

RECENT EVENTS

Visit to Bridgham, 18 November 2011

David O'Neale, co-author with Tony Dobbin of *Village Life—The Story of Bridgham in Norfolk*, gave a fascinating and fact-packed talk to Society members and Bridgham village residents in Bridgham village hall.

Bridgham is an attractive village situated approximately 6 miles northeast of Thetford on the road to East Harling, to which the River Thet runs parallel and to the south. In the twenty-first century it is home to approximately 300 residents.

The present day village name is of Saxon origin, the now familiar spelling of having been on settled in the nineteenth century. The place name is unique in that the Norfolk Bridgham seems to be the only one in the world! From the fifteenth century onwards, surnames were in common usage, and often new residents in a village were identified by a "surname" which was the placename of their previous home town or village. Bearing this in mind, David decided to carry out some research on the surname of Bridgham. His investigations uncovered a thriving Bridgham family history society in the USA. He believes that possibly the first American Bridgham, Thomas Bridgham of Thelneham, Suffolk, who moved to Massachusetts in 1641, originated from Bridgham in Norfolk.

David's talk started with the earliest human activity within the area of the village, which can be evidenced by a Neolithic flint blade found on Hall Farm (opposite the church) and other finds of flint tools by the River Thet. Evidence of habitation continues through to the Roman occupation and the creation of the important Roman road, the Peddars Way, which forms part of the western parish boundary. David showed us an interesting map of the area, dating from circa 1000 AD, that identified many areas of heathland and familiar village names.

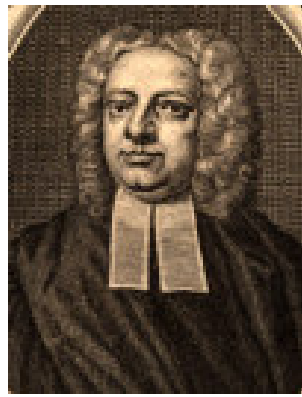
We learned that the entry for Bridgham in the Domesday Book of 1086 identified the Abbot of St Etheldreda's Abbey, Ely as the Lord of the Manor and that the village was contained within the Shropham Hundred comprising 480 acres as well as two watermills.

Bridgham boasted a gilded cross sometime before the eventual construction of the church in 1300–1330, some of which remains today. The church contains a rood screen, with late fifteenth-century painting as well as a fine Perpendicular style octagonal font. Although there is evidence of a tower, the reason for its present absence remains a mystery. The church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, is the only remaining building in the village that pre-dates 1600—however the village does contain 11 listed buildings, many of which are described within David's book.

Bridgham acquired a notable rector in 1717, John Theophilus Desaguliers, a Frenchman who, having studied at Oxford, went on to give scientific lectures. However, Desaguliers was more famous for being an important Freemason of his day, and for his friendship with Sir Isaac Newton and other influential men of the period, as well as for inventing the planetarium. He also appears in a Hogarth painting (held at Ickworth House, Bury St Edmunds) in which the artist makes a rather ironic reference to his latest thesis on balance.

There is a Nelson connection with Bridgham. In 1802 Stephen George Comyn was appointed rector at Bridgham. He was a popular naval chaplain who, at Nelson's request, accompanied him on at least two occasions, on HMS Vanguard at the Battle of the Nile being one such. Comyn arrived in Bridgham following persistent requests to Nelson to lean upon the Lord Chancellor on his behalf in order to secure a living for the chaplain on dry land.

One of the most fascinating aspects of David's talk about the history of the village concerned the numerous photographs of local buildings, important village events and residents that he had collated.



A portrait of Desaguliers by Hans Hysing

The book contains a fantastic pictorial record of village life and inhabitants past and present. One of the most interesting photographs was that of a wedding that took place in 1908, remarkable because David has been able to name all of the guests as well as identify precisely where the photograph was taken.

One couldn't help but be impressed by the quality and quantity of information packed into *Village Life*. The book gives a comprehensive and accessible account of the village from 1000 AD to the present day and makes

fascinating reading. Meanwhile it was apparent how much of the old community spirit still lives on in Bridgham, encouraged and fostered, one suspects, by this all-embracing project which took David and his writing partner, Tony Dobbin, 10 years to complete. In order to aid his research David organised many village events, which proved an invaluable tool as he seems to have collected and recorded, by various media, many personal memories of village life and its inhabitants. Attendees at the talk watched an enchanting DVD with footage of several of these occasions, including an event in 2009 which reunited the people and recreated costumes worn in a Fancy Dress Parade which took place in Bridgham in 1949.

Delia Cook

The MAGGINI Quartet

Sunday 12 February
Swaffham Assembly Rooms, 3pm

Beethoven op. 18 No. 2
Mendelssohn op. 80

Tickets £20
Concessions £15

Available from
Shirley Matthews 01760 723205
Ceres Bookshop 01760 722504
Maggini Festival Box Office 020 7262 4473
mqfundmanager@gmail.com

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email at liz@dittner.co.uk or tel 01366 727813

Newsletter 35— January 2012



A BAT IN THE BEDCHAMBER!

We all know that if we live in rural Breckland we share our environment with a variety of creatures, large and small. Some are pests, but most enhance the country experience.

Each summer at dusk, the garden is alive with bats whipping between the trees, across the pond and around the house searching for insects. Occasionally, a long-eared bat may be seen resting on the brickwork before it returns to its home under the tiles. In winter the bats disappear from view, hibernating until spring, or at least they should ...

Late on a January night in a darkened bedroom a strange noise was heard. Was the dog who should be asleep in the corner of room, wandering around? No, he was curled up on his bed. More noise, and then, what appeared to be a large butterfly was spotted on the blinds. It moved, opened its wings and took off around the bedroom at high speed – a bat!



It's amazing how fast a sleepy person and dog can vacate a bedroom when under attack from a Pipistrelle. When human and canine had calmed down, the bedroom door was inched open, the light turned off and the window flung open before they retreated to a safer bed. Next morning there was no sign of the intruder – he must have left via the open window. Sigh of relief!

In a couple of days all was forgotten, so what consternation to find the Pip walking across hall carpet. At least it was not flying and could be trapped under a food cover and kept safely away from the bedroom whilst an action plan was formed. The Wildlife Hospital at East Winch advised not to touch any bat without wearing gloves – they can give nasty bites and carry diseases. It was to be left where it was and, as it was expected to be mild next day, it could be released at dusk. And, "Oh, it's probably thirsty – soak some cotton wool in water and it will drink that, but don't attempt to feed it". Thank goodness: Pipistrelles eat up to three thousands insects a day – not easy to find on a frosty January night.

Morning light found the bat still under the food cover looking fairly fit, so back to bed with the morning coffee. As the first sip was taken, the bat flew in through the bedroom door. There was a second hasty retreat as the Pipistrelle circled the room and headed for the bed. Another panic call was made to East Winch for someone to come and find and *remove* the escapee. The RSPCA HQ rang back – they couldn't help: ring the Bat Conservation Trust in London. The Bat Con people have no volunteers in rural Breckland and, anyway, until the bat was found and "contained", no volunteer could visit the house.

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WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

Friday 10 February, 4pm

Visit to St George's Whisky Distillery at Roudham. A guided tour of East Anglia's only whisky distillery, with the chance to see the production process and to sample a slug of Saint George's finest malt. Cost is £5 per person. Numbers on the tour are strictly limited, so please let Sue Whittleby know in advance if you wish to attend.

Friday 4 May

Society AGM and a talk by member Michael Gouldstone on the Gurkhas. Full details will be sent to members in April.

Friday 1 June

An evening field trip to Barnham Cross Common in Thetford, led by Neil Featherstone of the Brecks Partnership. Full details in the April newsletter.

If you are concerned about driving in the dark, or simply need a lift to a Society event, please contact Sue Whittleby, as it may be possible to arrange transport with other members.

It's at times like this that you need sensible friends with knowledge of bats. And I have such a friend. She arrived with a shoebox, tea towel and gardening gloves. The bedroom was searched, inch by inch and there, behind the bed and under the valance, just a few inches off the floor, was the sleeping Pip.

Once it was safely in the box, clinging to the tea towel, the box was put outside on the woodpile and left in peace. Next morning the occupant had flown. Hopefully, the Pipistrelle is now safely where he should be for the winter and will not want to share my bed again.

Sue Pennell



The Pipistrelle is Britain's commonest and smallest bat, weighing only half an ounce, with a body two inches long, and a wingspan of eight inches.



Brown long-eared bats are the second most numerous, and in Thetford Forest they outnumber Pipistrelles.

FLINT FOUND AT BEACHAMWELL – THE SEQUEL

Members will recall from the last newsletter that Sue Pennell had found an interesting flint arrowhead in her garden. She has recently had confirmation from Gressenhall on its date and identity. The report gave the following information:

“Leaf Arrowhead (incomplete) Dimensions 36 x 25 x 4.6mm

A broad based, thin leaf arrowhead, recently snapped transversely with loss of the point.

Finished overall on both faces by peripheral shallow pressure flaking, with complete removal of the surface of the blank. Both faces show signs of incipient patination, which has not affected the break surface. DIGIT.

Leaf Arrowheads are a defining artefact of the Neolithic (especially the Early Neolithic Period, 4000–3000BC).”

We are now receiving information that other members have unearthed interesting items – watch this space!



This flint arrowhead could be as much as 6000 years old



Does your countryside project deserve an award?

Landscape, restoration, conservation or education projects that enhance the countryside, or people's knowledge of and access to it, are being sought by CPRE Norfolk, as potential winners of this year's CPRE Norfolk Awards. These prestigious awards are presented annually by The Campaign to Protect Rural England in Norfolk (CPRE Norfolk) to recognise and encourage projects and activities that are beneficial to the Norfolk countryside.

“Norfolk continues to be under threat from over and insensitive development, but we know that there are wonderful projects taking place in the county that really improve the landscape, or our understanding of it. These projects, often by small community groups on limited budgets, deserve to be recognised and those involved should be applauded for what they are doing. For over 30 years the CPRE Norfolk Awards have acknowledged the efforts of these groups

and individuals who have created something special and by so doing, we hope to encourage more high quality projects in our beautiful county,” says Martin Walton, chairman of the CPRE Norfolk Awards judging panel.

Application forms are available from the CPRE Norfolk website www.cprenorfolk.org.uk, by emailing info@cprenorfolk.org.uk or by phoning the CPRE Norfolk office on 01603 761660.

To be considered for this year's Awards, all applications must be received by Friday 8 June 2012.

Katy Jones
Membership and Events Manager
CPRE Norfolk, Cardinal House, 86 St Benedict's Street
Norwich, NR2 4AB
Tel: 01603 761660

A changing of the guard at the Society

This spring will see big changes at the Breckland Society with the retirement of both John Davies, Treasurer, and Sue Whittle, Secretary, from the committee. They have held their respective posts since the Society's inception in 2003 and have been and have been at the heart of its development. Thanks to their time and commitment we have enjoyed nearly a decade of success. Now it's time for someone else to take over the baton!

Both John and Sue will formally stand down at our AGM on 4 May. Existing committee member Paul Squires will become our new Treasurer and Delia Cook will take on the new post of Events Secretary, with responsibility for coordinating the programme of indoor and outdoor events.

That means we are still looking for someone to join us as Secretary, acting as the main contact point for the Society, arranging the committee meetings and helping shape the future direction of the Society. If you are interested in taking this on, then please contact Sue on 01366 328190 or James Parry on 01366 328676.

As part of the forthcoming changes, the committee has also discussed the nature and frequency of the events we organise. In future we will hold four events each year, plus our AGM in May. The events will be carefully chosen to offer variety and quality, ranging from indoor lectures to field trips and private tours of houses and gardens, all designed to educate and entertain! As

ever, we welcome your suggestions for possible future events and activities.

With the Landscape Partnership Bid for the Brecks well advanced and a decision on possible Heritage Lottery Fund support for projects across the area expected in the summer, there may also be the opportunity for Society members to get involved in a range of different projects towards the end of this year and beyond.

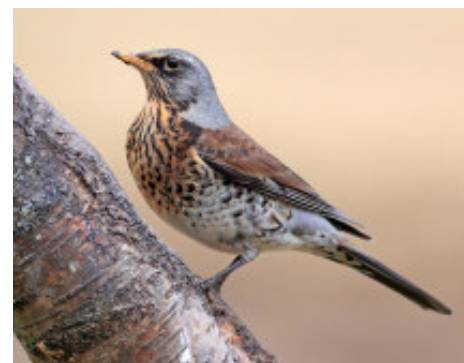
The Society's membership currently stands at just over one hundred and we would like to see this figure grow over the next year. The subscription rates have remained unchanged since we started and we think they represent excellent value, with four newsletters each year and free or reduced admission to Society events.

Please encourage your friends, family and people you know to consider joining us. Membership leaflets are currently being reprinted and will be available soon from Sue or James.

LATEST WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ACROSS THE BRECKS

The mild and dry conditions that we have enjoyed for most of the late autumn and early winter have been a marked change from the same period last year! Wildlife has benefited, with many species surviving into 2012 in greater numbers than would normally be the case.

Unseasonably warm weather meant that butterflies in particular were able to remain on the wing until well into November and even December in a few cases. A Red Admiral was seen in Oxborough on 3 December and there was a report of a Brimstone in Thetford the same day. Bees were still busy nectaring on the few remaining flowers in bloom until mid-November at least. The plague of Bee Flies continued, with some hardy individuals still buzzing around up to Christmas.



Fieldfare Turdus pilaris

Winter birds such as Fieldfares and Redwings were in surprisingly short supply after their earlier invasion last October. A small flock of Bramblings, the northern European version of the Chaffinch, was seen at Weeting on 1 January, with much larger numbers nearby at

Santon Downham. A Great Grey Shrike was seen at Lynford Arboretum on 8 January, with three Crossbills there two days later. As ever, some of the best bird sightings were at RSPB Lakenheath Fen, with regular Bittern sightings – up to four or five a day! – plus Marsh Harriers, Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owls all performing well. Unusual ducks included a female Scaup at the Nunnery Lake in Thetford mid-month.

With few frosts and generally balmy temperatures to date, mammals such as grey squirrels and hedgehogs have remained active throughout. Hedgehogs are in severe decline nationally, with evidence that their population has fallen by a quarter in the past decade. If that rate of decline continues, they will become extinct in Britain within 15 years! Although road casualties are among the problems – it is estimated that a hedgehog is run over on British roads every ten minutes – the real issue is one of manicured gardens and an overly tidied countryside, with fewer rough edges in which hedgehogs can thrive.

No such problems meanwhile for grey squirrels. Thoroughly ensconced across much of the UK, they first arrived in the Brecks in the 1950s and have since prospered. The last native red squirrels hung on here into the 1990s, with no reliable reports since then. Contrary to popular folklore, the greys do not directly attack or even drive out the reds, but they are stronger and therefore more successful at competing for food. They also transmit parapoxvirus, which is fatal to the reds but to which most greys seem immune. Reds are being given a helping hand through a cull of the greys in Northumberland and parts of North Wales, for example, but the long-term solution probably lies in the provision of an antibiotic distributed via food left out for squirrels. Only then will red squirrel reintroductions to the Brecks and elsewhere be truly viable.



Great Grey Shrike Lanius excubitor