

RECENT EVENTS

A birder's year in Norfolk

On Thursday 22 November, Allan Hale produced a fascinating evening at Beachamwell Village Hall. His collection of slides was wonderful and his descriptions a great help to all those who can never remember the difference between a marsh tit and willow tit!

The talk was also illustrated with photographs of the seasons in Beachamwell, showing a variety scenes in the village throughout the year.

One of his most dramatic sequences was taken when he was watching a bittern fishing at the edge of the reeds: a heron flew into its space and a fight took place between the two. The result was some great shots, showing the ruff on the neck of the bittern. How we would all have loved to be in that situation. It was a great evening with a full hall of supporters.



Members of the Constance Ensemble, with some of their instruments

Jonathan Radford, who dazzled us with his saxophone. All the musicians impressed us with their virtuosity, their stage presence, and their ability to communicate with their audience. It was a magical evening, and it was a privilege to be there, with those exceptional young people. We wish them all well as they work towards what will surely be glittering careers.

The Christmas Concert

All those of us who were at the Christmas Concert at Houghton Barns on 15 December were surely aware that we were watching and listening to something special. These were young people with local roots, even if they were by now studying at Chethams School of Music or the Birmingham Conservatoire. The programme was wonderfully varied, ranging from early music played by the Constance Ensemble, to the impressive Fauré fantasie for flute played with sparkle by Rosie Sells, a Beethoven piano sonata played by Chloe Martindale, and extraordinary performances from



Jonathan Radford

NEWS FROM THE BRECKS PROJECT



The Brecks is one of three areas in Norfolk that are invited to apply for a new programme of EU funding, called LEADER, designed to deliver the Rural Development Programme for England. The focus is on "improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors, improving the environment and the countryside, and raising the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy".



CPRE Norfolk (Campaign to Protect Rural England - Norfolk Branch) will soon be recruiting for the following part-time posts:

Administrator/Book-keeper

Membership and Events Manager

Recruitment will take place during the first part of February. Both posts will be based at the Norwich office. Further details are available by email only: please contact info@cprenorfolk.org.uk

In addition, the Honorary Treasurer has served his five-year tenure and will be stepping down at the next AGM. This is a voluntary role and expressions of interest to the Director would be welcome. Please contact 01603 761660.

There are as yet no specific guidelines as what projects would be eligible for funding, but is expected that £500,000 would be available for grant aid in the Brecks each year over the next six years.

The scheme will be run through structures known as Local Action Groups, and it appears likely that the Breckland Society will form part of this.

Bids will be submitted by mid-March, and we hope that by the time our next newsletter is due we shall know a great deal more about it.

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



ARTS FUNDING CUTS HIT RURAL EAST ANGLIA

Throughout East Anglia, arts organisations are licking their wounds following the announcement of severe cuts in funding by Arts Council England. Unless the proposals are reversed, Creative Arts East and Eastern Angles will lose significant proportions of their grant, Norwich Puppet Theatre will lose all its allocation, as will London Sinfonia, putting a question mark over the residency of this fine orchestra at King's Lynn.

East Anglia is not, of course, the only area to be affected by this cull of cultural resources for rural areas; almost 200 organisations nationally may be affected. But it would seem that our area is being particularly badly hit. Creative Arts East brings high-quality arts programmes to local venues, many of these aimed at young people, as well as to older people in residential homes and day care centres, and to adults with disabilities. Their Village Screen programme provides equipment and supporting volunteers to promote cinema in local venues. Through Village Stage they support community volunteers in the promotion of professional arts events. Their Music Wise and Youth Arts programmes cater specifically for young and disadvantaged people. If they lose their grant none of this work can continue.

Eastern Angles, the Ipswich-based theatre company, are well known throughout East Anglia, regularly touring four counties. As well as playing in major venues, they bring their theatre to village halls, schools and community centres, giving many people in outlying villages an opportunity they would otherwise have to travel many miles to see. They bring excellence to our doorstep, and regularly play to packed houses. The Arts Council is proposing to cut their grant by almost fifty per cent. As Eastern Angles' Artistic Director, Ivan Cutting says, these cuts "will strike at the heart of [our] work, and jeopardise our ability to take theatre to the most far-flung communities of East Anglia".

These cuts are part of a national reassessment by Arts Council England (ACE) of its portfolio. In the eastern region it seems that arts provision for rural communities has suffered the brunt of the cutbacks. ACE have explained the cuts as a move "to prioritise increased revenue funding for the region's major capital partnership projects and for the development of arts organisations in some of



The Eastern Angles, during a performance of A Dulditch Angel, a play based on the life of Breckland author Mary Mann

WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events

Saturday 23 February

Field-walking event, 10am-3pm

Places will be limited, so advance booking is essential. Please contact **Anne Mason** on 01760 755685 to book.

Saturday 19 April

Visit to Culford with art historian Ann Gore, who will talk about the landscape designed by Humphry Repton.

Once again, places will be limited, so advance booking is essential - contact James Parry on 01366 328676.

The AGM will take place in mid-May, and details will be sent to members as soon as they are known.

the region's key geographical locations". This argument appears to contradict their previously stated commitment to rural resources, and to ignore the contribution rural communities make to life in Britain.

Art needs patrons. ACE has in the past been a valuable supporter of art of all forms, working to make excellence universally available, promoting cultural links in rural communities as well as funding the major projects in the principal centres. The removal of these life-lines will impoverish the lives of many people in the remoter parts of the country.

Whilst many organisations will be celebrating increases in their grants, it seems that rural areas have suffered disproportionately in this shake-up of arts funding.

The Society's Chairman wrote to the Arts Council, protesting about the scale of the proposed cuts and asking for reconsideration in the case of Eastern Angles. The Council's Chief Executive, Peter Hewitt, replied

admitting that, whilst the Council had received a "good financial settlement" from Government for the next three years, it had decided that, rather than simply continuing the funding of all existing recipients, it would "take a bolder path". The thrust of this new approach seems to mean giving more money to fewer organisations, and the message to those who are not among the chosen few appears to be "tough". We are assured, meanwhile, in classic contemporary jargon, that the Council "will continue to ensure that there is a wide range of product [sic] on offer to audiences in the East of England".

This clearly may not now include Eastern Angles. Final funding decisions are expected in early February, and we can only hope that sense will prevail. You can sign the petition on the Eastern Angles' website, www.easternangles.co.uk, if you wish to add your name to the protest.



THE COUNTRY ROOTS OF OUR EASTER FESTIVITIES

This year, Easter Sunday falls very early, on 23 March, coinciding exactly with the spring equinox, which falls each year between 20 and 23 March, depending on exactly when the sun crosses the earth's equator. Have you even wondered why the word Easter seems to have nothing to do with the resurrection of Jesus? Or why we celebrate with chocolate eggs, bunnies and hot cross buns? Lucinda Mackworth-Young continues her exploration of the origins of our traditions.

Long before Christianity, the spring equinox was the time when the ancient goddess of spring was celebrated. Her name, in Anglo-Saxon, was Eostre or Ostara. Not only the word Easter, but also the words oestrus and oestrogen (the feminine reproductive hormone) were derived from her name. Eostre was also the goddess of dawn, or of the growing light as, from the equinox, the days lengthened to become longer than the nights. She was associated with feminine fertility, and with the hare. Her festival, in reflection of the natural world at that time of year, celebrated rebirth, revival and resurrection.

Our ancestors honoured and celebrated the earth's changing seasons on eight particular days of the year, spread a month and a half apart: midwinter, Candlemas, the spring equinox, Mayday, midsummer, Lammas, the autumn equinox and Hallowe'en. At these festivals energy was raised through communal singing, dancing and ritual (much as we do in church today) with the aid of the four elements, earth, air, water and fire - still present in our services as flowers, incense, water and candles.

Depending on the time of year, different symbols were used as a focus for celebration. At the spring equinox our traditional Easter symbols of decorated chocolate eggs and pictures of chicks and bunnies were very much in evidence as real eggs, birds and rabbits. And the traditional Easter colours of green and yellow were present in new shoots, leaves



and daffodils. Perhaps the most important symbol was, and still is, the egg, representing the eternal cycle of life, and thus eternity. Games and activities involving eggs took place, and still take place at this time of year.

According to legend, on Eostre's Day a hare laid an egg to symbolise the renewal of eternal life. The legend has come down to us as the Easter Bunny leaving decorated eggs in the garden for good children to

find. Once found, eggs were often imbued with wishes, and the wished-on eggs were then blown, decorated and hung indoors on branches that had fallen from trees. Blown and decorated eggs were also given as presents to symbolise eternal friendship. Eggs were also hard-boiled, decorated or marked for recognition, and rolled down hills in races.



While the bunny is perhaps the second most common symbol of Easter nowadays, it was particularly the hare that embodied the spirit of the spring equinox in earlier times. Hares have long symbolised not only freedom of spirit and courage, but also fertility.

Hot cross buns, or special cakes marked with an equal-armed cross to divide them into four quarters, were traditionally baked as moon cakes, the four quarters representing the four lunar quarters: waxing, full, waning and the dark of the moon. Coincidentally, our traditional hot cross bun day, Good Friday, falls on a full moon this year. And it is interesting to remember that the date of our Easter Day is calculated afresh each year by the lunar calendar from the spring equinox.

Just as the hours of daylight and dark were equal, or in balance, at the spring equinox, so it would have been a time for balance in people's outdoor work and indoor home life, outer projects and inner spiritual life. From then, as the hours of sunlight gradually increased, bringing increased light and warmth people would have felt more energy. Traditionally a time to spring clean, to throw out old, unwanted stuff, whether physical or spiritual, it was also a time to look outwards, to feel encouraged by the new young shoots of projects, to be bold and courageous, like the March Hare, in implementing new ideas, and to feel renewed faith and hope, as an inner, spiritual response to the resurrection of the natural world around them.

SOCIETY VISIT TO CULFORD

On Saturday 19 April, Society members will have the opportunity to visit the Repton landscape park at Culford, a village about six miles north of Bury St Edmunds. The village is probably best known for Culford School, which moved there from Bury in 1935.

Culford is mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Book, the survey by William the Conqueror of his newly won lands. The medieval manor was owned by the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds and bought by the Bacon family in 1540 after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Sir Nathaniel Bacon, son of Sir Nicholas, who had been Elizabeth I's Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, built the first hall on the present site in 1591. The estate passed to the Cornwallis Family in 1660 and a new hall was built between 1790 and 1796, with Samuel Wyatt as architect.

In 1792, in one of his Red Books, Humphry Repton provided plans for the landscaping of the park. In 1823, the estate was sold to Richard Benyon de Beauvoir and another estate plan of 1834 shows major expansion of the parkland.

When the fifth Earl of Cadogan bought the estate in 1889, the hall was enlarged by William Young in the Italianate style and new stables were added.

Culford itself is a superb example of a planned estate village, with a very recognisable and coherent style of building for the dwellings, in brick and flint with bargeboards. Many of the buildings have plaques

to commemorate the owners of the Hall who successively developed the village. Even the church, standing just inside the park, was completely rebuilt by the Reverend Edward Benyon in the 1850s.

With all these alterations and additions, different architects and landscape gardeners, Culford Park is a very complex site. The Breckland Society's visit on 19 April should be a fascinating afternoon when art historian Ann Gore will interpret for us the changes that have taken place within the park and, in particular, what remains of Repton's landscape.

Places on this tour must be booked in advance. Please contact James Parry on 01366 328676.



Humphry Repton, 1752-1818, landscape architect

FIELD-WALKING AT ILLINGTON

On Saturday 23 February, members of the Breckland Society will be learning the techniques of field-walking and how to care for any artefacts we find. This event will take place at Illington and the Society is very grateful to Mr Richard Johnston for giving us permission to walk one of his fields.

Illington is approximately seven miles northeast of Thetford and five miles north of Wretham, lying in a shallow valley of sandy soil with chalk beneath. There are some patches of clay and gravel from glacial deposits, and names on the Tithe Map such as Clay Pit Piece and Sand Hill Close suggest quarrying in the past.

Although it now consists of only two farms and some scattered cottages, it has had a long sequence of settlement, dating back to the prehistoric period and notably the Iron Age. There were two small Romano-British farmsteads and evidence of Early Saxon settlement (5th century AD) came with the discovery and excavation of a cemetery in 1949.

Later Saxon and early Medieval (12th century) pottery has been found near the church, which appears to have been sited in the southeast corner of the village, though the distribution of finds suggests that the settlement pattern shifted in the medieval period.

The first possible record for Illington is in the will, dated 957AD, of Theodred, Bishop of London, in which there is mention of 'the estate which I have at Illyntone' (although some historians think this may refer to Hillington). At Domesday, it was owned by William de Warenne, son-in-law of William the Conqueror, with one freeman, seven villeins and ten bordars. There were damp grazing meadows by the stream and fold-courses for sheep extending over the infield, outfield and heath.

By 1346, there were two manors on moated sites but the manors were joined early in the 16th century under the Jermyns and then the Gascoignes. The latter began to enclose the land and John Gascoigne's will of 1608 includes a bequest of 40 shillings 'to the town of Illington for use in lieu ... of a piece of common taken in by me as they do suppose'. By 1603, there were only thirty-two communicants and in 1739 there were about sixty people living there.

Illington from the mid-18th century was more of an estate than a village. A map of 1772 shows the hall with its farm, one cottage nearby, West Farm with its outbuildings, two other dwellings and the church.

The nave of St Andrew's Church dates from about 1100 on an older site. By the 14th century it had a chancel, west tower, south porch and south aisle, all of rubble walls faced with flint and with limestone quoins. Remains of the now demolished south aisle can be seen against the south wall. Reflecting the decrease in Illington's population, the church was made redundant in 1987 and is now in the care of the Norfolk Churches Trust.

How to get to the venue

We are meeting at St Andrew's Church in Illington at 10am on Saturday 23 February, Grid Reference 948900 (Explorer OS Map 229).

Illington is approximately 8 miles northeast of Thetford. Take the A1075 north from Thetford; go past East Wretham Heath Nature Reserve and then take the next turning on your right, which is Illington Road (opposite the army camp). Continue along this road, crossing over the Peddars Way, for 1.25 miles and then take the lane on the left up to Illington. (Look for the telephone box on the right hand side of the road and the lane is directly opposite.) Then take the first track on the right and you will see the church ahead of you.

Please bring warm clothing and footwear suitable for walking across a ploughed field.

John and Tessa Hauxwell have very kindly offered to provide soup at lunchtime but please bring a hot drink and other food to sustain you! Field-walking can be very cold as it involves quite a bit of standing about and slow walking.

After lunch, we will learn how to clean and identify finds and the session should end at 3pm.

It is important to book a place with Anne Mason, tel 01760 755685; or email anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk (those already booked need not contact her) by 15 February.

If you have booked a place and are unable to come on the day or get lost on the way there, please tel 0777 5898097.