



Longstanton & District Heritage Society

Protecting and Promoting
the Heritage of
Longstanton & District

NEWSLETTER

No.1 May, 2008

GOOD BEGINNINGS

A positive start to the Longstanton & District Heritage Society since its launch at the Inaugural Meeting held in Longstanton Village Institute on 11th May, 2007: 99 individually named members by financial year end, 31/3/2008. The level of membership and interest has been tremendous. Local, national and international membership shows the scale of interest in our efforts to protect and promote the heritage of the villages of Longstanton and Oakington & Westwick as well as the history of RAF Oakington and Oakington Barracks.

The Society was even mentioned in the Northstowe Planning Application Vol. 24! This shows that the developers and local government are taking notice of LDHS - and it is thanks to *every* individual member that we have managed to achieve this. We can all be proud that individuals are making a difference to the outcome of the Northstowe project.



Les Ellingham

the bomber force would turn South East towards their target in the industrial heartland of Germany which surrounded the river Ruhr. The flare highlighted the silhouette of EF366 enough for two enemy fighters to spot them and attack. The Stirling was crippled and having turned due South it headed towards the area of Achel - Hamont in Flanders.

Five of the crew parachuted from the escape hatch and Les was last to leave by which time they were dangerously close to the ground. The pilot Robert Bruce Meicklejohn and navigator Charles Redwood stayed at the controls and succeeded in lifting the plane sufficient to miss the village of Achel. It crashed in a field with its cargo of bombs in the hamlet of 'Het Ven' and exploded, killing both pilot and navigator.

Les hit the ground somewhere near the church at Achel and undercover of darkness travelled and hid for three hours before finding an unlocked door to a barn attached to a farmhouse at Neerpelt.

Eventually, Les was himself spirited away from the area and with two other RAF men arranged to escape via the railway station in Paris. When they entered the station Les noted that it was empty but before he could react to his suspicions he felt a pistol jammed against his ribs and heard the words 'No monkey business!'. His captor had been trained in Canada! Les was sent to the Prisoner of War camp at Stalag IVB at Muhlberg on the River Elbe north of Dresden. There he was kept with prisoners of 34 other nations before his release by Russian Cossacks in 1945.

LDHS Social & Talks - 2008

Longstanton & District Heritage Society started the year with an 'open door', social held in the Village Institute on **Friday 18 January**. It was well attended with members and non-members enjoying the exhibition of old photographs on display; new many friends were made - much information exchanged.



Well attended LDHS Social

Tom Eaton's albums were, quite rightly, the source of great interest being a unique record of Longstanton's recent social life. Other photographs on display for the first time illustrated various aspects of Longstanton's past going back to before WWII with such subjects as women's part in the village and in RAF Oakington during the war. Plenty of photographs of the Stirling, the first four engined bomber to enter service with the RAF flown, by 7 Squadron from RAF Oakington, were also on display.

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Aircrew of Stirling EF 366 - June 1943

Charles Redwood (RNZAF) navigator. Les Ellingham (RAF) wireless op. Jack Kilfoyle (RAF) gunner.
Frank Hugo (RAF) bomb aimer. Robert B Meiklejohn (RAAF) pilot. Bill Cole (RAF) flight engineer.

Stirling EF366 - Contact Made

As a direct result of using the above photograph from Rene Winters, another part of the 'jigsaw', that formed EF366's last flight from RAF Oakington, was received. A letter arrived (25/10/2007) from Paul Nichols, the brother-in-law of Les Ellingham, containing a personal account of that fateful flight. Les, third from the right, is now 85 and the only surviving member of EF366's flight crew, was on board when the Stirling was shot down.

Their mission on 22 June, 1943 was to act as Pathfinder leading a fleet of 160 bombers intent on the destruction of Krefeld. EF366 was to drop a flare over Eindhoven whereupon

Did you know each of these machines had ten feet clipped off their wings just to enable them to fit into the standard MOD hanger?

Another social evening is planned on **7 November***, when it's hoped to 'Put Names to Faces & Places' - your chance to bring along your old photographs of interest - everyone welcome.

Guest speaker for the **1 February** talk, was the well known local historian Mike Petty. Mike has made it his



'Scrapbook 1836', Mike Petty in full dramatic mode

life's work to catalogue Cambridgeshire history and gave us an entertaining, whimsical glimpse into local life of over 170 years ago. Entitled '**1838 Scrapbook**', he invited us to imagine what it would have been like to see Cambridgeshire through the eyes of none other than Samuel Pickwick! Needless to say, by this device Mike's imagination allowed him not only to paint pictures in our minds but also to drop into various character voices, engaging his audience throughout. Full use was made of newspaper cuttings and pictures of the time - he even managed to include a real flying horse. Don't believe me? Well, you should have been there!



Chris Evans revealing nationally significant Roman sites under the Northstowe footprint

< ref map from "Longstanton a Village Hinterland", Vol. II Author Chris Evans

For those of us interested in just what does lie under the proposed new town of Northstowe, the talk, '**Longstanton Archaeology**', given by Chris Evans of Cambridge University's Archaeological Unit on the **7 March**, proved to be 'an eye opener'! To paraphrase from the film 'Top Gun', it is an archaeological rich environment. Something like 38 significant sites have been identified ranging from bronze age/ iron age/ Roman, medieval through to WWII. He confirmed that the major Roman site of national significance, discovered in the north of the airfield, is over an area 2 - 3 times greater than Roman Cambridge!

Peter Friend's talk '**Rivers, Streams & Floods**', on Friday 4 April proved to be a fascinating insight into the deep history of the area. Peter, a nationally respected figure in the field of sedimentary geology, showed by a series of slides East Anglia, and our area in particular, had been subject to the various cyclic cooling over millions of years, causing rivers to change course and floodplains to form.

Peter used many well presented slides to illustrate his talk working from a laptop and projector.

One of these slides illustrated clearly that the Earth had gone through many periods of extreme cold and heat over geological time, showing that we were possibly due for another 'ice age'! However, he made the point that 'global warming', essentially thought to be the result of man's production of CO₂, would be likely be the predominant effect.



Floodplains around St.Ives

Further talks/socials planned for this year include:

6 September, 'Swavesey - a Medieval Town' by John Shepperson.

3 October, 'Local Memories of the War' by Ralph Warboys.

7 November, Social Evening*.

What next - 2008/09

LDHS is committed to following the progress of Northstowe planning process and the archaeology excavations. LDHS will lobby the developers and local government as required, to ensure that this significant site is recorded and finds preserved for future generations. Chris Evans advised that there would be a tremendous quantity of artefacts from the site and that there would be enough for display in a small local museum.

LDHS would benefit from having a laptop, projector and mobile screen. This technology will enable talks and displays to be more readily carried out throughout Longstanton and District. e.g. to local schools, residents and other interested groups. If anyone wishes to donate funds specifically to this cause, or carry out a fund raising event to raise money for this equipment- please let us know.

In addition, to making our archives more accessible LDHS will continue to lobby the developers and local government in order that we obtain a suitable heritage facility which will record the social and rural and military history of Longstanton and Oakington & Westwick. LDHS is committed to establishing a facility which will be a fitting memorial to all those who flew from RAF Oakington during WW2.

And finally ...

Many thanks to everyone who has helped establish this Heritage Society - in particular CLE Print of St.Ives for the continued support by their printing of our calendars/cards and this newsletter. All contributions large and small have been greatly appreciated. Please continue to support our work during the forth-coming year, and spread the word amongst family, friends and former colleagues. Your membership is our mandate - and every single member is invaluable. And remember please do not hesitate to contact us at any time if you have any queries; would like any information; or would like to contribute memories, photographs etc. Contact details are below.