

## **Town Team Visit to Beccles**

Our guide was Barry Darsch who has written quite a few books on the history of Beccles. He was also the town mayor until recently and a trustee of the museum.

We learnt about the town signs with Queen Elizabeth 1 presenting the town charter to John Baas the Port Reeve in 1584 (although there is no actual evidence that she ever came to Beccles or that he ever met her, but it makes a good story.) We also learnt about why the charter was granted. Most of Beccles land was owned by the monks at Bury St Edmunds. After the dissolution William Rede – a prominent merchant – fraudulently claimed he had been granted the land by King Henry V111. This caused a bit of unrest – so the people surrendered the town to Elizabeth – and the charter was to sort the matter out once and for all.

Another fraud was committed in Victorian times by William Moore – a highly successful printer and quite a rich man – but who managed to spend more than even he possessed. A bittersweet story as he was a good employer to many of the town. Clowes printers (on the site where Tesco is now) survived the involvement of William Moore and became well known for printing the Beatrix Potter books

We visited the newly installed information centre by Beccles Quay on the river Waveney which forms the border between Norfolk and Suffolk. We then headed back to the church where the Reverend Edmund Nelson married Catherine Suckling – 9 years before Horatio was born. The Suffolk Poet George Crabbe also got married there.

Of course, we saw the bell tower with the clocks only on three sides which face Suffolk – because they “wont give the time of day to the people of Norfolk.” That is not actually true, and we were made very welcome.

The afternoon was spent at the museum. The house was formerly that of Sir John Leman who was Lord Mayor of London in 1616. They have a great little display of the prehistoric causeway across the marshes discovered in 2006, a lovely model of the town as it was in the 1840s and my favourite exhibit is a straw embroidery – yes, small pieces of straw cut and sewn on a bit like beads and they really shine like gold. It was practiced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and samples are now rare especially outside Russia.