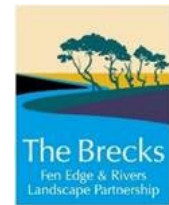




### RECENT EVENTS

- Excursion report of the walking tour of the remains of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey
- Guided Visit to Lynford Water and the grounds of Lynford Hall
- Report on the launch of 'Industrious Rivers'
- Talk on The Brandon Gunflint Industry
- Our Christmas Social in Swaffham
- Report on 'Tales from the River'



### EVENTS

Details of events planned for 2023 will be found on the Breckland Society website. Members will also receive an occasional message by email to inform them of forthcoming events for 2023.

Members will be notified by email when tickets for the Society events are available on the Eventbrite website.

### THE BRECKLAND SOCIETY AND THE BRECKS FEN EDGE AND RIVERS PARTNERSHIP

Industrious Rivers, the latest Society project, was launched on October 17th and those members who have expressed an interest have attended education and training sessions in November, December and January.

For more about this new project see page 4

### THE JOURNAL OF BRECKLAND STUDIES

Volume 4 of the Journal is now available. Price £8 to members or £12.50 to non-members including postage.

Volumes 2 and 3 are £5 each, or £7.50 for both including postage.

Volume 1 is now out of print but is downloadable as a PDF on the Society's website.

If you wish to buy copies please contact the secretary.

# LIVING AND BELIEVING IN THE BRECKS

# EXCURSION REPORT OF THE WALKING TOUR OF THE REMAINS OF BURY ST. EDMUNDS ABBEY.

Dr Richard Hoggett, Heritage Consultant and archaeologist led us on a fascinating tour of the ruins of Bury Abbey on Sunday 11 September 2022. Author of the site's Heritage Assessment, Richard is an expert in the history of the abbey. He explained that in AD 869 the raiding Viking Army, overwintering in Thetford, captured and killed the Anglo-Saxon King Edmund by shooting him with arrows whilst he was tied to a tree, before decapitating him. In the first of a series of miracles those searching for his body were called to by his severed head, guiding them to the spot where it was being guarded by a large wolf. In the early decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Edmund's martyred remains, miraculously 'whole and incorrupt' were brought to a wooden church in the Anglo-Saxon settlement of *Beodricsworth* - the single most important event in the development of the settlement which was to become Bury St Edmunds.

The acquisition of such a notable relic made the monastery a place of national and international pilgrimage and a Benedictine abbey was established in 1020. Edward the Confessor substantially enlarged the privileges in its charter so that by the Norman Conquest, Bury ranked fourth among English abbeys in wealth and political importance. It continued to thrive throughout the 13th century but relations with the townspeople were rarely cordial and in 1327 there was a summer of riots. Despite these setbacks Bury St Edmunds remained politically important throughout the 15th century – Henry VI came for Christmas in 1433 and stayed for four months – and when it was surrendered to King Henry VIII in 1539 for Dissolution it still had a considerable income. Its buildings were emptied, stripped of stonework and reduced to ruins, but the abbey wasn't completely erased as the boundary of the monastic precinct with its mediaeval walls largely survived.

We met at the Norman Tower, originally to the formal entry to the huge abbey church. It is immediately opposite Churchgate Street and this alignment is not a coincidence. Richard explained that the abbey founded the town and thus the main historic streets follow the plan of the abbey precinct. With the Norman Tower behind us we could see the west front of the abbey church which, over the centuries, has been converted into a series of remarkable *ad hoc* buildings, including houses. The accretion of tons of demolition rubble, which cover the main structural features of the abbey, mean that the ground level is



*The Abbey ruins*

much higher than when the abbey church was built, so that the lower part of the west front is invisible. As we walked through the site towards the River Lark, the enormous size of the abbey church became apparent. Begun in 1095, it was extended in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the addition of an extra aisle to enable more pilgrims to visit the St Edmund's shrine generating even more income. The extension made the abbey church larger than St. Peter's in Rome, comparable in size to Cluny Abbey in France and only just slightly smaller than Winchester – England's largest abbey. It was also bigger than its rival in Norwich, which Richard explained was probably not a co-incidence!

The abbey cloister was located to the north of the abbey church, with the Chapter House, Great Hall, Refectory, and Infirmary (which had its own cloister) all close by. Water supply was crucial for monastic houses and at Bury the River Lark and its tributary the Linnet flow along the eastern margin of the site. The Linnet was diverted, and a man-made watercourse ensured a flow through the Reredorter (communal latrines). The abbey's vineyard was just across the Lark, with a bridge so that monks could walk amongst the vines for recreation. In between the two rivers to the south of the site were zig-zag shaped fishponds, The Crankles, and a watermill was built at the northern end, close to the east gate of the town.

The abbey precinct contained everything that was needed for the life of the monastery: a brewery, bakery, granary, mill, dovecote, the Abbott's stables, and a workshop for making leaded windows. In addition to the abbey church there were other churches on the site, one of which is now the modern cathedral of St James and St Edmund. The Abbott's palace, hall, 'great court' and garden were to the north of the cathedral in the current Abbey Gardens. There are 139 listed buildings, including 21 assessed as Grade 1 (nationally significant) within the site and more than 100 archaeological excavations have taken place. To mark the millennium of the foundation of the abbey in 2020, a major new heritage trail around the site was developed, and although its installation was delayed by the pandemic this has recently been completed.

The Heritage Assessment for the Abbey is

[https://stedscathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Heritage-Assessment\\_compressed.pdf](https://stedscathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Heritage-Assessment_compressed.pdf)

## A GUIDED VISIT TO LYNFORD WATER AND THE GROUNDS OF LYNFORD HALL WITH OUR CHAIRMAN, JAMES PARRY.

Some of the parish of Lynford, near Mundford is in the STANTA battle area, and all roads to the village are cul-de-sacs closed off by MoD barriers. To the left of the approach road is FE forestry and a string of flooded gravel pits now called Lynford Water. In the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century the bones of mammoths, rhinos, hyena, wolf and other animals that lived here about 60,000 years ago were discovered amongst the gravels along with Neanderthal hand axes, leading experts to conclude that, this was a significant butchery site used by palaeolithic settlers.

A group of members met James Parry our guide in the car park here and walked down to the 'beach', a popular summer leisure site by the lakes for families from Thetford and Brandon. Despite the autumn sunshine there were few people about to disturb the family of Tufted Duck, a Grey Heron, Little Egret and Great Crested Grebe on the water. The group then walked east to the minimal remains of a water-powered mill by the bridge on the road to Ickburgh before skirting the perimeter of the STANTA area to return to the car park. There were several flowers unseasonably in bloom, especially scabious and vipers bugloss.

<http://www.breakingnewground.org.uk/earthheritagetrail/lynford-water/>

The group then walked to the other side of the road where they passed the Arboretum established in the 1950s by forestry students at a training school in the Hall. In the past year a group of volunteers have improved the labelling on the trees, aiming to record and clearly label them all, as well as planting saplings to replace those lost over the years. The modern Forestry England organisation is now using this diverse plantation a useful tool to identify the most resilient tree species to include in its plans its future plantings.

They continued down the path to the ornamental lake in front of the Hall where the water had only recently returned to near its normal level since it virtually disappeared during the summer drought. Unfortunately, the local hawfinch population was not to be seen that day as the group walked on to the stylish Roman Catholic Chapel built for Yolande Lyne-Stephens. Here the scaffolding had recently been removed to reveal the ornamental parapets which had recently been repaired and the flintwork on the walls which is of exceptional quality. It is hoped that the Society may be able to arrange a visit to the interior of the chapel when repair works have been completed.

The return to the car park passed along the former main drive to the Hall from the Thetford Road, viewing the double lines of Sequoia or Wellingtonia trees that form perhaps the finest avenue of its type anywhere and taking close views of the Victorian Lynford Hall with its Jacobean and French architectural influences.

The estate was bought in 1856 by Stephens Lyne-Stephens, a man who had made his money from a glass-making business in Portugal and was known at the time as 'the richest commoner in England'. He demolished the old hall but the new one was not completed until 1872, several years after his death. His wife spent part of the year at the Hall until she died in 1894, after which it had a chequered history including a fire, a time as a 'grace and favour' residence for a Weeting businessman, a forestry school after the Second World War and perhaps most memorably as a filming location for BBC comedies. Its courtyard posed as the town square of Nouvions and the chateau home of Major-General von Klinkerhoffen in 'Allo, 'Allo, and it was also used in Dads' Army. It is remembered by locals as an auction house of Tyrone Roberts a Swaffham auctioneer, whilst in its grounds were a number of caravans and mobile homes.

For more information see

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000224?section=official-list-entry>

Julia Grover



*The church of our lady of Consolation and St. Stephen, Lynford. Carol Palfreyman*

## THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL WAS HOSTED BY GREG TURNER AT OAKLEIGH HOUSE, SWAFFHAM.

Almost 50 members attended a very enjoyable drinks party, where thanks were expressed to Greg who told us about the history of the house, parts of which date back to the 16th Century. It was given a Georgian frontage in the 1750s when Swaffham was a local centre for the gentry and boasted a racecourse and hare coursing clubs. It is said to be built on the site of a former house occupied by John Chapman, the Pedlar of Swaffham.

The house is now available for short-term lets, including wedding parties and can sleep up to 22 people.

# ‘NO FLASH IN THE PAN’.

## A TALK BY DR. HUGO ANDERSON-WHYMARK BY ZOOM

For this talk on November 1st our speaker was Dr. Hugo Anderson-Whymark, senior Curator of Prehistory at the National Museums of Scotland, in Edinburgh. He is an archaeologist specialising in British prehistory, particularly stone tools. A flintknapper himself, he developed an interest in the gunflint industry and has researched Brandon's flintknappers for more than 15 years.

Breckland in the east of England has long been synonymous with man's use of knapped flint. In the Stone Age, millions of primitive axe heads and arrowheads were produced from the large flint mine pits at Grime's Graves, but from the 18th to the mid 20th century the Breckland town of Brandon was pre-eminent in the production of high quality gunflints for the British Empire. Gunflints produced the spark to ignite the gunpowder in flintlock pistols and muskets, and Brandon is known as the home of the gunflint industry in Britain. The trade thrived there from the 1790s with the price reaching 20 shillings per thousand during wartime but dropping to 2/3 per 1000 in 1845, and even before this in 1816 poverty in the town led to riots. The final workshop closed in 1994 when the last order from South Africa for gunflints was cancelled.

His talk explored the manufacture of gunflints in Britain from the 1650s onwards. The first place of production was Salisbury, in Wiltshire from 1742, later Northfleet near London and Maidstone in Kent. These places were close to military depots where there would have been a great demand. Following the Battle of Waterloo in 1805 the call for gunflints was greatly reduced, and the knapping of replica artefacts and flint novelties by characters such as Fred Snare and Bill Basham developed to maintain work as the trade in gunflints declined. These replicas can be found in museums now, but are not authentic examples.

The largest development of flint mines in the area was at Lingheath, a couple of miles away from the town in an area that is now part of the High Lodge leisure area. Here the best ‘black’ flints were mined from a deep layer in the chalk bedrock.

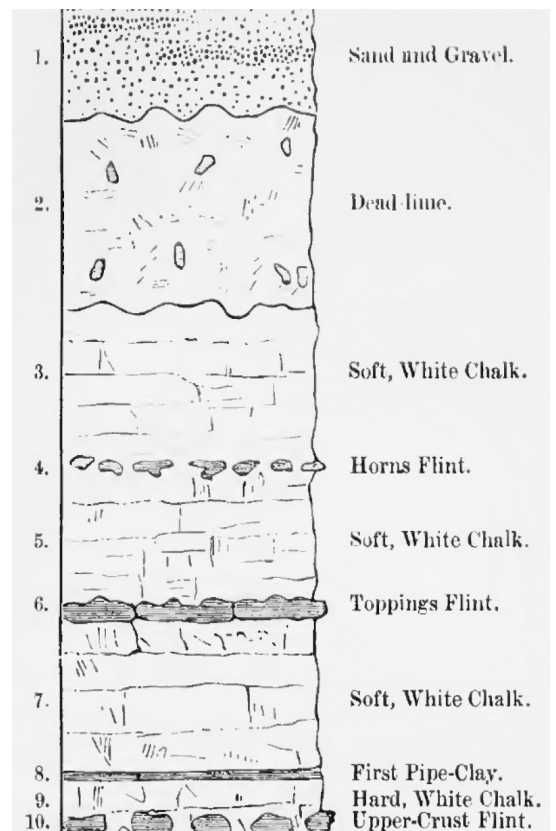
For more information go to -

<http://www.breakingnewground.org.uk/earthheritagetrail/brandon-flint-mine-pits/>

There is also early film of knappers in Brandon available online at -<https://prehistorics-uk.blogspot.com/2014/08/brandon-gun-flint-knapping.html>



*The Lingheath flint pits, 1931.*  
[Image © BGS GeoScenic P205615]



*Part of the sequence of chalk and flint beds in the Brandon area. The miners gave familiar names to each horizon. [Image: ‘On the Manufacture of Gunflints’ by SBJ Skertchly, 1879]*

## A REPORT ON EARLY MEETINGS FOR THE INDUSTRIOUS RIVERS PROJECT.

This lottery-funded project was launched on October 17<sup>th</sup> at The Engine House in Brandon Country Park. There was a plenty of interest in the topic and the event was fully subscribed. Elliott Wragg, the project leader spoke about his research on the banks of the River Thames in London and how this could be used to investigate the remains of industrial usage on the rivers of the BFER area, and Tom Williamson told us about studies in the Broads area that could also assist our work. After lunch attendees travelled to Brandon Lock on the Little Ouse River near the Sports Centre in the town, the site of an earlier staunch and then walked upriver along the Haling Path to the Town Bridge where several old warehouses and maltings remain, now in more modern uses.



*The remains of a lock on the River Lark near Mildenhall*

In November Ivan Cane gave a talk in Mildenhall on locks and staunches, and the group walked along the River Lark where the remains of a lock could be seen.



*The old mill now converted for modern residential use.*

In December interest remained keen at a meeting in Oxborough Village Hall. Elliott returned to instruct us on ways of recording and monitoring the remains of river works and he was joined by Angus Wainwright of the National Trust. In the afternoon we moved to the grounds of Oxburgh Hall where the late Bob Greef had identified brickwork thought to be associated with a water mill that was marked on an early map.



*Attendees exploring the brickwork by the old mill race near Oxburgh Hall.*



## TALES FROM THE RIVER: ENJOYING THE BRECKLAND RIVERS. ANOTHER LOTTERY-FUNDED BFER PROJECT.

The Tales from the River project is gathering and celebrating memories and images of recreation in, on or by the Brecks rivers and other waters. It is part of The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership (BFER), supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This project complements Industrious Rivers, another BFER project led by the Breckland Society. While that is looking at the archaeology and history of industry and navigation, Tales from the River is focusing on non-industrial activities, including swimming, boating, fishing, other sorts of recreation or art inspired by the rivers, and more unusual activities such as ice skating, baptism, duck decoys and eel babbling.

Locations studied by the projects are likely to coincide. Traditional places to swim or fish are often at mill ponds, locks, staunches, and crossing places such as bridges, ferries and fords, perhaps because these are where people went or could access. WG Clarke said, after his detailed description of staunches on the Little Ouse, "In the river below each staunch is a deep pool or 'staunch hole', usually a favourite place for fishing and bathing." (Page 97, 'In Breckland Wilds', 1925)

Volunteers trained by the project in archive research and oral history interviewing have already discovered fascinating material from local people in Thetford, Oxborough, Stoke Ferry and elsewhere. One interviewee's family all swam, and this 1947 image shows his mother in her swimsuit standing on remains of the staunch at Santon Downham. Another named the children in this 1934 photograph of the ford at North Pickenham, including his father and uncle aged 6 and 4, and described how generations of his family played in rivers and he developed a lifelong interest in river wildlife. Brandon and Thetford interviewees told of using belly tanks jettisoned from wartime aeroplanes and Thetford Pulpware baby baths as boats. Many have remembered time spent having picnics, paddling, sunbathing, swimming, fishing or just messing about on the river.

Young people in the project used stories collected and their imagination to create a delightful film on the history of recreation in Thetford (which you can see on the BFER YouTube channel) and are working on an exhibition to complement it which will tour the libraries. Next year young people will learn about and do storytelling to illustrate tales gathered in the project.

A survey of the rivers with another BFER project, Healing Waters, is looking at historic, current and possible future swim and recreation places, to map these and use them in swim walks and to combine heritage, safety and wildlife information in signage at key swim spots.



*Santon Downham Staunch 1947  
M. Baldwin*



How you could get involved: Volunteers are welcome to help research and collect stories, photos, film, folklore. If you are working on the Industrious Rivers or other projects, please look out for anything on watery recreation or people who would be willing to share their memories of enjoying the Brecks rivers, and pass these on. The project is holding drop-in sessions jointly with local history groups, such as this lively event in Oxborough, and would welcome volunteers to help with these events.

Contact Imogen Radford, Tales from the River (and Healing Waters) project lead [imogen36@googlemail.com](mailto:imogen36@googlemail.com) if you'd like more info, to join the supporters mailing list or to get involved. More information about plans and project updates, <https://tinyurl.com/TalesRiverPlans>, and on social media @OSBrecks.