

Experts and specialists have been commissioned to assist in all aspects of the development process. These include education, interpretation, access, health and safety and the care and administration of the collections. A full building survey has also been commissioned of the Burrell Paint Workshop where the museum is housed. This input is providing the Trustees with plans and projects working to current best practice and helping them to plan for the future. There are also plans to employ a Volunteer Coordinator, the first paid post to be principally funded by the museum since it first opened fifteen years ago.

If you would like to find out more about the museum or how you can become an active member of one of the Charles Burrell Museum's volunteer teams, please contact Michelle Turner (Volunteer Coordinator) on 01842 765840, Council Offices, Kings House, King Street, Thetford, or [burrellvolunteercoordinator@thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:burrellvolunteercoordinator@thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk)

## Events Round-Up

### Summer Barbecue, 29 July

On a beautiful summer evening, over 40 members enjoyed the annual Society barbecue, held on this occasion in the delightful gardens of Richard and Wendy Johnson at Garboldisham. Our thanks go Richard and Wendy and their three daughters, for hosting the barbecue and for all the assistance they gave us. It was an excellent evening, and the food was splendid – cooked by three very able chefs.

Next year's barbecue will be held at The Houghton Centre on 20th May 2006. It will be preceded by the Society's Annual General Meeting (which will be kept brief) and a tour of St Mary's church with Bob Davey.

Put the date in your diary now!

### Talk by Robin Page, 18 October

The Society was given a rousing talk by Robin Page, the well-known and often controversial commentator on rural issues. Robin's theme was the current crisis in the countryside – namely the decline in wildlife due to the transformation of fields into intensive food factories, the collapse of some farming incomes, and a society that is increasingly losing touch with nature and with real, seasonal food. He has been instrumental in launching the Countryside Restoration Trust, which seeks to purchase land that has been intensively farmed and then restore it through sensitive and sympathetic farming practices, thereby rehabilitating the landscape as a fit habitat for wildlife.

Robin's talk was a joint event with the Friends of Thetford Forest Park. 'Friends' was founded in 1995 with the aims of increasing knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the Forest, and now has over 400 members. Their fundraising has contributed to the sculpture by Ben Platt-Mills at High Lodge, the 12 benches along the forest trails, the restoration of Mildenhall Warren Lodge and the purchase of seven bicycles for use by the less able (together with grants from the National Lottery, the Local Network Fund, Forest Heath District Council, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund). 'Friends' celebrated its tenth birthday this year.

### 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:

25<sup>th</sup> November, 9<sup>th</sup> December

20<sup>th</sup> January 2006 (a special Burns Night celebration)

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](mailto:musicmindmovement@btinternet.com)

## WHAT'S ON

### Forthcoming Society events

#### Tuesday 22 November

Talk by Edward Martin, Suffolk County Council Archaeologist, on the archaeology of the Lark Valley. Joint event with the Lark Valley Association, at Culford Village Hall, 7.30pm. Tickets £3 at the door.

#### Saturday 17 December

Christmas Extravaganza at the Houghton Centre. A celebration in words, music and song, with a talented young musician from UEA on saxophone, Jeremy Ard, Tony Hopping, Andres Hernandez Salazar and Lucinda Mackworth-Young. Tickets £12.50 to include wine and nibbles, from Sue Whittlely on the usual phone number. See enclosed flyer.

#### Friday 17 February 2006

Susanna Wade Martins speaking on Norfolk farmbuildings, at the Houghton Centre, 7.30pm. Tickets (£5) must be booked in advance via Sue Whittlely, 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.

#### The Breckland Society

The Hay Barn, Hall Farm Barns

Oxborough, Norfolk PE33 9PS

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## CONFERENCE POINTS TOWARDS A BRECKS REGIONAL PARK

*A major conference celebrating the Brecks and assessing the potential future of the area was held at Elveden Hall on Friday 16 September. Attended by over 80 delegates from a range of organisations, including English Nature, RSPB, The Rural Development Service, The Forestry Commission, Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and Breckland District Council, the conference was organised by the Brecks Countryside Project, hosted by Lord Iveagh and chaired by James Parry.*

A range of speakers – including Tom Williamson from UEA, well known to Society members – reviewed the progress that has been made in the decade since the original Brecks conference, held in 1995 at Culford School. An area of particular achievement has been the protection of several of the wildlife species for which Breckland is nationally significant; these include stone curlew and woodlark, as well as a range of endangered plants. Awareness of the area's distinctive landscape and architecture has also been increased. However, conference discussion increasingly focused on the importance of ensuring that the many special qualities of the Brecks are safeguarded in the future and on the means by which this might be achieved.

In recent months the possibility of the Brecks becoming a regional park has been increasingly highlighted as a potentially useful way forward. The term 'regional park' is not yet well established in Britain and at present has no statutory basis (unlike Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Parks, for example, both of which have been floated in the past as options for the Brecks but are no longer on the agenda). However, the lack of many precedents may be an advantage in the sense that the concept can be moulded to suit the particular requirements of the Brecks. There is evidence that a more comprehensive and coordinated arrangement for the area could be useful, for despite having the largest number of land-based nature conservation designations in the East of England, as well as other recognitions such as Special Landscape Areas, as an entity the Brecks still has no overall protection.

The issue is more than simply one of wildlife and landscape protection, however. Under the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, Breckland District Council has the highest new housing allocation in Norfolk: 15,200 new homes to be built. On the Suffolk side of the county boundary, St Edmundsbury DC has to provide 8,000 new homes. The demands these dramatic increases in population will bring to the Brecks in terms of impact on natural resources, recreational facilities and the historic environment and wildlife are considerable. The overall framework of a regional park could offer a valuable integrated and holistic approach to these issues, rather than the current piecemeal approach, where planning issues are shared between two county councils and five districts.

The creation of a regional park would also be a useful catalyst in the further development of sustainable tourism in the Brecks, an area in which much work has been achieved by the Brecks Tourism Partnership. It has already been announced that the partnership is to amalgamate with the Brecks Countryside Project to form a joint Brecks Project; this could form the basis of a regional park agency and help avoid the creation of a further level of bureaucracy. Discussion continues on how the idea of a regional park might be taken forward, and what it might actually mean 'on the ground'. The Society is broadly supportive of the concept, but we would welcome the views of any members on this subject. Meanwhile, the Elveden conference was concluded by a reception and thought-provoking talk by celebrated nature writer Richard Mabey, who cited the success of initiatives in the Netherlands and United States to 're-wild' the countryside in encouraging those present to think big when planning the future of the Brecks.

### Vernacular Architecture Project

*Are your surveys nearing completion?*

*By now, we hope that many of you carrying out the Vernacular Buildings Survey have almost completed your allocated village(s).*

*Teresa Squires has very kindly agreed to compile the database and she would be grateful for batches of forms as soon as possible. You don't have to wait until you have finished your village to give her some forms – please send them to Sue Whittlely.*

*If you have difficulty completing your survey, please would you let Anne Mason know and she will do what she can to help.*

*Anne's address is 69a Pales Green, Castle Acre, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE32 2AL. Tel 01760 755685, email:*

[anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk)



# THE COUNTRY ROOTS OF OUR FESTIVE SEASON

*Have you ever wondered why we celebrate Christmas with a round, flaming pudding? Or why we have holly and ivy? Lucinda Mackworth-Young looks at the origins of some of our traditions.*

The winter solstice, the longest night of the year (21–22 December), was regarded as a highly significant time by our ancestors who, from at least 10,000 BC, built and orientated stone circles and wood henges to trace solar, lunar and stellar movements. Our pre-Christian Celtic, Roman, Norse and Saxon settlers brought with them a wealth of ways of celebrating the season, as can easily be traced through our carols and our current celebrations. Here is a quick tour of those still popular today.



## The holly and the ivy

With their very lives depending on the fertility of the land, our ancestors looked with apprehension on the shortening of days, and did all they could to ensure the sun's return through raising spirits, or energy. They brought into their houses evergreens, symbols of eternal life, reminders of summers past and summers to come. Holly symbolised the masculine and was used for protection, the bright red berries also offering hope. Ivy symbolised the feminine and was used in divination (*The holly and the ivy... The holly bears the crown... And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ*). Mistletoe symbolised fertility (don't forget to kiss!) and had magical healing properties. Bay was sacred to Apollo, the sun god. A pine tree (symbol of peace and protection) was hung with offerings to the tree spirit in the hope of being granted wishes for the coming year.

People sang and danced simultaneously, in circles or long chains (*he led them a merry dance*), always moving more clockwise (*deosil*) than anticlockwise (*widdershins*), as that was believed to help the movement of the sun and so all good things on earth (sympathetic magic). The word *carole* (old French) literally means "ring-dance with song". People also lit candles and fires. The Yule log was lit from an ember saved from the previous year's log, and kept alight for the whole festive season.



## Silent night

As the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> December approaches and the earth's spiral into the dark is almost complete, there is a feeling that the earth is drawing in on itself. Very often there is fog on these days and little or no wind. There is a deep sense of stillness and expectancy (*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*), making many of us feel as though we want to take time to ourselves, perhaps communing with the night sky. In Northern Europe this night was called *Mothernight*: the Sun Child (the giver of life, the light of the world) was about to be reborn from Mother Earth (ever virgin: belonging to no man, sufficient unto herself).

In the following days, as it became clear that they were indeed lengthening, motherhood and, in particular, childhood, with the promise of renewed life and hope, were celebrated. Gifts were given by Odin (or Woden/Wotan), the Northern European All-Father God, who

distributed them while flying across the skies on his eight-legged steed, Sleipnir. Odin was also the Lord of the Wild Hunt which, in mediaeval times, was led by the winter goddess, Frau Holle. In the hunt, the death of the deer was considered a divine sacrifice freely made in love, in order that others might live (*The rising of the sun and the running of the deer*). Odin later became known as Father Holle, or Holly (with connotations of the Green Man and the Horned God), and then Father Christmas.

## Wassail

The important midwinter festivals of the Roman Empire were Saturnalia (17–24 December), the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun (25 December) when the young solar god, Mithras, was reborn, and the Kalends, which began on 1<sup>st</sup> January. During Saturnalia and the Kalends warfare was suspended, businesses closed, hangings postponed, slaves changed places with their masters and there was heavy eating and drinking.

In Saxon Halls, in particular on 25<sup>th</sup> December, the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon year – because the sun was returning – and for 12 days thereafter, people drank heavily (*wassail*, or good health – "wassail all over the town") and feasted. Goose was the sacred bird of the winter goddess and so symbolised Frau Holle, the boar's head (bedecked with Bays and Rosemary) symbolised sacrifice, and the round, flaming pudding symbolised the sun. Stories were told of the year's deeds, both heroic and unfortunate, which inspired, informed and integrated the community, and which gradually settled in as legend, as stories do. Both Romans and Saxons enacted ritual drama and plays (often involving cross dressing – forerunners of the pantomime) and played games electing the "Lord of Misrule" to lead them for the season. There was a general sense of "time out", peace and goodwill.



## The wheel of the year

Meanwhile, just as the seeds were beginning to germinate beneath the earth, so new plans, projects and the new year's resolutions were being formed in people's minds, ready to come to fruition with the waxing year. The natural cycle of birth, growth, sacrifice and rebirth, the Wheel of the Year, was a living reality to our ancestors in their natural world and could, of course, be experienced on many different levels of understanding. It was symbolised by the wreath, the circle which has no beginning or end. The expression Yule Tide comes from the Norse word *jul* meaning wheel, and the Saxon *hweolor-tid* meaning turning time (*To everything, turn, turn, turn, there is a season*). It reminds us that all life is in constant motion, nothing – even our much-loved traditions – stays the same, and we need to accept and move with change, finding ways to celebrate rather than fear it.

With so many similarities, and in the face of such deep tradition, is it any surprise that, in seeking to have their beliefs accepted and established, the early Christians chose the Festival of the Returning Sun to celebrate their God's birthday?

# VIEWPOINT

*Viewpoint is an opportunity for members of the Society to air their views on subjects of interest to other members and/or of relevance to the work of the Society. We welcome members' submissions and comments, but make the point that any opinions expressed are those of the individual(s) concerned and not necessarily of the Society (although of course we always listen to what you have to say!). In this edition, John Davies is appalled by the despoiling of our countryside and towns and villages by litter. We appear, he thinks, to have become a nation of litterlouts, to have lost pride in our countryside and towns. Who are those who drop litter wherever they go, and why do they do it? Has it always been so?*

One of the most obvious problems is fly-tipping, which takes two forms. First, the illegal dumping of household items such as sofas and washing machines alongside highways or in open countryside; and second, the disposal of potentially hazardous industrial waste. In the first instance, such behaviour is largely unnecessary, as local authorities will either collect these items for a modest charge or they can be taken by the owners to a designated recycling centre, surely just as easily as dumping them in a layby? With industrial waste, the polluters are clearly seeking to avoid paying the appropriate landfill tax, introduced by the government several years ago. Quite rightly, it was felt that those who created waste, toxic and non-toxic, should meet the cost of its disposal. The problem is that there are always those who try to avoid the cost of doing so. Those responsible can sometimes be traced but, more often than not, they are careful to remove anything that might identify them. If caught, are they prosecuted?

One solution lies with local and central government and with more efficient enforcement of the law, as well as greater vigilance on the part of individuals.

An additional problem is the casual and often mindless disposal of personal litter; particularly food and drink containers, which are dropped or thrown out of car windows after consumption of their contents. We all see this happening daily but are usually reluctant to challenge those responsible for fear of a verbal barrage or worse. Indeed, there have been several recent cases of people being assaulted when confronting antisocial behaviour.

Such litter is often unnecessary packaging, redundant containers and the ubiquitous carrier bags from fast-food outlets, shops and supermarkets, handed out freely in their millions each year. What is the solution? Are we so steeped in political correctness that we are afraid to say what we think and do what needs to be done? Is this a peculiarly British trait? In France the situation seems quite different; there is litter

but very little. The countryside is clean and there is a definite civic pride, which no longer appears to exist in England. Major supermarkets in France no longer hand out free carrier bags. Shoppers have the choice of unloading from their trolley directly into their cars or of bringing with them reusable carrier bags, as did our parents!

Why can we not campaign for similar policies here? Eliminating those free carrier bags would help bring about a cleaner countryside and a reduction in the amount spent by local authorities cleaning up (and thereby in our council taxes!).

## The Chairman adds:

There is some evidence that we may be dealing with a cultural issue here. Historically, England was regarded by some 16th- and 17th-century visitors from overseas as a rowdy, untidy place and the filth and rubbish-strewn streets of London at that time are well documented. The situation certainly changed during the Victorian era, with increased awareness of health risks etc, but it is undoubtedly the case that the littering of the British countryside is a more recent phenomenon, the consequence perhaps of greater population mobility and, indeed, of more unnecessary packaging, as John says. Some local supermarkets - admittedly at the lower end of the market - have indeed ceased handing out free bags, although this is probably motivated by a desire to cut costs rather than to save the planet. Others could and should follow suit – the practice of wrapping meat and frozen items in their own bag within a larger bag appears particularly unnecessary.

With an increasingly urbanised population, it may be that many people have lost contact with the land and regard the area between one town and another as an empty corridor, 'dead space' in which it matters not if rubbish is jettisoned. Exactly how one tackles this issue in the long term is open to debate, but in the meantime local 'clean-up' groups could be an idea. A similar system operates successfully in other European countries and in parts of the United States.

## CHARLES BURRELL MUSEUM, THETFORD Progress of the Development Project

*As many of you will know, the Charles Burrell Museum opened in 1991 and is housed in the former Burrell Works' Paint Shop on Minstergate in Thetford. The museum tells the stories of the Charles Burrell Works, the people who laboured there, and the machinery they produced. The past is captured through displays representing different areas of the Works, such as the foundry, and the collection of Burrell engines and other agricultural equipment.*

Last year the museum was awarded £217,000 over three years, as part of the Norfolk Museums and Heritage Package (from the European Union, Norfolk County Council, Breckland Council and Thetford Town Council). The Museums and Heritage Development Team for the Charles Burrell Museum consists of one full-time project officer and one part-time assistant, both based at Thetford Town Council Offices. The team, in partnership with the museum's Trustees, Friends and volunteers is building on the work of the last 15 years and introducing innovative new ideas to ensure the museum has a sustainable future. Their objective is to support and guide the Trustees, Friends and volunteers through this period of change. The funding is mostly for training and capacity building but there is some capital which we are using for the upkeep of the building.

*/cont'd on page 4*

