

Friends of Beccles and District Museum



Newsletter
March 2023 No17

Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter.

Since the publication of the last Newsletter the museum has received very welcome grants from Beccles and District Lions Club and Beccles Town Council towards the cost of the replacement photocopier.

Lucy Johnson is no longer the curator. If you know of anyone who would be interested in the role or in one of our other volunteering opportunities, please contact the museum museumadmin@btconnect.com 01502 715722.

Lucy Johnson was to have provided our first special exhibition of the season. I am pleased to report that Andy Lovegrove and Jack Morris have stepped into the breach and the exhibition will be in place.

Thank you for your continuing support for the museum.

Barry Darch

Chairman of Trustees, Beccles and District Museum, CIO

Did you know?

The 'District' in the museum's name refers to 29 parishes, comprising 9 in Norfolk and 20 in Suffolk, so we cover a large geographical area. We are hoping to increase the number of items in our collections from the villages, so, if you know of someone who would like to donate an item to the museum, please encourage the person to contact us. The object will need to have a strong connection with the village. Images of a village in the form of photographs and postcards will be particularly welcome. The 29 villages are listed on our website. If you cannot access it, please contact us if you wish to discover whether a particular village is in 'the District'.

Front Cover Image – Painting of Geldeston Staithe (see article on page 11-12).

Special Exhibitions During 2023

Our **first special exhibition** is about the history of the **sailing club and Regatta**. It will run from the beginning of April to the end of May. **The Preview Evening will be on Friday 31st March at 6pm.**

The **second special exhibition** on **Elliott and Garrood** will run from the start of June to the end of end of July. **Preview Evening Friday 2nd June at 6pm.**

Roman Connections will be the third exhibition from August onwards **Preview Evening Friday 4th August, 6pm. (See more information overleaf).**

Please accept this notification as your invitation to the previews. We will not be issuing separate tickets.



Boat sculptures for Beccles Amateur Sailing Club and Regatta exhibition made by Emily Brown of Books and Crannies.

Roman Connections

We have been inspired by a donation last year of variously sized pebbles and stones in which sand erosion has caused holes to be formed. These stones had been found many miles inland and are thought to have been used in the Roman period for different tasks of everyday life, such as weaving and fishing.

To demonstrate how they would have been used, two of our volunteers Alan Wheeler (carpentry skills) and his wife Christine (a member of a weaving guild) have kindly constructed a replica of a Roman loom. The warp (vertical) threads have to be kept under tension. The odd warp threads (1,3,5 etc) are tied and fixed. The even warp threads (2,4,6 etc), which have to be able to move from in front of the odd warp threads to behind them, are kept under tension by the loom weights. Each time the even warp threads change position, from in front to behind, or behind to in front, the shuttle with the weft (horizontal) thread is passed across the loom. This way the fabric is slowly created. On the model we have three weights but in practice there should be more.

The Roman Connections exhibition will be from August to the end of October to give maximum access to children in the summer holidays and for our autumn school visits. Our sincere thanks to Alan and Christine.



Andy Lovegrove



Left: Model Roman Loom.

Above: Loom Stone.

Photographs taken by Jack Morris.

Sir Edward Etchingham of Barsham Hall

Last year marked the 495th anniversary of the death of Sir Edward Etchingham, the last of the Etchingham lords of the manor of Barsham. His death in the tranquil setting of the moated Barsham Hall ended a century of Etchingham lordship in Barsham and concluded a life spent in the service of Henry VIII and, it seems, under the patronage of the powerful Howard family.

Etchingham was a naval commander during Henry's conflict with France from 1512 to 1514. In the autumn of 1512 he was appointed captain of *The Lizard*, purchased that year and tasked with interrupting French shipping in the North Sea over the winter. The following spring, he served under the Lord Admiral, Sir Edward Howard, escorting supply convoys, participating in the blockade of the French fleet at Brest, and raiding the French coast. When Edward Howard was killed in action, it was Etchingham who wrote to Thomas Wolsey with eye-witness accounts of the disaster.

Then, in September 1513, James IV of Scotland invaded the north of England whilst Henry VIII was campaigning in France. Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey (from 1514 2nd Duke of Norfolk) hastily assembled an army and marched north to meet the invasion. Ships of the navy were ordered to Newcastle to strengthen Surrey's force – early Tudor warships carried a sizable company of soldiers. When the English army met the Scots at Flodden Field near Branxton in Northumberland, Etchingham and his men were assigned to the forward company under the new Lord Admiral, the younger Thomas Howard. The Scots were routed and James IV slain along with much of his aristocracy, senior clergy, nobility, chieftains and at least 10,000 others. Etchingham was knighted 'after the fylde' by the Earl of Surrey.

His reputation sealed at Flodden perhaps, Etchingham was appointed in 1514 to command the *Peter Pomegranate* – named for St Peter and the King's wife, Catherine of Aragon, whose badge was a pomegranate. Built in 1510, *Peter Pomegranate* was a sister ship of the *Mary Rose*. At 450 tonnes and with a crew of 300 sailors, gunners and soldiers, she was one of the great warships of Henry VIII's navy and, like the *Mary Rose*, one of the early custom-built warships with gun decks, as opposed to merchantmen with defensive weaponry. Being given command was a signal honour.

Further preferment followed. Etchingham was appointed Collector of Customs at Ipswich in 1515, an office from which he would expect to draw considerable income. In 1521 still under the patronage of the younger Thomas Howard, who had succeeded his father as Earl of Surrey and was now Lord Deputy in Ireland, Etchingham served for a year as Constable of Limerick Castle. When Howard was recalled as Lord Admiral for further naval operations against France, Etchingham followed and joined the fleet harrying the French coast and landing troops to sack the Breton town of Morlaix in summer 1522.

In a curious way, even after his death in 1527 Sir Edward Etchingham continued to serve his king. His tomb – one of the treasures of Holy Trinity church, Barsham – was fashioned from terracotta in the Italianate Renaissance style, a style that Henry VIII actively promoted amongst his courtiers in a conscious effort to modernise English taste and to portray himself as a sophisticated Renaissance prince and the equal of his Continental neighbours. Etchingham's tomb is one of a unique group of seven East Anglian terracotta tombs with Italianate panels almost certainly made by the same band of travelling craftsmen from Flanders or Italy, sometimes employing common moulds on the various tombs. The most impressive tombs are those of the Marneys at Layer Marney in Essex and the Bedingfelds of Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk. Both families were prominent at court and influential in East Anglia, and the Etchinghams were related by marriage and ties of kinship to both – which most probably explains how these craftsmen came to bring this important example of early English Renaissance work to Barsham.



Robert Bacon

Stone tomb of
Sir Edward
Etchingham.
Holy Trinity
Church,
Barsham.

How Beccles Celebrated Some Coronations From 1861 to 1911

Here is the notice that appeared in a newspaper advertising celebrations for George III's coronation in 1761:

B E C C L E S.

THE principal Inhabitants of BECCLES, in the County of Suffolk, intending to celebrate the Day of his Majesty's Coronation, propose a Two Shillings and Six-penny Ordinary at the Assembly Room, at the White Lion, at Two in the Afternoon, and request the Favour of such Gentlemen in the Neighbourhood as chuse to accompany them on this joyous Occasion, to send for Tickets to Mr. Otley, at the said White Lion, on or before the 19th Instant.—In the Evening Fire-works will be plaid off, at the Expence of the Corporation, which when over, a general Illumination will begin, and at Ten there will be a Ball for the Ladies.

N. B. In order to prevent any Damage that might ensue to the Inhabitants, the Fire-works will be plaid off under the Direction of a skilful Person. And Notice is hereby given, That if any Person or Persons shall attempt to throw or fire off any Squibbs, Rocketts, or other Fire-works, or fire any Guns or Pistols, in the Market-place or Streets of the said Town, they will be prosecuted with the utmost Severity.

In 1830 to mark the coronation of William IV the Corporation of the Fen gave £20 (nearly £2000 in today's money) and several individuals contributed £5 each. The Oddfellows planned to celebrate at their large rooms at the Falcon Inn (where WH Smith's now is).

By the time of Queen Victoria's Coronation in 1838 Beccles had a borough council and mayor. The council agreed that each poor family in the town would be given meat, bread and beer at their own houses. The Ipswich Journal announced that the day would end with 'a Ball at the Assembly Room when the Higher & Middle Classes will unite on the occasion.' Gentlemen would pay 4 shillings and ladies 3. On the day itself 'triumphal arches' were erected in the streets and 'the principal houses' were decorated with evergreens and flowers. The Beccles Company of Musicians, who paraded the town with flags, played 'loyal & inspiriting airs', calling forth 'a feeling

of patriotic joy from all classes of the Inhabitants'. Sports described as 'rustic' took place. The paper reported that all went off 'with éclat'.

In 1902, however, things did not go so well. Edward VII developed appendicitis and the coronation was postponed. In Beccles only the dinner for old people and the children's tea went ahead. The following month Athletic Sports were held in the afternoon of Coronation Day and a Fancy Dress Costume Parade in the evening.

1911 saw the crowning of George V. The Beccles Territorials were reviewed in New Market and a feu de joie was fired by the 5th Suffolks. Children were then marched there from their schools, the Howitzer Band leading one school, the Town Band another and the Bugle Band a third. The mayor and corporation then headed the huge procession of children to the Common where sports were held and refreshments served. In the evening a concert and 'cinematographic entertainment' followed on the Common; and dancing took place in an enclosure. Members of the Adult School served food and non-intoxicating drinks in a specially erected refreshment room. The mayor Col. Wilson (whose rank came from his role in the Territorials and who was the manager of Clowes) told the assembled children that they were 'inheritors of a mighty empire' and upon them depended 'in great measure the maintenance of the power and might which are now our glory and our pride'.



Celebration of the Coronation of King George V, 1911, New Market, Beccles, 1911

Focus on Geldeston

Geldeston today is a quiet village. You may have visited one of its two pubs, even perhaps walking there from Beccles along the river. But in the late 18th century it was a hive of commercial activity centred on the staithe.

The Norwich Mercury of the 13th January 1776 advertised the sale of the staithe and the buildings connected with it:

“Geldeston staithe etc. to be sold by private contract. All that well-known staithe and wharf with the sole and exclusive right of navigation belonging thereto, extending to and from the Port of Great Yarmouth, at which is now carried on a very considerable and well established mercantile trade in coal, corn, deal, etc. with great advantage, and in great repute, being so situated that the trade is entirely free from all encumbrances of tonnage, lockage etc. to which most other inland navigations are subject; being a singular and very considerable advantage to the trade of this navigation. This situation for trade is admirably fine, being so entire within itself that no opposers will ever hurt it, lying between the towns of Beccles and Bungay and having a fine navigable canal cut from the River Waveney half a mile up to it, upon which stands a small town of warehouses, malthouses, granaries, etc. all adjoining to the land and locked up every night: with an exceeding fine coal wharf, capable of containing 2000 chaldron of coal, which are landed with little or no expense, with a very quick sale for the same. Likewise alone capable of containing 1000 quarters of corn, built in 1773, adjoining to which is commanded the canal, the wharf and all the buildings etc. upon it. Also an exceeding good brick and tiled malting office, built last summer, 40 comb steep, with two exceeding good work floors, one plaster of Paris, the other brick, and a fine granary over the same, capable of containing 500 quarters of corn, with store rooms and drying chambers for laying dry malt so conveniently adjoining and built over the canal, that vessels may lay under the chambers to receive their loading without expense and the same is capable of containing 1000 quarters of malt. Adjoining is a strong-built brick cinder oven, with large yards boarded in for laying a large quantity of coals and cinders. Also new built stables for the convenience of teams coming to the staithe; also adjoining is a large spacious quay and yard.’

The Wherry public house and three wherries and two ‘pleasure boats’ were among other property included in the sale.

An Act of Parliament of 1670 facilitated the restoring of the navigation from Beccles to Bungay; and it is thought that the cut from the Waveney to Geldeston was made in the early 1700s.

The Dowson family owned the Staithe from the late 18th century. In a map of 1826 it is called Dowson's Staithe. White's Directory for Norfolk of 1854 lists businesses run by the Dowson family. Henry Dowson was described as a maltster, brewer and spirit merchant; and Benjamin Dowson and Sons were listed as maltsters and corn and coal merchants.

The Geldeston Brewery operated for about 30 years from 1828. It owned many public houses in the area, including the Gillingham Swan which was sold for £610 in 1858, the Pigeons in Puddingmoor, Beccles, the Wheatacre White House (now the White Lion) and the Kirby Cane Swan.

The arrival of the Waveney Valley Line in the 1860s affected the viability of waterborne traffic. The maltings at the Staithe were demolished in 1922 and other maltings closed in the 1930s. But the Wherry pub is still there!

The Dowsons were benefactors of Geldeston, the Misses Dowson building the Village Hall in 1923 to commemorate the family connections. Nearly a century before Dowsons built the village school.

A notable descendant of the family was the internationally known architect Sir Philip Dowson (1924-2014), sometime President of the Royal Academy and the first president of The Beccles Society, who lived at Geldeston.

Barry Darch

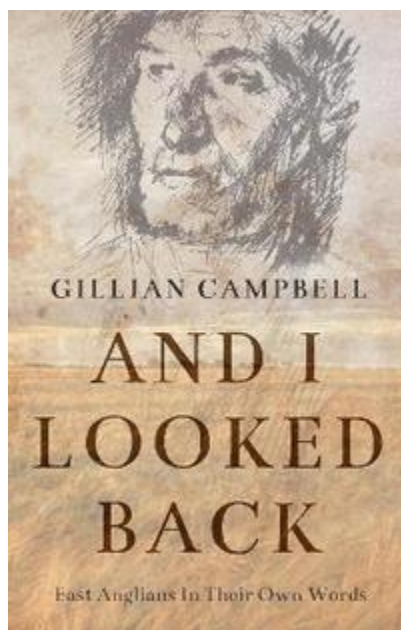
See the image on the Newsletter title page for a painting of Geldeston Staithe.

A New Book of Local Interest

And I Looked Back: East Anglians in Their Own Words

Gillian Campbell, whom many of you will know as a local resident, has compiled a book of reminiscences of people born in the early years of the 20th century. Over a period of thirty years she has recorded people from a variety of backgrounds. One man was put to the plough, with a horse, aged eight, another went to sea in a steam drifter at sixteen and there is a woman whose children were born in the workhouse.

The book (£12.99) is due to be published in April and will be available in bookshops and at the museum.



Beccles and District Museum

Museum Opening 2023

This season we will be opening on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 1.45 – 4.30 from 1st April to 28th October.

If you have been a steward previously and haven't signed up for this year, please contact Michelle and Roger Golding steward.becclesmuseum@gmail.com, as it would be very useful to have some people in reserve. We are also keen to recruit some new stewards and other volunteers.

Please contact: Beccles and District Museum, Leman House, Ballygate, Beccles, NR34 9ND 01502 715722 (answer machine when closed).

museumadmin@btconnect.com

Shop: shop.becclesmuseum@gmail.com

Friends of the Museum and the 100 Club

If you are a Friend, we are very grateful to you. Our income from visitors was down last year and every penny counts. Like most small museums, we don't break even. We rely on the generosity of past and present supporters, any grants that we can get and our various fund-raising activities, including the shop. If you would like to join the 100 Club or buy more shares, please contact the museum.