



IN TIME

Ely U3A History Group Members'
Newsletter



Edition 21

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Welcome to Issue 21 of IN TIME. It's always good when an article inspires one of our readers to write more about a topic and this is the case in two of our articles this week. Clint Tweed tells us more about the history of George Brewster the boy chimney sweep and how he was commemorated, while Roger Haverson provides us with more information about King John's treasure and its association with King's Lynn. We also have another childhood memory, information about the Assize Rolls of Ely and a fascinating article about a long ago military hero buried in Ely Cathedral

Please keep on writing - Send your articles to Maggie Haverson (email address supplied in the email containing this newsletter).

Remembering George Brewster – Clinton Tweed



Following on from the most interesting piece mentioning George Brewster in the last weeks "In Time" about chimney sweep boys, I thought readers would be interested in this extract from the recent Fulbourn Village History Society Newsletter. When Viv and I lived in Fulbourn I was Chair of the Society for a few years.

This is the letter that the Society sent in support of a project to erect an appropriate memorial -

"On behalf of Fulbourn Village History Society, I wish to support Joanna Hudson's project of erecting at the former Fulbourn Mental Hospital, a commemorative plaque to George Brewster. As you are no doubt aware, in 1875 he died aged eleven, of suffocation whilst sweeping the flues of what

was then known as the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum for Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Ely and Borough of Cambridge. Negative publicity for the tragedy and the subsequent involvement of the Earl of Shaftsbury which lead to the Chimney Sweepers Act of 1875 seven months later, ultimately stopped the practice of sending children up chimneys. The death of George Brewster was therefore a local event that had national consequences. Fulbourn Village History Society aim to encourage research into and an understanding of local history, especially that of Fulbourn, Cambs. A memorial to George Brewster who died within the boundaries of Fulbourn parish would be a significant contribution towards the understanding of our heritage."



The efforts of the Society and others was successful and the management company of Capitol Park have now agreed to erecting a plaque on a plinth in the grounds of the former hospital.

Treasure Trove (or not!) - Roger Haverson



As a Linnet of 70 years standing I was delighted to read Kate's account of her visit to Lynn and its sights. My recollections go back to the late 1940's, early fifties, being dragged around the town by my grandad, or often as not ending up on being carried home on his "showlders". Long before the days of tourism, heritage centres and town guides, he knew about the King John Cup (to a five year old I thought he knew about everything - I still do!). If you wanted to see it you just went into the town hall and asked, and I they weren't too busy (they usually weren't for grandad, he was that sort of a bloke) they would open the safe and get it out for you. Happy days!

So whats the story about King John's treasure?



There is no doubt that King John (1167-1216) was not a popular king. There's also no doubt that he deserved his bad press. He had lost most of England's lands in France, been excommunicated by The Pope and forced to sign Magna Carta. His levels of cruelty and suppression were legendary.

Biographer Marc Morris, when asked if he was as bad as made out wrote "Oh No! He was much worse!" Jim Bradley however calls him "a hardworking administrator, an able man, an able General."

He broke his word over Magna Carta, and that led to the start of the "First Baron's War". Retreating from a French invasion after the siege of Rochester castle John avoided East Anglia, staunchly rebel held, and skirted The Wash to Spalding, to Lynn. Then called Bishop's Lynn, he was well received having

granted the town a charter in 1204.

On 12th October he left the town for Newark via Swineshead near Boston, but took the more comfortable inland route.

His baggage train however headed due west across the tidal section of the Wash via Walpole Cross keys, Sutton Bridge, and onwards.

In 1216 a royal progress was not just a couple RangeRovers or an extra coach on the London train! There were 3000 people involved in the baggage train alone, and hundreds of horses and carts. The fen roads were little more than muddy tracks, and the carts were heavily loaded with arms, furniture and food as well as the king's precious possessions. The Wash was a lot bigger then, pre-drainage, Wisbech was a major port and Long Sutton was on the coast. The route was across tidal marsh! Wash tides are always unpredictable, neaps hardly happen and springs move at a fast walk and rise many feet. Anyway the slow moving cavalcade was caught by the tide, carts swept away and many lost along, apparently with the king's jewels. Roger of Wendover, an English chronicler who died in 1236 writes "*the ground opened up in the midst of the waves, and bottomless whirlpools sucked in everything*"

What was lost has never been determined. Indeed there seem to records of his regalia after the event. Conspiracy theories abound, one is that a monk stole the jewels and spirited them away to the continent, another that John had used the jewels as security for a loan, and their loss was very "convenient". Anyway they have never been found, though every few years someone comes up with another location, ground penetrating radar etc and try again.

So what happened to poor old Bad King John? He left Lynn a sick man, got worse as he travelled across to Newark, and died of dysentery in Newark Castle 19th October 1216. He was succeeded by his son Henry, then 9 years old, but in effect by the Lord Protector William Marshal who was an immensely capable baron who won the civil war in 1217, and forced the French to renounce their claim to the English throne.

The King John Cup is still in the town that became King's Lynn after the reformation? Well, it's a priceless piece of history made of silver, gold and jewels. It is the oldest and finest specimen of all English secular medieval cups in the world, and has been used for centuries as a "loving cup". If you are in Lynn, pay a visit to the Regalia Rooms and see it. It's date -1325 - a little over a century after King's Johns death!

But it's still fabulous.



Childhood Memories

Here is Kate's childhood memory. If you have a memory you would like to share please send it in.

Searching the beach – Kate Cann



Many years ago after the war was over, my father came out of the RAF and we returned to his favourite holiday resort on the Kent coast, my father being a Kentish man. Here together with my brothers and sister who were at boarding school I would be reunited with the old seaside resort of Herne Bay for two glorious weeks in August before we all returned to school

Herne Bay is a typical Victorian seaside resort with a stony beach, a Pier now long gone and a tea room where my parents liked to sit in the afternoon and relax after an exhausting morning for them with four children.

We would all go swimming out to a raft not far off the shore and my father would often be looking along the

beach for the remains of what he called a bouncing bomb. The story he told was of a man by the name of Barnes Wallis who had the idea of producing a bomb that would destroy a dam in Germany. As a child I grew up with the story and as he died when I was only fifteen I never really knew much about what we were looking for as we explored the beaches, wandering towards the village of Reculver and its ruined church a few miles from Herne Bay

I was to grow up to discover more about what went on in the area in the 1940s and watched with great interest the story of the Dam Busters knowing that my now deceased father had an interest in it long ago as we searched for pieces along Reculvers beach and wondering if this bouncing bomb really did exist .



So low and behold when this interesting article appeared in the paper in 2017, I could finally put my ghost to rest, knowing now that Reculver beach was used as a testing site for the World War 11 bouncing bomb. I'm so glad I collect newspaper clippings they come in handy sometimes

Assizes Rolls of Ely – Christine Alexander



Many of the readers of 'In Time' probably know this already, but Cambridge University Library is undertaking a research project on the Assize Rolls of Ely, C17 - C19.

Although the result will only be a catalogue rather than making digitised images available online, I suspect they

will post some interesting examples. In fact there are already some interesting examples on the background page linked below, plus lovely old images of Ely. The catalogue will include names of accused, so some people may discover interesting ancestors, or, for example, detect patterns of crime by location and time period.

Teaser page at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/ElyAssizes> Background page at: https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/Ely_Assizes2

The University Library's Digital Library has made available many images on various themes at: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/> There must be something for almost all interests!

Brithnoth – John Carruth



Our magnificent Cathedral of Ely has been the Seat of the Bishops of Ely for over 900 years. At the East end is Bishop West's Chapel. As well as tombs of relatively 'modern' Bishops buried here - Bishops Keene (1771-1781) and Sparke (1812-1836), a locally important Victorian Bishop – there are six Bishops from a much earlier time, along with the remains of a great military hero.. We are privileged to have in Bishop West's Chapel the remains of Brithnoth, a great military hero from a much earlier period, a time when Anglo-Saxon England was subject to Viking invasions.

Possibly an Anglo-Saxon Prince, there is a magnificent statue of Brithnoth proudly standing on the bank of the Blackwater river at Maldon in Essex, surveying the site of the Battle of Maldon. It was there, over 1000 years ago, on 11 August 991 that he met his death. He was leading the East-Anglian 'Fryd' (militia) in an attempt to prevent the Viking horde, led by Norseman Olaf Tryggvason, from coming across the causeway from Northey Island and taking Malden. Great East Anglian Hero!! But he lost the battle because of reckless Bravado! After his soldiers had 'formed up' for battle, in a very favourable position, Brithnoth ordered all the horses of his army to be sent away so that there could be no fleeing from the battle. The Vikings were in a poor position, having to advance across a narrow causeway or wade through the mud. Very difficult to then launch an attack. So Olaf Tryggvason politely appealed to Brithnoth to let the Vikings cross over to the firm ground in peace, so that they could fight on more favourable ground. Brithnoth courteously agreed to that and then lost the battle.

Sadly, his valiant defence was to no avail and he was said to have been felled by a poisoned spearhead, and his decapitated head carried from the battlefield as a trophy of victory. The Monks accompanying the Anglo-Saxon army carried Brithnoth's headless body back to the Isle of Ely, where it was buried in the Saxon church there. They didn't like the idea of burying him without a head so a head was fashioned out of wax and placed on the 'headless' corpse. With the building of the Norman Church, the remains were transferred into the new building, along with those of six Anglo-Saxon Bishops. They were all interred at the centre of the church, under what is now the Octagon. The writer, J.R.R. Tolkien, was also a Professor of Anglo-Saxon history and a great admirer of Brithnoth. His play and poem, 'The





homecoming of Britnoth's son', based on an ancient Anglo-Saxon poem, was written in 1953, a year before his great trilogy 'Lord of the Rings'.

In 1769, all the remains were moved to Bishop West's chapel where the seven of them, known as 'The Saxon Worthies' were interred in the outer wall. At that time, the opportunity was taken to measure the bones of these Saxons from the 10th and 11th centuries, and Brithnoth's skeletal remains, even without a skull, showed him to have been about 6 feet 9 inches tall! There was no

evidence found of a wax head! – had it deteriorated, or had it ever existed?!

Petty's Pick of the Week

Every day Mike Petty posts on his Facebook group "Fenland History on Facebook" a number of newspaper clips from his massive archive of local events reported "on this day" <https://www.facebook.com/groups/102684982076955>



Hovertrain collapse lay-off - Cambridgeshire Daily News August 17th 1970

Eight men have been laid off at the tracked hovercraft site at Sutton Gault while an investigation is being carried on into the cause of the collapse of three 50-ton concrete beams of the new track being built for Britain's pioneer Hovertrain.

The accident happened while workmen were erecting the beginnings of the track from Sutton Gault. The plans were that the track should eventually join up with the mile of track which has already been built from the Earith end. The method of construction means that each track beam has to be pushed along its forerunner into place. The final section from the Erith had to pass along a mile of track to be put into place.

The accident happened while the third beam was being pushed on the new part of the track. Workmen ran for their lives when a ganger spotted a crack widening in one of the beams. All three beams collapsed after cracks were spotted.

Foundation work on which most of the men have been kept occupied is running out but it may be that investigation will show that the track will need more supporting beams than first thought.

Construction is likely to be delayed between six or eight weeks. Tracked hovercraft plan to run the first large experimental vehicles on the track early next year. 70 08 04; 70 08 17a

This story appeared in a Cambridge newspaper on this date.