

Green Buildings In Norfolk: new CPRE Norfolk research at the UK's largest science festival

What exactly is climate change? How will it affect us? And what can you do to make a difference? These questions will be answered at *Changing the Climate, Changing Ourselves*; a climate change and sustainability exhibition taking place at Norwich Cathedral between 19 August and 16 September.

The main event will take place between 2 and 9 September, when the BA Festival Of Science rolls into town. The UK's largest science festival is coming to Norwich and the exhibition in Norwich Cathedral will be included in a series of events across the city.

During BA Festival of Science week, CPRE Norfolk's Renewable Energy Team will be unveiling research on Norfolk's most energy-efficient buildings and giving away copies of a special booklet on these showcase buildings. As well as CPRE Norfolk staff and volunteers, Norfolk's leading green architects will be manning the CPRE Norfolk stand and discussing their projects with members of the public.

Among the other exhibitors are LSI Architects, who will be showcasing their latest innovative sustainable building projects, and Jennifer Thompson with her striking photographs depicting erosion on the Norfolk coastline.

The exhibition is free of charge and open to all during usual Cathedral opening hours, so please come and visit us. To find out more about the BA Festival of Science, hosted by University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park and Norwich City Council, please visit www.the-ba.net/festivalofscience

NEWS FROM THE BRECKS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



Eating the reds to save the whites

For some time now, Abby at the Brecks Partnership has been working with the Lark Angling & Preservation Society, controlling alien crayfish in the River Lark. These invaders are destroying river banks and eating everything in their path (including each other).

They are, however, tasty and nutritious! Pioneering a Social Enterprise based on marketing these tasty aliens as a conservation foodstuff is an exciting challenge. If any members of the Breckland Society have a background in food and marketing, Abby would love to hear from you. You can contact her on 01842761569, or brecks.project@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk

If you would like to know more about the identification of crayfish and related science, why not join our training day on the River Wissey in the Norfolk Brecks.

Sunday 13 August 2006, 10am till 3pm – get in touch with Abby for more details about the day.

Brecks Bus

Inexpensive door-to-door, wheelchair-accessible bus service – Mondays to Fridays 10am till 4pm – yes it's true!

Just ring to book on 01842 816170 (24 hrs notice preferred but not essential).

WHAT'S ON

Forthcoming Society events

Saturday 14 October

Oral History training day at Santon Downham Village Hall, 10am – 3pm. See page 3 for more details, and enclosed form.

Saturday 11 November

Author and critic D J Taylor will talk to the Society about his novel *Kept*, and why the Breckland landscape inspired him to set much of the action near Watton. See the article on page 1 for more information about this interesting book.

Wayland House, Watton, 7.30pm.
Bookings to James Parry on 01366 328676,

Thursday 30 November

Local historian Janet Smith will tell the extraordinary tale of the droving of tukeys and geese – on foot! – along the London road (now the A11) from Attleborough to Thetford and beyond. Further details will be given in the October newsletter.

mid-December.

Christmas event to be announced!

The Breckland Society

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THE BRECKLAND LANDSCAPE: AN INSPIRATION?

"It was a little surprizing to find such a piece of absolute desert almost in the heart of England. To us it was a novel idea. We had not even heard of it."

William Gilpin, 1809

"I wish, too, that I could convey to you the incredible beauty of that vast and lonely country."

Michael Home, 1946

When the Society was established in 2003, one of the objectives we set ourselves was the promotion of research and interest into local literature and into writing about the unique landscape that is the Brecks. We envisaged this extending from historical accounts of the area – such as those written by celebrated figures like Daniel Defoe and William Gilpin – through to modern fiction, and since then have been continually surprised at the variety of literary sources that have come to light.

At first it seemed that relatively few writers had passed this way, or that homegrown talent was conspicuously absent. Indeed, the apparent neglect of Breckland and its landscapes by writers was mirrored by a similarly sparse appearance by painters, poets and playwrights. Given the unusual and remote nature of the landscape, this seemed rather odd, as writers in particular have always been drawn to such places. Then, Society members were introduced to the works of 19th-century Shropham's Mary Mann through the excellent one-woman show written and presented by Patience Tomlinson. This drew on the gritty, and at times shocking, prose written by Norfolk's answer to Thomas Hardy, and brought into focus the potential offered by the Breckland landscape and its people to inspire writing and social commentary.

This theme was explored further by Christopher Bush who, as Michael Home, wrote an elegant and insightful collection of biographical novels based on his experiences growing up in Victorian and Edwardian Hockwold. All now out of print, these can be obtained from local libraries and are well worth reading.

The most recent novel to be set in the Brecks, at least in part, is D J Taylor's *Kept* (Chatto & Windus, 2006), a 'Victorian mystery' about the urge to possess. Located in 1860s Norfolk, much of the action in the book takes place at a country house (the fictional 'Easton Hall') a few miles outside Watton. Isabel Ireland, a flighty and possibly insane young widow, whose first husband died in mysterious circumstances, lives in solitary confinement in the remote and decaying house of her second husband, a reclusive naturalist obsessed by birds' eggs and who keeps a wolf chained up in the far corner of his estate, which is going to rack and ruin. Meanwhile, from his London office, sinister Mr Pardew is plotting the theft of several hundredweight of bullion from the Dover mail ...

The book contains some evocative descriptions of the Breckland landscape – "a land of silence and subterfuge" – and of everyday life on an isolated Norfolk country estate:



'Taylor has created a novel that is not only written in authentic mid-Victorian idiom, but seems to be possessed by the voices of Victorian novelists, including Dickens and Thackeray ... *Kept* is a triumphant success.' (Daily Telegraph).

D J Taylor is a well-known writer and critic, and a biographer of both William Thackeray and George Orwell. He has kindly agreed to come and talk to the Society this autumn about *Kept*, and his reasons for setting aspects of the story in the Brecks. See *What's On* for details.

Have you see seen one of these in your garden?



Hummingbird hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum*

During the hot weather several people reported seeing **hummingbird hawkmoths** in their gardens. People not knowing this insect often take it for a hummingbird, because its flight is very rapid and it has the ability to hover in front of a flower while sipping the nectar. Nevertheless, it stays only for a moment at one flower and then rapidly moves to the next one. It is believed that individuals found here during summer have come from the warm south of Europe during May, June and July. They are not able to survive the winter in the cooler northern regions, but it is possible that some of them travel back south again in autumn.

RUN RABBIT RUN

Some time ago, Society member Toni Arthur-Hay recorded and transcribed the following interview with some Northwold residents, for the Northwold Village Life newsletter. Toni has kindly agreed to let us reproduce it, as it deals with a subject so important to the Breckland – warrening. This is a piece of living history ...

Three fine Norfolk gentlemen, Ray, Terrence and Cecil Osborne, tell a story that is not of today. Theirs is the tale of survival and self-sufficiency. Their proud memories tell of living and working in the mid 1900s, when they used to help their dad. Henry George Osborne, a Northwolder, married Florence Emma Theobald from Cressingham. They had seven children: Frank (now deceased), Phyllis, Barbara, the twins Rex and Ray (b.1928), Terrence and young Popeye (Cecil). Most of the telling is from Ray, with Terrence and Cecil chipping in now and then.

“Dad was a keeper first. Where Woodland Lodge is now, that’s where they lived and my grandfather lived there as well and they was all keepers. Then they suddenly went out rabbiting. Then he got a job as rabbit warrener for Major Mills on the Hillborough estate, and then for Colonel Smith at Didlington estate.”

What is a rabbit warrener?

“Well, someone who catches rabbits – plain as that. There was about twelve families in Northwold what caught rabbits. Well, there were so many you see, and they just bred and bred. I mean, my dad used to kill rabbits all the year round, but there was still plenty of them for the next year.”

“He used to bike from Northwold to Hillborough, ‘bout eight or nine mile, at half-past seven in the morning and he’d keep going ‘til about half past three in the afternoon. Then ‘course he used to have to bike home then. He never used to stop for dinner. Dad was on his own a lot of the time, weren’t he. On his own.”

How did they catch the rabbits?

“Ferrets and nets and that. And course that was hard work, ‘cos they used to dig a lot. They set nets around the burrows, bolt off what they could, then they used to have what they called a line ferret and turn that in and then they used to have to dig on them where they heard them lumping underground. When a ferret got a rabbit he used to stamp and, do you see, that’s lumping. You could hear it by putting your ear on the staff of the spade. You just jabbed the metal bit of the spade in the ground and listen on the staff. And you walked about jabbing and listening until you found ‘em. Sometime my dad lay on the floor with his ear on the ground. Today they have ferret locators, but in them days they had to listen in on the staff ‘til you could hear them lumping.”

How many rabbits did they catch in a day?

“Well, that varied depending on the weather and where the rabbits were laying, but 60 to 70 a day perhaps. They’d run out into the nets then break their neck, because then blood went to the neck and they was better to eat then. If a rabbit was hit hard the blood would all be on the body like and that wasn’t so good to eat.”

Could he keep any for himself?

“Well, it all depended on who you was working for. When he was at Hillborough and Didlington he couldn’t. But when he was about Northwold, he’d buy a field for the rabbits then he’d keep them for hisself.

When he was on Hillborough estate he used to get ten shilling a dozen and he could catch about four or five dozen rabbits in a day, you see, and in them days ten shilling a dozen was good money. That was a lot of money then. And if you skinned a rabbit, in them days, the skin meant more than what the rabbit did. Well, they ain’t difficult to skin, ‘cos when a rabbit was paunched, that’s the inside taken out, you have that split in the middle and you just pull the skin off each side, then

push the legs through and pull them off. The head is the hardest thing to get out. You just had to cut where the ears were and then you pull it right off whole.

There used to be a bloke come round from Methwold, Hennells he was. He used to buy the skins and take ‘em back to Brandon, to the clothing factory. He examine them first ‘cos some skins got a black mark, a bit smudged – but if they was clear, he’d give you a full price. They used to be tanned then and all the rest on it and made into fur hats, gloves and coats. They’d get about one and nine [9p] a skin.

If you didn’t skin ‘em they went to the lodge. The lodges was like sort of ordinary houses, really. But they were just designed for that job. Dad used to keep his ferrets and sometimes his dogs in there and nets and snares and everything.

They used to hang the rabbits there. See, when you killed them, you killed them the day you caught them, then you paunched them, put the hind legs together and you hung them up in rows with the heads down. ‘Cos if you laid a rabbit down that wasn’t so good to eat. That’s like a pheasant or anything, you’re better hanging them. But you don’t hang rabbit for long. They eat pretty near straight away when they’re fresh.

Harvey from Norwich come and collect the rabbits from Hillborough lodge and sold them to the butchers. I mean, that was good food for everybody. During the war people used to come nearly every day and ask for rabbit. You see that was cheap food. Well, that cost about a half a crown [12 ½ p] to buy towards the end like, for a rabbit. I mean that was a good meal on there.

Mother used to do rabbit stew or bake them in the oven with a crust over. Rabbit pie. That was with bones in and everything. Cut up into little pieces, the back and the hind legs, ribs and the head and everything. There was always an argument about who was going to have the brains. We liked that the best. You used to split the head in half and then you get the brains out each side with the end of a spoon or fork. We had to take it in turns to have them. My dad always used to have the back ‘cos that was the biggest bit of the rabbit, with the two kidneys on it and the fat. And if you got little ones, mother used to skin them, then she’d fry them and they were so tender.”

When did you last eat rabbit?

“That was when Frank was alive. So, that must have been about ten year ago. We miss it, we do. But that ‘myxy’ still keep cropping up and that put people off. It was 1953 when myxomatosis came in. We didn’t know what it was when we first saw it. Then they announced it on the wireless. I mean, we never thought there was going to be another rabbit again. We used to go round with air-guns to put them out of their misery. It was sad. You had your warrener earning a living, you had your ferret breeders, net makers, snare and strap makers, staff makers, everything, didn’t you? And they was all put out of business, weren’t they? And people aren’t as healthy now, are they?

We’d eat a rabbit pie tomorrow if we could get one.”

THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE PROJECT MOVES ON

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 of flint, chalk and clay lump. We will 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 you need 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 14 October, from 10am to 3pm at Santon Downham Village Hall. The trainer will be Sarah Housden, who worked on the BBC radio Wartime Reminiscences series. 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! 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 – workshops for apprentices in traditional building techniques – is now being planned, with the workshops to take place during the summer/autumn.

If you have any ideas or recommendations, please phone Anne Mason on tel. 01760 755685 or email anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk (For an excellent example of an oral history, see page 2, opposite.)

THE PLANTS OF BRECKLAND

Those among us who are keen gardeners usually take an interest in plant history. Early last spring the Society was treated to a delightful and informative talk by local botanist Yvonne Leonard at Barnham Village Hall. Society member Val Elwes was there ... it seems our gardens are full of large, flashy hybrids, which flourish easily in their pampered conditions.



Perennial knawel

Scleranthus perennis prostratus

Yvonne told us about simple, insignificant plants, grasses, mosses and lichens, often so small that you have to kneel down to see them. These plants are in the Brecks, not in spite of the conditions but because of them; around us there are 16 nationally rare plants and a similar number of nationally scarce species that flourish because of our unique soil conditions, climate and land use through the ages. We are fortunate in having in Breckland a variety of habitats: dry sandy heathland, wetland and water meadows, parkland, chalk grassland and coniferous forests.

Amazingly, roadside verges provide an ideal habitat for the rare Spanish catchfly, with its sticky yellow/green flowers. Its ‘cousin’, the sand catchfly, also appears when conditions are favourable, that is when the ground is disturbed – the long-lasting seeds allow it to survive between such favourable conditions. It was good to hear that the local councils co-operate, and mark the verges so that the contractors know when to mow.

Next time you are driving from Brandon to Barton Mills, just remember that you are driving through a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Difficult to believe, isn’t it? But RAF Lakenheath contains 11 of the Breckland rare species. English Nature have a leaflet that lists them all, along with birds and insects; the section on rare plants is written by Yvonne Leonard. The most vulnerable of these rarities is the perennial knawel. This plant is individually protected by law, and is found at the end of a runway; as it will not tolerate any competition it is ideally suited to the short-grass growing regime, where it also gets small amounts of soil disturbance from the mowers.

Breckland’s sandy soil and low rainfall create characteristic flora, not just rarities but also variants of more common species; these appear in Breckland as very low-growing plants, not exceeding 2cms in height. However, for those of you that prefer something a little taller, there are military orchids at Mildenhall, yellow rock roses in June at Grimes Graves, and occasionally the rare maiden pink.

NORFOLK PLANNING CONFERENCE 2006

Swaffham, 15 June: Planning and Housing in Norfolk – Getting It Right

Organised jointly by the Norfolk Association of Parish & Town Councils and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), this event presented an overview of the likely impact and opportunities to be derived from recent changes in planning policies, as well as offering a visit to the newly refurbished Assembly Rooms in Swaffham. Society members Geoff and Barbara Pritchard were there.

Attended mainly by parish and town councillors from across Norfolk, the conference was chaired by Professor O’Riordan of the UEA who, along with Richard Ward, Director of CPRE Suffolk and the main speaker for the day, highlighted the pressing need to develop sustainable communities, considering people and places rather than bricks and mortar, moving towards localism in economic activity, carbon-neutral targets for the building sector, and the provision of more affordable housing. Emphasis was also placed on maintaining the local distinctiveness of places.

Pro-active local initiative will be crucial in steering the planning that will be required to accommodate this region’s significantly increased targets for new homes (575,000 by 2021).

Some very practical tips were given for influencing our predominantly ‘top-down’ planning process, including the advice to prepare supportive back-up material in advance – (the planning process generally favours speed over quality of decisions). The potential value, in this respect, of the Breckland Society’s Vernacular Building Survey immediately sprang to mind!