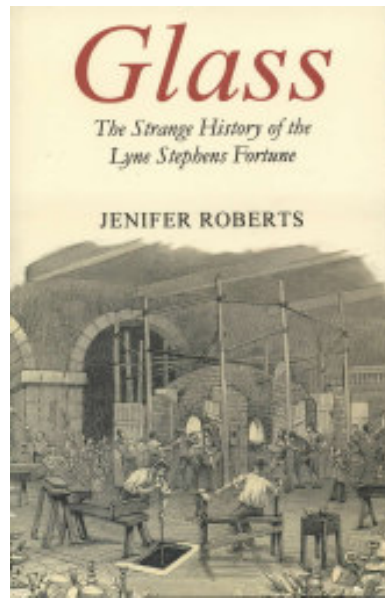
We are still looking for volunteers to help with the buildings survey. You need have no architectural background, just an interest in your local area's buildings and the willingness to devote a day or so during the next nine months to walking around your village or town, taking photographs and recording what you see on a form. Two training days will be held to explain exactly what's required. These are scheduled for **Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th February**, and will be held at Oak Lodge, High Lodge Forest Centre, near Brandon. You only need attend one of the days; each will comprise a two-hour 'classroom' session, during which the objectives of the survey will be explained, along with the main features to look out for, followed by lunch and a two-hour site visit to a nearby village to test out the recording form in practice.



BRECKLAND COUNCIL TO SURVEY LISTED BUILDINGS

The Society's vernacular architecture project has been boosted by the news that Breckland Council has announced plans to carry out a comprehensive survey of all the listed buildings in the district. Starting this month and funded by a government grant, the survey is the first of its type to be carried out by a local authority anywhere in the country and will involve the inspection of over 1,600 buildings across the area. The listing of historic buildings – Grade I, II* and II – is the responsibility of English Heritage and the Department of Culture, Media & Sport, based partly on recommendations from local authorities. Breckland DC will develop a database of the survey's findings, including detailed descriptions, condition surveys and photographs.

With the Breckland Society simultaneously surveying the thousands of historic buildings that are not considered of sufficient interest to be listed in their own right but which still make an enormous contribution to our townscapes, Breckland will soon have the most up-to-date architectural record of any district in the country.



THE STORY OF YOLANDE LYNE STEPHENS AND LYNFORD HALL

Lynford Hall is one of the most celebrated of the great estates of the Brecks. Although there has been a house on the site since at least the early seventeenth century, Lynford came to the fore in the mid-nineteenth century under the ownership of Stephens Lyne Stephens, famously described as the 'richest commoner in England'. Lyne Stephens commissioned a lavish new house, designed by William Burn 1856-61 and described by Pevsner as 'a kind of Parisian neo-Jacobean'. The French angle doubtless came from Lyne Stephens's wife Yolande, an ex-ballet dancer from Paris, whose colourful background prompted a less than rapturous reception from the conservative local gentry.

Sadly, Lyne Stephens did not live to see his house completed. He died in 1860, leaving a pile of outstanding debts and bills, and although Yolande was left £1 million in his will, the lawyers and trustees fought hard to do her out of much of the legacy and even tried to sell off Lynford. At one stage Queen Victoria was considering buying it for the Prince of Wales, but she eventually chose Sandringham instead. Meanwhile, Yolande continued to spend several months a year at Lynford, complete with Italian butler, French chef and some poodles. She died there in August 1894, still mostly shunned by Norfolk society. Today she is best known for commissioning the charming Catholic chapel on the Lynford estate.

The extraordinary story of Yolande and Lynford Hall is the subject of a special talk to be given to the Society on **Sunday 20 March** by Jenifer Roberts, author of the 2003 book *Glass - The Strange History of the Lyne Stephens Fortune*. Entitled *A Ballerina in Norfolk*, this event will be held at Lynford Hall itself, with the cooperation of Lynford Hall Hotel (see back page for details of how to apply for tickets).

NEWS FROM THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND

The CPRE Breckland branch has continued to play an active role in monitoring planning applications and development issues generally across the district. The issue of wind farms continues to exercise many minds, from the planning officers handling the growing number of applications in Norfolk to the local residents who are faced with living next door to the turbines. As enthusiastic as we all are about developing alternative and greener sources of energy, it is difficult to accept the impact on the landscape of inappropriately located wind turbines. Certainly, the rush to embrace the concept of sustainable energy sources has led to a degree of myopia in certain quarters about the potentially negative impact on wildlife, tranquillity and visual amenity.

Against this backdrop, Breckland Council was recently asked to comment on an application for a wind farm at Guestwick, west of Aylsham, which although within Broadland DC, was considered to have a potential impact on Breckland. Yet again, the debate produced a knife-edge vote, with Breckland eventually voting to approve the application only after the chairman forced it through with his casting vote. It is disappointing that decisions on such divisive and contentious applications are coming down to the views of just one individual. Meanwhile, North Norfolk DC is objecting to the application. Broadland are to consider it in March.

On a lighter note, CPRE Breckland are holding a social event, to be combined with their AGM, on **Friday 4 March at 7.30pm in Wayland Hall, Watton**. Joanne Kidd, a lecturer for the National Association of Decorative Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS), will give a talk on 'Green & Pleasant Land - The History and Development of the British Garden'. Breckland Society members are very welcome. Tickets cost £6.50, to include wine and nibbles, and are available from Keith Wood on 01362 820804.

BRECKLAND BIRDS: THE WOODLARK AND THE GOSHAWK

Although clearly very different, these two birds have something in common: Thetford Forest is one of their British headquarters, and among the best places to observe them. There, however, the similarity ends. The goshawk remains a tricky bird to track down, despite its size (which can be close to that of a buzzard), whereas the woodlark has become a regular sight and sound on areas of clear-fell in the Brecks. In good conditions in spring - a still and mild day is most suitable - the air can seem full of the woodlark's fluty song. Such days also offer the most likely chance to see goshawks soaring and, with luck, displaying over the forest.

Both species have a chequered history in this country. Never numerous, the goshawk was probably exterminated as a native breeding species during the 19th century, the victim of gamekeepers and egg collectors, but since the 1960s it has recolonised Britain through a combination of vagrants from Scandinavia (where it remains common) and released/escaped captive birds. The British population remains quite small - probably no more than 400 pairs in any one

year, and widely scattered - but goshawks are back, and doing well. They are secretive birds, and surprisingly unobtrusive. This makes it difficult to be certain how many pairs are resident in the Brecks, but it is probably in the region of 20. They require large areas of undisturbed forest and hunt like over-sized sparrowhawks, flying low and fast through the trees and relying on surprise tactics to down wood pigeons, pheasant and similar-sized prey.

The history of the woodlark in Britain is rather more complex than that of the goshawk. Woodlarks require open areas of lightly-wooded country - heathland is especially favoured - in which to prosper, and so their numbers and distribution have always reflected the availability of this habitat. Common in the first half of the 19th century, they declined as heathland was enclosed and ploughed up, then expanded again during periods of agricultural depression (when land came out of production and heathland reasserted itself), only to be hit hard during the post-Second World War period, when the intensification of agriculture reduced their habitat again. Since the 1960s, however, numbers have spiralled as woodlarks have taken advantage of newly planted forestry and, more recently, areas of

restored heathland. The British population now stands at 2,000 pairs or so, of which over 400 are in the Brecks.

Although well camouflaged when on the ground, woodlarks are relatively easy to find when singing. They have a lyrical and melodic song, usually delivered from a broken off tree branch or from the air, the males performing a circular aerial flight before dropping to the ground or back to a perch. The woodlark's short tail and fluttering flight is reminiscent of a bat, and they are very different in 'jizz' from the skylark, their larger cousin.

We hope to see both these Breckland specialities on a field trip to Mayday Farm, near Brandon, on 28 April. See back page for details.

THETFORD ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

On 2 October 2004 the Ancient House Museum in Thetford closed for redevelopment.

The Ancient House Museum is housed in a magnificent merchant's house, built about 1490, with an extension added about 1590. The house is jettied and timber-framed, using oak with wattle and daub in-fill, and with fine carved ceilings and fireplace timbers. The museum itself was founded in the 1920s by Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, the second son of the Elveden Maharajah, and holds a range of original family photographs and items from the family's collections.

The redevelopment will undertake sensitive conservation work that will ensure the long-term future of this important listed building. An extension will create more space for displays and improved visitor facilities, and there will be a top-to-toe re-display of the museum using films, hands-on displays and costumed characters to bring the museum and its stories to life. The museum will reopen in Spring 2006.

Mark Elwes, representing the Society, attended a talk in December 2004 by Stephen Heywood, Norfolk County Council's Conservation Officer. He traced the history of this amazing building and drew attention to its unique architectural features.

What has always been a good museum will next year become aoutstanding.

Thetford was once famed for its outstanding timber-framed buildings, although many have been obscured by subsequent render.



SIGNALLING THE END OF THE WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH?



The Brecks Countryside Project is highlighting a growing problem in our waterways, and particularly in the River Lark.

Our native white-clawed crayfish is now no longer to be found in the River Lark. In fact, the crayfish you are now most likely to meet in the Brecks is the red signal crayfish ... and it shouldn't be here!

Alien crayfish escaped, or possibly were introduced, into our rivers and are now wreaking havoc. The red signal crayfish destroys populations of the white-clawed native, being larger, more aggressive and faster-breeding, and also because it carries a disease to which the white-clawed has no defence.

There are now no native white-clawed crayfish on the River Lark, says the Brecks Countryside Project, and the red signal crayfish continues to damage our rivers, eroding banks by burrowing. The bankside erosion is a serious issue, causing increased risk of flooding in some areas and requiring expensive engineering work. By being an alien interloper the red signal crayfish also threatens our native biodiversity, although their effect on other riverine species is not fully understood - and otters do eat them.

Although eradication of the red signal crayfish is probably impossible, some measure of control is necessary, and the Brecks Countryside Project is hoping to support the work of the Lark Angling and Preservation Society by encouraging other groups to help trap the aliens on the Lark. If you would like to join "crayfishing days" run by the Lark Angling and Preservation Society, telephone Richard West on 01842 815421 from 5 May onwards.

If you would like to help with a pilot project on the River Lark, please contact the Brecks Countryside Project on 01842 761569 or brecks.project@et.sufolkcc.gov.uk

The powerfully-built red signal crayfish has proved more than a match for our native white-clawed variety