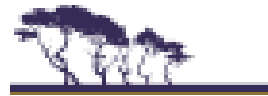


## Events Round-Up



The Society's 2005 Christmas Extravaganza at The Houghton Centre was a great success. *Christmas Is A-Comin'* was a medley of music, song and readings, performed by, from the left, Andres Hernandez, Lucinda Mackworth-Young, Suzanne Francis, Tony Hopping and Jeremy Ard. Mark Elwes, right, gave the vote of thanks.

## NEWS FROM THE BRECKS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



### Brecks Public Art Project

In 2005 the Brecks Tourism Partnership decided to commission a work or works of art for the Brecks, and initiated a process to select an artist. It is intended that the chosen artist will produce a work of art which will enhance Breckland's special identity, reflecting the area's landscape, its history and its rich natural habitat. Part of the brief for the artist is to involve the community, with meetings, workshops and/or presentations. It is anticipated that the work will be completed and installed by July this year. At the time of going to press the designated site has not been announced.

The Breckland Society was represented on the selection panel who met the artists and, from a strong shortlist, chose Keith Rand, whose work demonstrates great sensibility towards the environment he is working in. We very much look forward to seeing his new work.

### Scottish Dancing at the Houghton Centre

South Pickenham, Nr Swaffham

Relaxed and fun, Scottish dancing will recommence on the following Friday evenings at 7.00pm:

24<sup>th</sup> February, 24<sup>th</sup> March

All welcome, whether or not you've danced before.

£5 per evening, or £30 for the season, to include tea, coffee, juice and biscuits.

Contact **Lucinda Mackworth-Young**: tel 01760 441444 mobile: 07850 912006 email musicmindmovement@btinternet.com

## WHAT'S ON

### Forthcoming Society events

#### Friday 10 February Deadly landscapes: crime-writing in East Anglia

Why do so many crime writers choose to set their stories in the towns and landscapes of Norfolk and Suffolk? Deborah Usher, a lecturer on the art and literature of East Anglia, will give an illustrated talk.

7.30pm at the Houghton Centre. Tickets £5 (to include a glass of wine) from Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190.

#### Wednesday 22 March

Talk by local botanist Yvonne Leonard on the plants of Breckland. Barnham Village Hall, 7.30 pm, tickets £3 at the door.

#### Saturday 29 April

Society members are offered a rare opportunity to tour the Battle Area. Numbers will be strictly limited, and so tickets will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

More information is available from Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190 or whittlely@lineone.net

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info@brecsoc.org.uk  
www.brecsoc.org.uk

## THE MILITARY TRAINING AREA AT STANFORD – CONSERVATION OF A UNIQUE HERITAGE

*If you look at a map of Breckland, you will see the words Danger Area written across a large part of it. This is the area known officially as the Stanford Training Area, usually referred to locally as the Battle Area. It is an area of considerable landscape and archaeological value, with 26 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and many rare and uncommon plants, birds and animals, most notably the otter, great crested newt, woodlark and, famously, the stone curlew.*

Breckland has connections with modern warfare stretching back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1911, 30,000 soldiers were involved in manoeuvres on the heaths around Thetford and were accommodated in bell tents on the former warren with their mules and weaponry. East Road, Thetford, was used as a landing ground for aircraft testing the feasibility of using planes to support ground troops in war. In 1916, Lloyd George reviewed tank trials on Lakenheath Warren, prior to their being used at the Battle of Cambrai and on the Somme. During the Second World War, an army training camp was established at High Ash, on the A1065 north of Mundford, now marked by a Cromwell tank placed at the entrance. Forestry Commission all-ability trail and interpretation boards tell the story of its use by the Desert Rats. Airfields were developed at Feltwell, Watton, Tuddenham, East Wretham, Bodney and Knettishall, and Lakenheath and Mildenhall were expanded.



Stone curlew

It was in 1942 that the Ministry of Defence requisitioned 7,000 hectares around Stanford for integrated training of troops and air power, using live ammunition. This meant that the villages of West Tofts, Buckenham Tofts, Tottington, Langford, Sturston and Stanford had to be cleared and the 600 inhabitants had to move out, with three weeks' notice. These



Great crested newt

six communities consisted largely of estate tenants, with sheep farming and warrening as the traditional occupations.

Echoing developments in other parts of Breckland, this area became dominated by the creation of large estates as a result of low land prices. Though some, such as the Walsingham Estate centred on Merton, had remained in the same family for generations, new estates were created by those who had made their money in trade or industry. Mr Vincent, an officer in the excise, built a magnificent house at Buckenham Tofts and surrounded it with a landscaped park which became one of the finest in Norfolk. The stable block of the hall survives, as do many of the plantations and avenues of trees. Sir Payne Galway, who had made a fortune in the West Indies, and bought the West Tofts Estate, also planted trees on a vast scale.

White's Directory of 1845 lists the villages and shows that they were quite small communities. West Tofts had 182 inhabitants, Buckenham Tofts 77, Langford 57 and Sturston only 47. Tottington, owned by Lord Walsingham, was larger, with 340 people, and Stanford, on the turnpike road between Brandon and Watton, had 180 with a shop, school and inn. Each of these communities had its own church but, by 1883, those of Buckenham Tofts and Sturston were described as "a heap of ruins". Now, the Ministry of Defence

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has to keep the remaining churches watertight and descendants of the villagers evicted in 1942 are allowed back once a year to visit the graveyards.

In 1950, the Battle Area was acquired by compulsory purchase and now military exercises go on all year, with the exception of April, when the sheep are lambing. The sheep graze the area to reduce fire risk and to maintain the short grassland that provides a habitat for traditional Breckland plants, insects and birds, notably the stone curlew. More than half a million broadleaved trees have been planted in recent years, with the emphasis on native



Woodlark

trees such as beech, oak and wild cherry. As well as woodland, there are areas of heathland, lakes (both natural and man-made), marshes, a river and several streams. The water systems and associated wetlands support a number of diverse species, the most famous being the otter, which was reintroduced in the 1990s and is still present, and the great crested newt. Brown trout, dace, eel, chub, rudd, gudgeon and pike have been found in the rivers. This varied terrain supports over 600 registered flowering plants, of which 28 are rare or uncommon. Thirty-two types of

butterfly, 414 moths and 27 mammals have been identified. Six sites in the area have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the largest in single ownership in lowland Britain.

The use of Stanford as a military training area has preserved a substantial archaeological landscape, with 26 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, all of which are protected. The minimal nature of agricultural expansion in the area, together with the lack of tank exercises, has ensured that the sites are maintained in a good state of preservation. In 1996 the Breckland Archaeological Survey listed 42 earthwork sites in the area, including 28 barrows, two enclosures, two flint mines, two deserted medieval villages, field systems, a floated water meadow and five moated sites. There have also been several artifact finds.

Public access is difficult to allow for safety reasons: live shells and mortar bombs, dating from the Second World War onwards, are found regularly during clearance operations. Because of this risk, coupled with the high troop usage, sophisticated electronic target equipment and other range installations, as well as arable and livestock enterprise, there is only restricted access to the training area (although there is a permissive footpath along the Watton Brook, from Great Cressingham to Bodney).

A visit is always a very special experience. You see evidence of military use: the "European Village" built for training during the Cold War and a check-point of the kind used in Northern Ireland. Plinths mark the sites of buildings in the abandoned villages and groups of mature trees remain from the landscaped parks. On non-training days, there is only the sound of the sheep and birdsong; a sense of remoteness and of great beauty, untouched.

*Thanks to Tony Powell and Anne Mason for the information in this article.*

Society members are offered a rare opportunity to tour the Battle Area on **Saturday 29 April**. Numbers will be strictly limited, and so tickets will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. More information is available from Sue Whittley on 01366 328190 or whittley@lineone.net

## THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE PROJECT MOVES ON

*With the new year now under way, we are about to start the next two stages of the Vernacular Architecture Project.*

The first of these is the Oral History Archive, for which we will be interviewing master craftsmen and builders who work (or have worked in the past) with the traditional Breckland building materials – flint, chalk and clay lump. We shall also be recording the experiences of those who have been involved in maintaining and renovating such buildings, whether as owners, tenants or workers.

So – volunteers are needed to help compile this archive! Training and guidance will be given, and all that is required is an interest in local history and the ability to talk to others in a structured and accessible way which enables them to tell their story. There has already been tremendous volunteer involvement in the buildings survey and many members of the Society have given very generously of their time. Perhaps those of you who were unable to undertake the survey might like to volunteer for this part of the project? And anyone who has already been a surveyor is welcome to take part too!

We are holding a training day on Saturday 4 March, from 10am to 3pm, at Oak Lodge, High Lodge Forest Centre. There is no charge to those participating; coffee and lunch will be provided, and attendance will not mean that you have to commit to interviewing! The course will be led by Sarah Housden, who has been involved in the Second World War Reminiscences Project and has many years' experience.

This should be a very interesting day, and if you would like to acquire general oral history skills, then please take advantage of this opportunity. An application form is included with this newsletter.

The next stage of the Project – holding workshops for apprentices in traditional building techniques – is now being planned, and workshops will take place during the summer. More details will follow in the next newsletter, but if you have any ideas or recommendations, please phone Anne Mason on 01760 755685, or email [anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk)

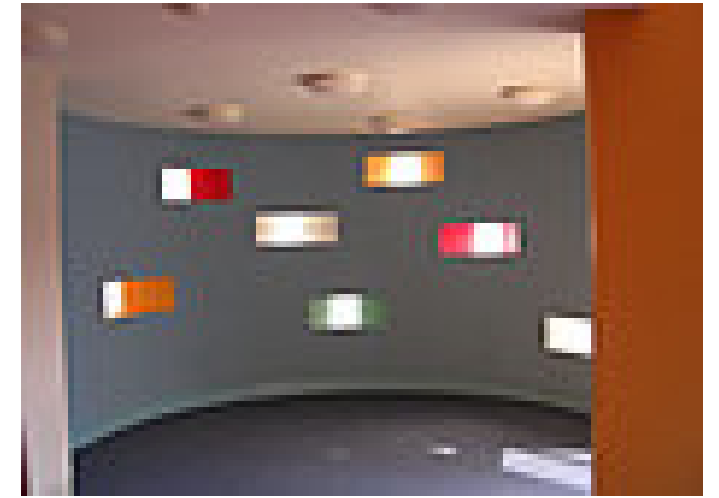
## THE NEW ENERGY-EFFICIENT COMMUNITY CENTRE IN SWAFFHAM

*In 2005, countryside campaigners CPRE Norfolk (the Norfolk branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England) celebrated 25 years of their environmental awards scheme. It is the longest-running awards scheme in the county: since the scheme began in 1980, over 300 Norfolk buildings and projects have been recognised, including schools' environmental work, building restorations and conversions, landscape management projects, and new contemporary architecture. Local architect Jeremy Stacey won an award for his community centre building in Swaffham, which has provoked much local comment, both favourable and hostile. In this article Jeremy explains his response to the challenges of designing a building for our age.*

Sandwiched between chapters titled Poets and Politicians and Essential Communism in a collection of essays titled Anarchy and Order written in 1938 by Herbert Read is a chapter called Why we English have no taste. He bemoans a lack of distinctiveness and the desire to be normal and conform that pervades all aspects of day-to-day life, resulting in a poverty of ideas. Anything that does not conform must be ridiculed.

In West Norfolk the same is true today, the building illustrated here has been described in the press as ghastly, a fine example of an eyesore, a monstrosity.

A discussion about design quality based on an understanding of the principles behind a design is still not part of everyday life, yet it is something that affects us all. There is no accepted common language to discuss design, the importance of critical analysis, the site and a relationship with the environment on a wider scale. Throughout the recent past the West has relied on fossil fuels to fulfil its energy needs. The ever-increasing emissions result in climate change affecting us all, including those



parts of the world least able to respond. This is why we need to consider low-energy buildings; it is not about saving money but about investing in the planet. This means that buildings will need to look different; at the simplest level, the warm south elevation will need to be different from the cold north elevation.

Planning committees and their advisory panels too often allow personal taste or preference to become the subject of the debate rather than the quality of the proposition being submitted. In rural areas and small towns it can appear that the level of critical debate is restricted to a persistent call for a new building to be "in keeping" with its neighbours. Supermarkets continue to be built to look like a populist memory of what a farm building might have been, disguising the global capitalism behind their inappropriate face. Houses continue to be built in a rosy image of village housing, taking a model from an age of repression rather than enlightenment, and set out on site plans having no regard for overall form, massing or orientation.

Our building, the Swaffham Community Centre, deliberately does not conform and as a result should inspire and delight.



The Chairman adds: