

RECENT EVENTS

On Tuesday 21 October at Old School, Thetford Grammar School, members were treated to a splendid lecture by Michael Morrison, illustrated by his superb photographs of the landscape and wildlife of Antarctica.

Michael Morrison is a Norfolk-based conservation architect working for the Antarctic Heritage Trust in their attempts to preserve not only the huts left by the explorers, but their contents.

The huts contain a wide variety of equipment and supplies left by the expeditions when they returned to UK, and are thus a unique legacy of the heroic era of Antarctic exploration. Not surprisingly after so many years, the huts and their contents now urgently need an extensive programme of conservation. This was begun in 2004 by the New Zealand Antarctic Heritage Trust, which has operational responsibility for the huts in this area of Antarctica, with the active support of the UK Trust.



Shackleton's Hut, erected in 1908 by his Discovery expedition at Cape Royds on Ross Island, restored in 1961 and now maintained by the NZ Antarctic Heritage Trust.



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

CPRE Norfolk Awards for 2008 celebrate outstanding Norfolk projects

Outstanding educational, environmental and architectural projects in Norfolk have been recognised with CPRE Norfolk Awards. The winners received plaques and certificates at the Assembly House in Norwich on the evening of Thursday 6 November, in the company of CPRE President Bill Bryson. The scheme was sponsored for the second year running by Targetfollow.

The Norfolk branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE Norfolk) celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. Its awards scheme is one of Norfolk's longest-running award programmes, founded in 1979 and providing an opportunity for CPRE to highlight examples of best practice across the county. Awards are given on merit for environmental and architectural projects that have made a significant contribution to the quality of the landscape over the past year, as well as to schools that engage children with the natural environment in the development of wildlife areas, gardening and food production schemes and environmental policies, including awareness of issues such as global warming and recycling.



The barn is used as a carpentry workshop by the craftsman owner and his apprentices.

importance of energy-efficient buildings in today's world. These included two new visitor centres, at Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve and Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden; these incorporate ground source heat pumps, wind turbines, rainwater harvesting and sheep's wool insulation. In a very different way, a clay lump barn at Great Hockham provides a wonderful example of a building with low embodied energy, being constructed entirely from recycled materials and now serving as a thriving workshop.

For a full list of winners, and more information, see the CPRE Norfolk website: www.cprenorfolk.org.uk



Eyeore's Barn, Great Hockham

Projects that improve access to the countryside are also recognised by the scheme. For example, in 2008, Norfolk County Council has created a series of walks through newly planted woodlands around Burlingham and Acle. Eight orchards have been planted to produce traditional varieties of Norfolk fruit and 10 miles of new hedgerow have been laid – an excellent example of how a local authority can take a lead in encouraging individuals to engage with the natural environment. In the architectural category there were numerous entries reflecting the



SOCIETY'S WARRENS PROJECT OFF TO A FLYING START

On 8 August the Society held its first training session for the Warrens of Breckland Research Project at the community education building at High Lodge Forest Centre. The project is funded by English Heritage.

Twenty-five Society members attended the session, joined by nine non-members who were attracted by the publicity. They were given a background into the history of warrens and warrening in the Brecks and invited to take part in the documentary and archaeological research and to choose one warren on which to concentrate. Such was the enthusiasm that all the warrens now have researchers, with most people working in pairs.

To help those volunteers new to documentary research, the Norfolk Record Office gave us a guided tour of its facilities on two afternoons in late September. In the Conservation Department, we were given a fascinating demonstration of the processes of preserving manuscripts. We were also shown one of the storerooms where the documents are kept in strictly controlled environments, in which temperatures and humidity are kept at optimum levels. Victoria Horth, the Education Officer, explained the procedures for accessing documents and patiently answered our questions. The Breckland Society is very grateful to the Record Office for hosting these sessions for us, free of charge.

On a beautifully still and sunny 18 October, the fieldwork training was held, again at Oak Lodge. New volunteers joined, bringing the total to 27. We were particularly delighted to have the support of Rachel Riley, Neal Armour-Chelu and Frances Evershed from the Forestry Commission, our partners in this project. In addition, David Kenny from English Heritage attended, as did Professor Tom Williamson from UEA, who has done work on warrens elsewhere in England and is keen to help us in any way he can.

After a presentation about warren banks and lodge sites, we went in two groups to try out the fieldwork survey forms by looking at the perimeter and possible trapping banks of Downham High Warren. After lunch (organised by Sue Whittle and greatly appreciated by everyone), we drove to Thetford Warren Lodge and were able to go inside (David Kenny had brought a key with him!) and discuss the various defensive and domestic features of the building.

Special thanks are due to Tim Bridge for setting up a Breckland Warrens Group on the Yahoo site. This means that we can exchange information or post queries and discoveries, as well as having the forms available as downloads.

Anne Mason wishes to thank all the volunteers personally, for their great enthusiasm for the project and for being so keen to be involved in it. People have already embarked on the research and it is wonderfully rewarding to see the project in action. Both David Kenny and Tom Williamson acknowledged that we will make a significant contribution to the knowledge of Breckland's history and heritage.

WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events

Saturday 13 December 6.30 pm Society Christmas Event at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.
Coffee and mince pies in the Cathedral Refectory, followed by a concert at 7.30 entitled *Tidings of Joy*, featuring works by Britten, Rutter, Vaughan Williams and others.
THIS EVENT IS NOW SOLD OUT. Please call Sue Whittle on 01366 328190 if you are interested in possible returns.

Friday 6 February 2009
A lecture by Susanna Wade Martins on Norfolk farm buildings. To be held at Houghton Barn, time and ticket price to be confirmed. Further information available from Sue Whittle.

Early March 2009
A walk in Thetford Forest to listen to early spring birdsong, especially woodlarks, and to look out for displaying goshawks. Further details in January newsletter.

Recorder gone AWOL!
We are missing one of the recorders that were used on our Vernacular Architecture Project. If anyone finds it, or knows where it is, please would they return it to Sue Whittle or give her a ring on 01366 328190. Thank you!

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at The Breckland Society
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THETFORD'S FORGOTTEN GARDEN

On 5 September a group of members visited two of Thetford's gems: the garden at The King's House (see below), and Thetford's 'Forgotten Garden', at Ford Place near the castle mound.

The site of Ford Place, beautifully located on the river, is steeped in history. The Duke of Leicester established an Augustinian priory here in 1387, and in medieval times there was a thriving market. By the 18th century the desirability of the location had attracted the attention of wealthy local residents, and the present walled garden almost certainly dates from around 1806, when George Beauchamp, a minor aristocrat from Langley Hall in south Norfolk, owned the property. By 1854 it was in the ownership of the Fison family, best known for their chemical manure manufacturing business in Thetford. Their ownership continued until the early 20th century.

Interpretation panels throughout the garden explain features of interest.



The walled garden was originally divided into two separate compartments by a central wall located from the entrance gate to the current shed. The 1882 Ordnance Survey town plan of Thetford clearly shows ranges of glasshouses against the perimeter walls, but these are now gone. The walls themselves are constructed of flint and clunch (chalk rubble), but also include fragments of masonry and stone – some of it carved – that were taken from nearby ruined medieval buildings.

Despite several changes of ownership, the walled garden survived in good condition until the 1970s, continuing to be productive and providing fruit and vegetables for the house. Thereafter it fell into disrepair and was neglected until 1999, when Thetford's Heritage Officer negotiated for it to be revitalised. Today an enthusiastic band of highly committed volunteers has transformed the site, clearing barrowloads of glass, tiles and wood, as well as two Anderson shelters. The garden is now managed for wildlife and as a haven of tranquillity in the heart of old Thetford.

The British Trust for Ornithology ring and monitor the large local bird population, and there are bee hives, grass snakes and an interesting colony of black rabbits. A quince avenue underplanted with lavender bisects the garden, and a small orchard of traditional apple varieties is one of the main highlights. After a fundraising appeal, the garden volunteers were able to acquire a fruit press, which is available for public use. The garden is open Thursday-Sunday 10am-6pm, further information from Theresa Mason on 01842 766530.

KING'S HOUSE GARDEN

On the same day as the visit to the garden at Ford Place, Society members were also given a tour of the superb garden at the King's House, the headquarters of Thetford Town Council. Barry Gayton, a keen plantsman and horticulturalist who has planted and landscaped the garden for the last 34 years, explained its history and layout.

The garden, along with the house, was bequeathed to the town by George Staniforth in 1947, and Mr Gayton has worked to maintain it in Staniforth's style ever since. However, the outstanding specimen trees in the garden make it clear that there has been a garden on the site for over 300 years – the house was once in the ownership of King James I.

However, disturbing news came early in November with the announcement that the Staniforth Trust, composed exclusively of Thetford town councillors and with responsibility for the garden, has taken the decision to replace Mr Gayton with a contractor with immediate effect. The character of the garden is likely to change considerably, and there is concern locally that this will not be for the better.



Above: The magnificent Wellingtonia in the garden is approximately 150 years old.

Left: The King's House has 16th-century origins.

VISIT TO MERTON PARK

The hall and church of Merton, about two miles south-west of Watton, were the destination of the Breckland Society's visit on 28 August, at the kind invitation of the de Grey family. Close to the Peddar's Way, this site has a long history of human occupation, with Bronze Age barrows and a possible Roman villa site, and Lord Walsingham gave a fascinating overview of the estate.

The Saxon manor was appropriated by the Norman Ralph Baynard in 1067, but in 1337 the heiress of Fulk Baynard married Thomas de Grey, and so established the branch of the de Grey family, who have lived here ever since. In 1780, Sir William de Grey was given the hereditary title of Baron Walsingham.

The original manor house was on the moated site. However, there was probably an earlier building on the site of the hall that was begun in 1613. Extended in the 19th century, only one wing survived a fire in 1956. The oldest extant building is the elegant red-brick gatehouse, to the east of the hall, which was built in the 1620s. To the west of it are the 19th-century stables, now converted into flats and offices.

The 17th-century hall was set in fine parkland, including standard oaks, and in the late 18th century further woodland and an avenue were planted. The Great Pond was formed by linking former fishponds, themselves relics of the mere that gave the settlement its name. An ornamental dairy, an iron bridge, two lodges and a folly (an extraordinary shell house) were added. Many of the farm buildings date from the Agricultural Revolution or from the "high farming" period of prosperity from the 1850s to 1870s. The estate included the villages of Tottington, Thompson, West Tofts, Stanford; Buckenham Tofts, Sturston and Langford; all but Thompson are now within the Battle Area. Accounts and papers relating to the management of the estate from the 14th century onwards can be studied in the Norfolk Record Office.

St Peter's Church contains medieval and later memorials to the de Grey family, but its round tower is even earlier, dating from the late 11th century or even from before the Norman Conquest of 1066. The church contains a complete rood stair, a 14th-century painted rood screen, a 15th-century font with a tall wooden cover and a 17th-century communion rail.

The grandson of the poet George Crabbe was the rector here for 34 years (from 1850 to 1884) and one of his friends was Edward Fitzgerald, the poet and translator of *The Rubaiyat of Omar*



The 17th-century gatehouse

Khayyam. Fitzgerald was staying at the Rectory in 1883 (actually in Thompson, not Merton) when he became ill and died.

SMALL NORFOLK THEATRE WINS HUGE INTERNATIONAL AWARD!

Westacre Arts Foundation has been providing the local community and far beyond with extremely high quality theatre, musical events, drama courses for young people and art exhibitions for more than two decades. After years of hard work and dedication, their achievements have been recognised in the shape of an IVCA Clarion Award for Excellence in the Performing Arts category. The 2008 winners were revealed at a Gala Awards Ceremony at the National Film Theatre, held on Friday 26 September.

These extremely prestigious and internationally recognised awards were launched six years ago, to acknowledge outstanding social, cultural and artistic achievement. Previous winners have included former Vice President Al Gore, Leonardo Di Caprio, the Old Vic Theatre, The National Theatre and The Royal Opera House.

Westacre Studio and Summer Theatre offer a wide-ranging and varied programme of theatre, drama workshops, concerts, children's events, touring theatre companies and art exhibitions all year round, with many of their productions playing to sell-out houses! Westacre Arts Foundation works hard to ensure that there are continuing opportunities for children and young people in the Norfolk area to explore drama and theatre by providing regular and holiday drama workshops catering for ages 6-21 years and by supporting their Bursary Awards Scheme, which provides performing arts and drama undergraduates the chance to work at Westacre Theatre over the summer season. They are able to experience a huge range of activities that include performing at the theatre, assisting with workshops and other events, while being based at a working theatre. In 2008 Westacre Theatre were able to offer a record eight Bursary Awards to students from the Norfolk area and they hope to match that in 2009.

Issy Huckle and Andy Naylor of Westacre Theatre said "We are absolutely delighted to have won a Clarion Award. For many years now we have been working to provide the local area with classical, traditional and experimental theatre, together with all our workshops and musical events. We believe strongly in giving young people the opportunity to be part of a working theatre and that the benefits they gain through their involvement are enormous".



Left to right: Andrew Smith, Westacre Arts Foundation board member; Clive Hadfield, Chairman of Westacre Arts Foundation; Issy Huckle, Administrative Director; Andy Naylor, Artistic Director; and Vanessa Du Pont, Westacre Theatre Company member

For more information on the IVCA Clarion Awards go to www.ivca.org