

## Issue 184 Newsletter July 2011

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2011 ISSUE 184

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Ipswich Borough Council and Suffolk County Council  
opposite sides of the road and different ways of doing business reflected

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# Editorial: A Great Past

'Made in Ipswich' was the title of the Town Lecture given by Brian Dyes on 12 May. It was a masterly survey of manufacturing in Ipswich from Saxon times to the present day. With less than an hour to cover a huge amount of material, he chose to concentrate almost exclusively on the remarkable achievements of the two Ransomes firms. That meant short shrift for medieval shipbuilding and for distinguished companies like E R & F Turner, Cocksedge's, Reavell's and Crane's, omissions which might have disappointed former employees of those firms. But the result was that Mr Dyes could revel in describing the design and production of Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies' ploughs, lawn mowers, threshing machines, tractors, forklift trucks, trolley buses, aircraft and combine harvesters - and Ransome and Rapier's whole range of railway products, concrete mixers, sluice gates and cranes, culminating in the gigantic walking dragline.

Like many Ipswich Society members, I already knew some of this but by no means all. However, I came away with two persistent general impressions. One was the knowledge that this work was not merely routine mass production but in several cases world class pioneering invention which depended on some brilliant engineers backed up by first class apprentice training. The other realisation was that these companies were not running down but perhaps at their peak when I came to live in Ipswich in 1957. And yet to me, living in N W Ipswich and quite close to the town centre, what was going on around the docks and in the east of the town was not very noticeable, almost part of another world.

So even in the 1950s there was little obvious synergy between the docks and the town centre to many residents like me. (It wouldn't have been the case in previous centuries of course when people lived close to their places of work.) But that 'division' is still apparent today - probably more so. Hence the Master Plan which I referred to in my April Editorial- the joint effort by Ipswich Central and IBC to promote an ambitious vision of linking up Ipswich's unique potential attraction, the Waterfront, with the town centre. Your Executive Committee was pleased to learn more about this at a meeting with Mr Richard Turner, Property Surveyor for Ipswich Central. How much of this possible development of shops, houses, public spaces and a new comprehensive bus station could take place in the foreseeable future is anybody's guess. But the strategy has much to commend it - and Ipswich has seldom stood still!

Other articles in this Newsletter show the variety of activities and achievements in Ipswich at present, as well as concerns being expressed by our members about problems actual and potential. I hope you will read on and find much to mull over.

Please let me have contributions to the next issue by 20 August. More and more members are responding to this ever-open invitation. I think it makes the Newsletter a vehicle for the whole Society and perhaps less predictable.

*Neil Salmon*

## Heritage Open Days

The Society will again be organising Ipswich's contribution to this national, in fact Europe-wide, event. Details have not been finalised at the time of going to press but there will be many venues which will open their doors to interested members of the public free of charge. All information will

be published in the leaflets which the Society provides. They will be available from mid-August at the Tourist Information Centre, museums and libraries.

Although it is difficult to keep adding new venues to our list, some are well worth a second look and some you might have missed in the past. However, if you have visited almost everything previously there are two other aspects of Heritage Open Days to consider - you might collect a leaflet and encourage friends to go; or you might visit Norwich or Colchester for example and enjoy what they have to offer. (London's Open Days are usually a week earlier.) If you do stay in Ipswich, don't forget to pay your respects to Thomas Wolsey at Curs on Plain on your way to St Peter's Church; he wasn't here last year.

## Winter Lectures

To be held in Methodist Church, Museum Street (entrance Black Horse Lane) at 7.30 pm.

12 October 'Ipswich's Business Improvement District' by William Coe and Paul Clement.

William Coe is the Chairman and Paul Clement the Chief Executive of Ipswich BID, a company set up by IBC to manage and improve the environment of the town centre and business opportunities there.

14 December 'Getting Wolsey's Statue in its Place' by Dr John Blatchly

Dr Blatchly, formerly Headmaster of Ipswich School, is a local historian, guide and enthusiastic champion of Medieval Ipswich - as many members know.

11 January 'Sherrington, Ipswich's Most Eminent Son' by Dr Michael Cook

Dr Michael Cook was a Consultant Anaesthetist at Ipswich Hospital; Sir Charles Sherrington's discoveries are a central part of the knowledge of the modern anaesthetist.

15 February 'Producing and Distributing Electricity for Suffolk' by Dr Michael Coleman

Dr Coleman has now retired from managing Sizewell and Bradwell nuclear power stations. A nuclear physicist by training, he was Chairman of Sussex Preservation Society.

14 March 'Managing Suffolk's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' by Nick Collinson

Nick Collinson manages The Suffolk Heaths and Coast AONB to which he is adding the Dedham Vale AONB, hopefully to be extended in the near future.

## Ipswich Society Awards 2011

Please feel free to nominate new buildings or new improvement schemes on the separate sheet enclosed with this Newsletter. This is one of the most important activities of the Society's year to which any member can contribute. In fact, members' involvement in observing changes in the town is particularly valuable because you may have noticed things in your own part of town which committee members don't know about. Our judges will go and look at all nominations - before all will be revealed in November's special meeting.

# IBC's Core Strategy

Some snippets of information from the ongoing examination in public.

How many housing units does Ipswich need and how many of those should be 'greenfield' family homes rather than apartments on 'brownfield' sites? This of course is a vital question for the Examination into the soundness of the Core Strategy for the future development of Ipswich, an on-going public debate in which The Ipswich Society has been involved.

The immediate difficulty is that Ipswich is constrained by old Victorian boundaries, whereas developers, the house buying public and most of the lay population see Ipswich as a bigger conurbation (to include, for example, Kesgrave and Pinewood). The Regional Strategy had the advantage of including these peripheral residential areas in its thought process and recommendations, whereas the Local Development Framework is solely for the Borough.

The other debate is the perennial chicken and egg question, which should come first in the growth stakes - houses or jobs? The developers argue (because they simply want to build and sell) that the houses must come first; employers will not move into an area without available labour. The counter argument is that building houses speculatively simply attracts residents who then commute to existing jobs elsewhere. This is certainly true at Ravenswood, which is conveniently placed adjacent to Junction 57 of the A14 and jobs in Martlesham, Felixstowe and north Essex.

Thus we start playing the numbers game on the only sizeable plot left to develop in Ipswich - the Northern Fringe, between Henley and Westerfield Roads north of the by-pass. And again we can debate how far north this new estate should stretch. As far as the railway, as far as the Borough boundary or into Westerfield itself? Different developers own or have taken options on the different fields within this large area and are bending their arguments to ensure their plot is essential to the working of the Framework.

The Ipswich Society's position on this is clear. We support the development of the Northern Fringe but with some essential conditions. Piecemeal development of small plots does nothing for infrastructure, community facilities or transport links. A planned development of, say, 1500 housing units could include (as a planning condition) a primary school, doctors' surgery, contributions to establishing public transport and off-site road improvements.

This is why The Ipswich Society opposed the proposed developments by Ipswich School on their playing field site and Mersea Homes on their site immediately east, adjacent to Westerfield Road. We are not against building homes on either of those sites (given that the case is proved that Ipswich needs to build 10,000+ new homes over the next 20 years) but there must be a Master Plan for the entire development and the various developers must contribute their fair share to the infrastructure and community facilities.

Part of the on-going debate at the Examination is how many homes in total should the Northern Fringe accommodate (hence the 'how many jobs' question). Crest Nicholson with land interests north of the railway are suggesting a number considerably higher than 1500. Thus when 'retail' was discussed at the Examination they suggested a supermarket rather than a local centre would be essential (think Tesco Kesgrave). The Examination re-convenes at about the same time as this Newsletter is published, so watch this space.

*John Norman, Vice-Chairman*

# Some Shorts

**Suffolk One**, the new sixth form centre on London Road but just outside the Borough, was awarded 'Best Educational building' in the 2011 East Anglia Building Excellence Awards. It features solar water heating and a ground heat recovery system.

**St Mary at the Elms Church** is being lovingly restored after the fire which broke out in its early Tudor tower in July of last year. Scaffolding fills the interior space so that the wooden beams and plaster of the roof can be restored. Church services continue to be held in this, one of the most homely of our twelve medieval churches.

**Giles Circus** should be a leafy new public space. But the five semi-mature trees planted last year show results of the drought. The tree nearest to Butter Market is thriving because that's the way the drainage flows. The others are under-nourished. More loving care needed?

**Azerbaijan** won the European Song Contest. Will its Olympic team, based in and practising in Ipswich, break out into song as they explore and enjoy our town centre?

**Suffolk Youth Theatre** was one of the region's truly outstanding cultural assets with its productions at the New Wolsey Theatre directed by Michael Platt. *Metamorphosis*, put on earlier than usual and at Dance East, was its last full-scale production because of withdrawal of funding. Sadly, the shape of things to come?

**Ipswich Town Centre Walking Map** should be a great help to visitors - and useful to locals as well? It emphasises the north-south axis to show the proximity of the Waterfront to the town centre. Rightly, it includes the Museum and the Mansion, but being on a large scale has to exclude Portman Road and DCS/Suffolk New College. Copies at the TIC and some shops.

A '**vintage market**' was held on the Waterfront on Sunday, 15 May; it proved a popular attraction (photo below). Such events help to assure the public that this is a developing and changing part of the town. Look out for publicity about the ambitious Maritime Festival on 21-22 August, organised by IBC and with many participants.

## Planning Matters

### **Rights of Way around the Wet Dock**

In the April issue I was able to report in haste the summary of the Inspector's decisions as the paper only came through the letter box on the very last day of the last deadline. Thus whilst it is true that the Inspector confirmed a Right of Way along the north side of the Wet Dock, it is as a Restricted Byway and not as a Byway Open to All Traffic (a BOAT). The effect of this, which was not sought by anyone, is to prevent all mechanically propelled vehicles from using it as a through route.

### **47 Key Street and Slade Street**

Trevor Home's fine mixed development, probably the best plans we have seen for the Waterfront, are not commercially viable in the present economic climate. The current proposals for a mixed development for 405 students, a student venue, medical centre, crèche, retail, launderette and other ancillary accommodation will have a good chance of coming to fruition with the support of the University and the site owners' desire to get some income from the site. The Jewish cemetery and the Tudor Barn will be enhanced by an improved public space with through pedestrian passage from the Fore Street end to the Custom House. Considerable work needs to be done to the plans of the new building at the north and south end of the Fore Street elevation. There is also considerable objection in allowing the 14 storey student block. Many feel that this height is too much a block back from the Wet Dock. However, economics will prevail, I fear, at this time and permission granted.

### **Fison House, 159 Princes Street**

Fison's 1958 headquarters, designed by Birkin Haward, has his signature use of pre-cast concrete V and H forms as pillars and beams. Only three of the proposed four sides were built and thus it was not deemed to be Listable by English Heritage and the 20th Century Society. In its present state it has not been possible to let it as offices. The owners have therefore proposed that it should be clad, a new floor added and a towerlet built as an entrance feature. Despite the objections of many architects, Birkin Haward's sons, the 20th Century Society, our Society and the Conservation Officer, the alterations have been granted permission, largely on economic grounds. We continue in our objection to the alteration as a programme of restoration; the possible addition of the fourth side would have achieved the same desirable economic aim without the loss to view of an important mid-20th century building.

### **Music Building for Ipswich School, Holly Road**

This proposal for a 204 seat recital room, rehearsal spaces and practice rooms with entrance foyer and catering facilities has been designed by a specialist architect to sit on the multi-purpose sports courts at the top of Holly Road behind Warrington Road. We do have some reservations about the external design which is unprepossessing, the increased traffic to evening events and the possibility of noise, together with the increase in density of buildings in what is currently a lung space. However, there are many positive things to be said about the development and, on balance, we felt it should not be objected to.

### **Reservoir site, Park Road**

Once again the original fine plans have proved uneconomical to sell, so a fresh approach is to demolish the reservoir, long disused, and build five detached 4-storey houses, modern in appearance but in the characteristic late Victorian style. Their height will be disguised by the topography of the site; and the ground floor, garage and utility will be largely hidden by the remnants of the existing bund. This, assuming completion, would be a useful addition to this area of north Ipswich.

### **Car park, Russell Road**

This application for a temporary car park for 117 spaces on an already concreted piece of land between IBC's Grafton House and West End Road was refused. This is an important decision as it reflects a recent policy change by the Borough in regards to temporary car parks in the town centre. It is now felt that their recent proliferation to 2000 spaces (50% of the total available) has increased traffic congestion and reduced the use of the Park and Ride schemes to the extent that the Bury Road scheme has been withdrawn owing to the excessive subsidy required by Suffolk County Council. Further, it may now be more profitable to use a site as a car park than develop it. The Society, which formally objected to the scheme, strongly supports this new policy.

### **161 Woodbridge Road**

The owner has already breached the front Victorian brick wall and in the process done such damage to the root system of one preserved beech tree that it will have to be felled. Fortunately the other tree will survive and, amazingly, he does not need permission to knock his wall down and create a parking area at the front. But he does need planning permission for a dropped kerb and this has been refused. He has perfectly adequate parking at the back with access from Lacey Street.

### **Examination in Public of Ipswich Borough Council's Core Strategy**

The Inquiry has started and now stopped again. The aim is to determine whether the plans are sound, not if you agree or disagree. The main contention is, in the cancellation of Regional Plans and Targets for Houses and Jobs, should the number of houses be built whatever, or should we wait for the jobs to come. This will run throughout the summer.

The Society will be in attendance and putting forward its published views.

*Mike Cook*

# Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM was held on Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at University Campus Suffolk overseen by our President, the Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Jane Chambers, and our Chairman, Jack Chapman. The minutes of the 2010 AGM, the Chairman's Report and the Society's accounts were all approved. Retiring members of the Executive Committee, viz. John Norman (Vice-Chairman), Mike Cook, Tom Gondris, Neil Salmon and Teresa Wiggin were all re-elected en bloc and Graham Smith was newly elected replacing Su Marsden who did not stand for re-election. Full details of the Committee are on the back page.

The appointment of two extra Vice-Presidents, Bob Allen and Chris Wiltshire, was recommended by the Executive and warmly endorsed by the members. Both Bob and Chris have been Chairmen of the Society and have presided over the Awards evenings.

## Suffolk Preservation Society

Following the brief AGM, the Director of the Suffolk Preservation Society, Simon Cairns, gave a very varied and well illustrated talk about the role of the SPS. He explained their long relationship with our Society because we have so many interests in common, as reflected in the SPS motto, 'Respecting the Past and Shaping the Future'.

Representing a county-wide organisation, Mr Cairns naturally reminded us of the rich variety of our large county with its 31 'landscape character areas', its villages and small towns, its coast (and coastal erosion). The aims of 'Suffolk Going for Growth' presents challenges to the SPS, some of them "alarming" -like new pylons (his bugbear!), wind turbines and possible large increases in housing, which even in the scaled down form now still amounts to 8000 more in the next fifteen years. Conserving the built environment will be even harder with cuts to councils' funds and to English Heritage, the demise of CABE, and fewer grants.

He explained how SPS could help in its work of responding to planning applications (as our Society does in Ipswich), providing design advice, promoting awareness of the special qualities of our county and arranging conferences and awards for excellence. In his view the greatest threat is complacency regarding the county's vulnerable landscape and the under-estimation of Suffolk's buildings - he thinks that some buildings officially Listed elsewhere could be quite ordinary here - and this applies also to the under-appreciation of our larger historic towns, certainly including Ipswich.

Mr Cairns had many complimentary comments to make about Ipswich but amused us first by describing the unfortunate impressions that a first time visiting motorist might have when driving into the town from the A14/A140. "Where is this town centre - here at Barrack Corner? Crown Street? Ah, here's High Street -this must be it? No, the next sign indicates Woodbridge. Have I missed it?" On the other hand, for the observant pedestrian, Ipswich is marvellous - a very walkable town centre ("not strung out like Norwich!") with a depth of urban heritage and quite different from Bury. And although a lot must have been lost in the 1960s, he thinks much of the new is very good.

People in Suffolk who don't love Ipswich have views "not based on reality". SPS has arranged successful visits to Ipswich, fully booked and repeated. One of his final thoughts concerned the stalling of new developments, which he thinks may be no bad thing since too much was going on, too quickly. But he concluded that Ipswich has the right mix of old and new and will go on re-inventing itself.

## Engaging with Young People

The Ipswich Society is keen to engage with young people and as a new member of the Executive Committee I have been asked to assist in that initiative. The project is in its early stages and a strategy has yet to be proposed and agreed.

However to make a start I made contact with Suffolk New College and found myself presenting the work of the Society to a group of students undertaking their studies on the BTEC Extended Diploma in Business.

Following the presentation the course tutor, Ian Howlett, kindly agreed to link one of the study units with an area of interest to the Society - the future promotion of the town of Ipswich. The students have identified a number of projects ranging from a new shopping centre to improvements to the night-time venues.

An opportunity presented itself for two students, Amy Carpenter and P J Banjo (photo below), to join me at a workshop with the Ipswich Central Town Centre Forum exploring future initiatives for the Ipswich Central team to adopt and take forward. Both students took a full and active part in the workshop making valuable contributions on behalf of young people. Carole Jones, an Ipswich Borough Councillor on our table at the workshop, said, "Having the students on our table was a real asset, Graham," and I entirely endorse that comment. They were a credit to themselves and Suffolk New College.

I am hoping this success will lead to a long term relationship between the Society and Suffolk New College. Certainly I have found that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience within the Society that can be of value to young people interested in the past, present and future of Ipswich. I would be pleased to hear from any school, college or other organisation that would like to discuss opportunities for the Society to engage with young people.

***Graham Smith***

## 'Big Society' and Localism

'Community Engagement and the Big Society' was the theme of a conference in Durham last September on which I reported in the January Newsletter. Soon afterwards one of the keynote speakers, Prof Phil Redmond, very publicly withdrew from a flagship Big Society project in



Liverpool on the grounds that funding cuts had made delivery impossible. The Prime Minister has since re-launched the Big Society for the third time in May after the Cabinet Office minister responsible admitted that "We may have failed to articulate it clearly ... " So how difficult a concept can it be, and where is the Big Society now? Can it still be a meaningful proposition without substantial funding?

I therefore took the opportunity to represent our Society at a seminar on Big Society and Localism held in Ely in May, to learn from those who are already actively involved. Views were mixed but the conclusions were similar: anyone delivering services to the public, whether through local authorities, charities or whatever, has to engage with this agenda. There is no other. But what it really means and how (or whether) it will work is not yet clear.

Tony Burton, Director of Civic Voice, remained enthusiastic that newly-devolved powers to produce Local Plans and Lists of Assets would bring greater influence over planning decisions to local communities and Civic Societies such as ours, provided we engage with the Localism agenda; but much remains to be clarified over the coming year. On the other hand, Neil Stott is Chief Executive of Keystone Development Trust, which delivers social good while running businesses to pay for it, and while he agrees that Big Society is an attractive concept and Localism is an agenda with which Development Trusts have no choice but to engage, he doesn't yet see how they will add anything new to what the Trusts are already doing. Indeed it is precisely the poorer communities in need of public services who lack volunteers sufficiently rich in time and money to fill the void left by public spending cuts and the suspension of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). But if the community does not engage, this will simply leave businesses to fill the void, raising the spectre of privatisation by the back door, cherry-picking the juicy bits and leaving the rest to wither.

This brings us to the new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which are joint bodies brought forward by local authorities but led by local businesses, which take the place of RDAs but without the substantial funding enjoyed by their predecessors. Alex Plant is the interim Strategic Director for a LEP covering Cambridge and Peterborough. He admitted that the loss of funding had led the relevant media to dismiss LEPs as 'talking shops' and 'toothless tigers'. Rather, Alex described the role of LEPs as the re-balancing of the economy at local rather than regional level, between local authorities, businesses and the Third Sector, and setting local priorities for transport and infrastructure, economic development, employment and skills, housing, and so on. But to address these requirements without RDAs and the Regional Spatial Strategies will be challenging, particularly for matters which transcend local boundaries.

The picture which emerges from these different perspectives is that the Government spending cuts are driving a re-balancing of the economy, to be focused at local level through the LEPs and the Third Sector, but with outstanding uncertainties about how (or perhaps whether) the gaps left by the cuts will be filled. At its most basic, if the Government's spending cuts leave important services at risk, then the wherewithal to provide them will have to come from elsewhere, and that is perhaps what defines the Big Society. But defining the Big Society as whatever fills the void left by the retreating State does not define a solution, but is simply re-stating the problem. Little wonder that there are difficulties in articulation and comprehension. Then again, if we aren't part of the solution, are we part of the problem?..... ..in place of 'Passing the Buck' and NIMBYism?

From the foregoing standpoint, a way of gaining further insight into the Big Society might be to consider issues local to Ipswich and Suffolk, many of which were enumerated by Simon Cairns,

Director of Suffolk Preservation Society in his presentation at our Society's AGM (which is reported more fully in this Newsletter). Both Simon and our own Chairman, Jack Chapman, made clear that both societies have interests in promoting respect for the past while shaping the future, and this involves drawing some difficult balances. The Suffolk countryside is distinctly subtle and hence susceptible to any development of any scale; but our economy is predicated on growth, which means more people demanding more houses, more jobs and more infrastructure. This chimes with the Ely seminar.

In the next ten years, much of our energy infrastructure will need to be replaced. In addition to the relentless growth in our demand for energy, many power stations fuelled by nuclear, coal and gas will reach the end of their operational life and will need to be replaced. And climate change will demand greater use of renewables such as wind and wave power, and more nuclear. There are already controversial proposals for wind turbine installations both on- and off-shore, not to mention incinerators for generating energy from waste as landfill becomes landfull! Interestingly, incinerators appear not to be part of the Localism agenda, since Kings Lynn appears destined to have one in spite of local protests, and Great Blakenham may well go the same way. Likewise nuclear power stations. But what of wind turbines, and more pylons carrying more power from Sizewell? The Government's answer to the latter appears to be to invite proposals for more aesthetically pleasing pylon designs. Many would prefer the cables to be buried, but would excavation in swathes as wide as a dual carriageway be any less detrimental to the countryside, quite apart from the expense? Who would welcome even higher energy bills?

But doesn't this point to the real problem, that no one is prepared to take responsibility for the consequences of the choices we make? For years we have asked successive governments for more and better services but lower taxes. And we expect them to solve the conundrum. They in turn have perhaps offered the Big Society as the 'solution' - "if you want it, you provide it and pay for it, because the public purse is empty." Likewise we want more energy, but we don't want the countryside spoilt by pylons of turbines. So who will take responsibility when the lights go out? Just as we want greater mobility and travel opportunities, but no more roads or airport runways. But who takes the blame for the resulting congestion and the fragility of our transport network when arteries become blocked?

In other words, preservation can quickly turn into stagnation unless a proper balance is drawn in shaping the future. Simon Cairns urged that the greatest threat to the Suffolk landscape is complacency. The Ely seminar warns that if communities do not engage in Localism then business interests may well dictate the future. Any gardener knows that nature is good at creating wilderness, but cultivation requires intervention to control pests and diseases in order to produce a valuable harvest. Light-touch regulation seemed to create wealth, but this was illusory. The 'help yourselves' bonus culture enjoyed by the financial services industry has given way to the 'help yourselves' agenda of the Big Society. In paying for that mistake perhaps we will re-discover what elected governments are really for, and take more collective responsibility for the consequences of our choices rather than passing the buck, whether to the Government, to our neighbours, or to the next generation.

Or perhaps our idea of democracy itself will need to move on.

***Mike Brain***

# Wet Dock Crossing

Just before the local elections in May, The Ipswich Society was invited to appear on BBC Look East alongside one of our local MPs, Ben Gummer. Ben was commenting on the inclusion of the Wet Dock crossing in the Local Transport Plan:

"A long term aspiration for Ipswich is a new Wet Dock crossing alongside future development (of the Island Site). This project would be largely funded by developers (of the Island Site)."

As is typical in media appearances, we were unable to convey the full range of points from our considered argument as to why this new road is unlikely to be built and its inclusion in the Local Transport Plan is political point scoring rather than practical or sensible.

It is believed by a considerable number of people (which increases when the dock gyratory roads grind to a halt) that a bridge over the lock will solve a hefty proportion of Ipswich's traffic problems - it won't. If a typical west-bound motorist's journey is down Bishop's Hill into Fore Street and eventually out of the gyratory on to Grafton Way and West End Road, then the Wet Dock crossing alternative would be driving south to Ship Launch Road, over the new bridge and back along Vernon Street to Stoke Bridge - almost three times as far. Not the natural choice in the daily commute.

Ipswich Waterfront is now home to some 500 marina berths with additional space for visiting yachts. These boats are currently able to come and go at any state of the tide and would not take kindly to a (height) restriction imposed by a new bridge. However, there are two alternatives. Build it higher with extended approach ramps or construct an opening bridge, one that is closed to traffic when a yacht passes - not a good idea in the rush hour.

Under the rules by which the Government decides which schemes, from across the nation, get priority of funding there are other Suffolk proposals much higher up the list than the Wet Dock crossing.

- \* A11 dualling, Barton Mills to Thetford (recently confirmed as desirable).
- \* Beccles Southern Relief Road.
- \* Copdock roundabout improvements. (This scheme is under way. paid for by the Port of Felixstowe but is limited to installing traffic lights.)
- \* A12 Four villages Improvement. (The subject of the EADT campaign.)
- \* Lowestoft Northern Spine Road (phase 5).
- \* Ipswich - Fit for the 21st Century (funding now promised by Dept of Transport).
- \*

Overall transport improvements must be geared to increasing cycling and walking and reducing dependency on the private car, which is the basis for the Ipswich 21st Century scheme. So sorry, Ben, but a Wet Dock crossing is not on, even long term.

*John Norman, Vice-Chairman*

# New Bridge at Ipswich Station

The new £2.4m footbridge with its two lifts finally opened in early June - very welcome and not before time! There has also been speculation about creating two new 'island' platforms on the site of the adjacent Freightliner re-fuelling yard. But Network Rail says "It is not a top priority at present."

## Adam Gordon (1934-2011)

Adam became a key member of The Ipswich Society soon after it was founded. In the early 1960s there was no planning department in the Borough Council ('planning' was an aspect of the Borough Engineer's Department) and in many towns like Ipswich scant respect was shown towards buildings or whole streets deemed no longer fit for purpose. So it's not surprising that intelligent young architects like Adam Gordon and Peter Barefoot were distressed by what was happening and allied themselves with the civic-minded society which they helped to promote.

Adam's regular contributions to the Society's Newsletter under the title 'Streetscene' soon became one of the first articles that members eagerly read. He had an architect's eye for significant changes that were taking place in Ipswich but always wrote like an observant layman walking the streets. Adam also made his office available for producing the Newsletters which in those days could mean assembling Roneo sheets, sometimes scattered all over the office in Silent Street!

The Society in the 1960s and 70s also undertook some hands-on improvement projects such as the installation of the sarsen stones and river bank tidying near Stoke Bridge and the tree planting alongside Ranelagh Road near the railway station. Adam was one of the principal labourers. (Photo below shows Adam, with hammer, preparing to plant a tree. Another photo on page 19 indicates how such trees have matured.)

A number of buildings he designed or helped to design are part of his legacy to Ipswich. They include the Post Office sorting centre in Commercial Road/Princes Street, the extension to Cranfield Court on Tuddenham Road/Valley Road, and what is now the Ivory Street Medical Practice, which was originally designed as the Oncology Department for Anglesea Road Hospital. He became self-employed in 1986 and particularly enjoyed working for a number of private clients.

Adam's versatility, keen intelligence, determination and quietly spoken smiling manner will be remembered and appreciated by The Ipswich Society, to which he contributed so much.

## Puzzling over the Mansion

I have recently begun a short course at the Suffolk Record Office about five Suffolk estates, taught by the excellent Dr Margaret Thomas. (As a complete ignoramus about this kind of stuff I apologise for any inaccuracies that might follow, which are all my own work.) The first session was about

Christchurch, here in Ipswich, and Margaret showed us maps, engravings and photos detailing the development of the house, park and estate over the centuries.

This spurred us on to visit the Mansion for the first time in ages. En route we looked at the site of the extensive formal water gardens which used to run from (roughly) the War Memorial down to Bethesda Baptist Chapel and realised this may be why this area often seems so soggy.

Margaret had explained the dates of the different windows on the front elevation, so we understood the motley look. So far, so good; but from then on, things got less explicable - especially why they didn't remove previous fittings when they made alterations as it ruins the effect they were trying to achieve?

For example, the strange window mullions on the first floor of the hall were on an outside wall before they built the corridor behind them, and the bottom half of a filled-in window opposite must date from when the ceiling was put in (the previous design being open to the rafters). And when they built the corridor, why didn't they line it up with the floors of the wings it connected so you don't have to go up and down steps?

But the weirdest thing was the grand staircase. Knowing it was a later insertion explained the odd angle of the archway leading to it from the hall, but it was built to give access to a suite of rooms above, which according to the fashion of the time had been built the full width of the wing with no corridor - a series of connecting doors in line with each other on the east side made a 'virtual corridor' if they were all open. Logically the staircase should end in a landing on the east with two of these doors leading off it, but they took the stairs to the other side and had to insert a whole new row of doors along the western length of the wing. And then they left the original doors in situ - two of which now opened on to thin air several feet above the turn of the stairs. Was the staircase a bargain that came from somewhere else? And I really don't understand the double doors in the panelling that open on either side above the stairs; was this to make the rooms look larger?

So then we started going round and noticing the oddities. The pretty door on to the gallery above the hall has an amazing number of bolts, given that it doesn't open on to the outside of the house. And if the bedrooms were in the west wing then they were directly above the kitchens and sculleries which must have been really noisy at 5.30 in the morning with all those buckets and clogs on the stone stairs.

A little courtyard on the east side has its knocker and letterbox on the courtyard side. And why should such a small(ish) house need three doors giving on to the entrance court? One of these has a pretty oval window above it let into a wall that appears to be more than a foot and a half thick in a house allegedly not made of stone. There were strangely curving walls in odd places and two rooms appeared to be adjoining - but the party wall would have to be more than two feet thick if they do. I wanted to ask Margaret all about it but she pre-empted me by saying how puzzling it all was and what a pity it was that the Mansion had never been properly recorded. And that all the date plaques had been moved - one of the few things we had assumed we could rely on. Oh well.

I'm sure we'll be going back many more times, noticing more strange things on each visit. And I'm sure many members are groaning and tutting at my woeful ignorance and are eager to enlighten me - please do. I'd love to know.

***Kay McElhinney***

# Building a Gable Warmer

**Part 2 of the article *Four Times Better* in Issue 183.**

Having decided to proceed with a pilot project to construct a 'gable warmer', my first thoughts were to investigate what permissions might be needed. Such cladding works on an elevation not facing the highway are generally 'permitted development' in planning terms. Obviously the nature of the cladding will have a visual impact and consideration should be given to your neighbours and anyone passing by who may have to look at it.

With Listed buildings and within Conservation Areas the rules are generally tighter and consents will be needed. These works will also require clearance under Building Regulations to ensure both the adequate performance of the insulation and fire protection where the house adjoins a neighbour's property, the latter not being needed where a gable is some distance from the property boundary.

I have recently constructed my gable warmer using mainly 4"x2" and 3"x2" timbers, infilled with 4" of Thermal fleece wool insulation, covered with a breathable membrane and then a cladding of fire retardant treated feather-edged timber boarding, a traditional Suffolk building material. I chose to stain mine a brick red colour and line up the joints with the brick courses, so that at a glance it looks much as it always did.

I have now had two winters with the insulation in place and have enjoyed a marked rise in comfort levels inside the house especially through the colder spells, which used to be miserable times each year. Comparison of my energy bills before and after the gable warmer was constructed bears out my calculations. I have achieved a 15% average reduction in my energy bills, nearly matching the predictions, which might have been achieved had I completed the timber cladding and not had two colder than normal winters to contend with.

Such a gable warmer is the biggest and most efficient energy saving measure that can be applied to an end terrace (or semi-detached) house, especially as a gable usually has no windows and therefore requires no special detailing other than at the edges. There remain several choices of insulation material and cladding finish that should suit a variety of situations and finances available.

A short walk around most neighbourhoods will reveal many older houses that are either end of terrace or semi-detached to which such a gable warmer could be applied. If promoted (or even encouraged with grant aid) this idea could provide a significant reduction in this country's energy footprint.

*Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect*

# Waterfront Attractions **Part 2 of *Waterfront Developments* in Issue 183.**

I listed in the last Newsletter a number of waterfront redevelopment schemes that were adding value to their location because of a Visitor Attraction - Swansea with the National Waterfront Museum and Salford with the Lowry and Imperial War Museum. But before holding these up as examples of

urban regeneration it is worth bearing in mind that even in these towns the residential flats are suffering from poor sales in much the same way as all new housing developments. However, because of the vibrant community at ground level the occupancy rate of the soaring tower blocks is less noticeable. This is not the case in Liverpool Leeds or in Hartlepool where unfinished towers blight the skyline.

So did Ipswich get it wrong? Did we build, or start to build, too many flats? Clearly the developers didn't think so or they wouldn't have speculated substantial sums without an expected return. To understand why we have so many unfinished or unoccupied units it is necessary to think back to the (relative) boom of the first half of the noughties.

Demand was high, in particular from three groups of potential purchasers. Professional people were claiming good salaries and it was worth commuting if they lived within a reasonable distance from the station. Secondly, with the high incidence of divorce, one of the partners needed a smaller pad away from the family home. Thirdly, the number of students enrolling for university was rising rapidly. They needed accommodation and although the majority didn't take the high rent Waterfront apartments, they did take the bottom end of the market pushing others further up the housing ladder. Ipswich also attracted a fair number of retirees, probably because of the adjacent marina and the safe sailing offered by the Orwell and the Walton backwaters. Neither Leeds nor Liverpool has quite the same attractions.

It is easy to suggest that what we actually need now is family houses with gardens, but the individual developers don't have the choice. If they own a piece of Waterfront they will want to develop it and get the return on their investment. In Ipswich there is a dire shortage of green space on which to build family homes; hence the reason the developers are falling over themselves to persuade the Inspector that developing the Northern Fringe is essential.

There are two further points to this story. One is that the developers still think that the Waterfront is a good place to build and two schemes are about to get under way; one is 'Over Stoke' on the site of Grahams, the plumbers' merchants in Great Whip Street (Stoke Quay frontage), which is a predominantly sheltered housing scheme but with 2½ storey family houses in an extension to Bulstrode Street (into the middle of the site). The second scheme is the old BOCM offices and car parks in between Salthouse Street, Slade Street and Fore Street (surrounding the Jewish cemetery) - a scheme of mainly student accommodation (because it's not on the Waterfront?). The second point is that the two successful schemes I opened this article with. in Swansea and Salford, are anchored by retail developments. Perhaps Tesco will provide the impetus to re-start Regatta Quay and complete the fitting out of The Mill. Perhaps?

*John Norman*

## Questions About High Streets

The Prime Minister says that high streets should be "the very heart of every community." Mary Portas ('Queen of Shops') has been asked by the Government to suggest ideas to re-invigorate town centre shopping. Where to start? Rents? Car parking? Suitable space for modern retailing?

(All difficult?) Limits on out-of-town supermarkets and especially their free car parking.

(Impossible?) Scope for readers' letters?

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## Letters to the Editor

### **Clutter in Arras Square from John Brown**

When I came to live in Ipswich - some fifty years ago - and joined the Society, I found a mixture of dirty industrial town and equally grubby market/County town. The town centre did have a few good quality shops and an excellent theatre; otherwise I think it might be fairly described as 'a bit of a dump'. The improvement since then has been phenomenal. I have reservations, of course, but pedestrian-friendly streets and paving; trees and open spaces with seating and sculpture; buildings painted and in reasonable repair; improvements to the docks and riverside; signage and excellent tourist information; all contribute to a pleasant town centre. Congratulations to the Society, the Borough and County Officers and all the other bodies and individuals who have wrought such a change.

Reservations? Well, there must always be some niggles. One which has annoyed me for some time is Arras Square and the way cars, vans and rubbish bins spoil the general look of this attractive space. I no longer encourage visitors to sit and enjoy the scene. I have approached the parking authorities but they say they have no jurisdiction as the Square itself - other than the original St Stephen's Lane width - is privately owned. Can anyone suggest how we might shame the property owners into taking pride in their own spaces?

### **The value of Double-Glazing from Ken Wilson**

Patrick Taylor's interesting article on domestic heat conservation casts doubt on the economy of double-glazing. I cannot fault his calculations but the value of this very popular installation lies surely in the reduction of that uncomfortable flow of cold air that descends steadily from a single-glazed window (despite the curtains). The improvement in living conditions delivered by a second layer of glass is ample reward.

I await part 2 of his article with interest.

### **The Value of a Gable Warmer from Ann Petherick**

Apropos of Patrick Taylor's article in the last Newsletter, I too am the owner of an end of terrace Victorian house in Ipswich. In 2005, as part of a programme of full modernisation, we applied external cladding not only to the gable wall but around the rear extension. As the house has been let since then I have not been able to obtain evidence of reduced fuel costs but I will see what I can find out. I also wonder whether it might be possible to demonstrate a knock-on effect to the rest of the terrace by the end property being kept so much warmer?



### **What is an Ipswichian? from Bernard Brown** (Auckland, New Zealand)

Perhaps the Editor and Mr Tucker could come up with a definition of 'Ipswichian'. [April Newsletter page 17.] I have never lived in Ipswich for more than a few days at a time with grandparents and aunts and friends, but

- \* I attended Ipswich v Aston Villa at Portman Road in 1938 (FA Cup re-play)
- \* My parents were devout Ipswichians, by any definition.
- \* Almost invariably I identify cropped photographs of buildings, etc in the Newsletter.
- \* I have Ipswich Town's results phoned through to me on Sunday mornings from N.Wales!
- \* I am a member of The Ipswich Society and I love Ipswich.

## Down and Out by the Orwell

Even in our busy lives we can't help noticing the homeless people in Ipswich. We see them and acknowledge their presence whilst walking past, but never consider the reality of their situation. Here in our home town of Ipswich we harbour our very own soup kitchen.

It's run daily every evening at 8 pm on Tower Street. It isn't known to many of us but the churches in our area have a day each when they run the soup kitchen.

I work with the Salvation Army on a Wednesday at the soup kitchen. We are on a rota of seven groups and each group takes it in turn to go. The groups are of six people and you do your turn every seven weeks. We fill the mini-bus with donated sleeping bags, tents, clothes, toiletries and such things, and then soup, chips, tea and coffee and sandwiches. We prepare the food beforehand at 'headquarters' and then set out to give out food to the homeless.

Working at the soup kitchen has really opened my eyes to the world of the homeless. You don't recognise these people; they look like regular folk in large coats! None of them wants to be in the situation they're in and I get a real sense from most of them of wanting to change. Everyone using the soup kitchen is sincerely grateful for what we do, which makes every moment worthwhile. The unfortunate case of a man being kicked out by his wife with nowhere to go is just one of many stories I have heard. So we would give him a sleeping bag, socks and hot tea and send him on his way. And at least we know he's warm.

There isn't a lot I can personally do for every homeless person in Ipswich apart from making sure I'm there on my assigned Wednesday with my chips or soup. So naturally I was appalled to hear that certain places have banned soup kitchens in the hope that the homeless will move on to another town as they deem themselves too posh to help the needy. The people with the money to make a difference to these people's lives, won't do so. I appreciate the view that some adopt that the homeless are homeless because of themselves. In some cases, like the ones trying to combat addictions, this is true but they don't deserve to starve. But this isn't the case of many I have met at the soup kitchen. Many drink to drown the pain of their situation, which I agree isn't the best way of spending the little money they have, but the daily pain some people experience tells me there are much worse things to turn to than alcohol. There are the few that I have met who never turn up intoxicated but who have found themselves in a dire situation and are just pleased for us reliably

being there. There are others facing time in the cells for defending themselves against racism, who just have had bad luck at being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The world seems to be against the homeless and often bad situations get worse by prejudices. To me, people who are victims of prejudices are the ones who need the most help as the world seems to be against them in a racially unbalanced society. Soup kitchens do so much good for people in need, even if it's just for a chat or to see the nurse who is also there on a Wednesday. Therefore banning soup kitchens will only take away a reliable source of food which isn't financially supported by the Government and isn't hurting anyone not involved. It is unnecessary to ban them. It is a worthwhile charity and, in my opinion, shows a great deal about the town it's in.

***Francesca Smith***

## News & Comment

### **Commemorating Ipswich's greatest son**

The Wolsey statue will have been installed during Ipswich Charter Day, 29 June. Sited at the junction of Silent Street and St Peter's Street it will be close to the long-lost mansion where he intended to retire as Provost of his Cardinal College. So it is appropriate that he is cast as a benevolent teacher. Although famous throughout Europe as Chancellor and Cardinal to Henry VIII, he was also an advocate of humane education: "Pleasure is to mingle with study, that the boy may think learning rather an amusement than a toil. Tender youth is to suffer neither severe thrashings nor sour and threatening looks, nor any kind of tyranny, for by such usage the fire of genius is either extinguished or in great measure damped."

### **The James Hehir Building**

Officially opened on 30 March, this is the second major building for the University and it sits on Orwell Quay. It comprises laboratories, lecture theatres and social areas. Its appropriate name commemorates IBC's late Chief Executive, long an advocate of a university here.

### **New children's hospice for Suffolk and Essex**

The Treehouse at St Augustine's Gardens and close to Felixstowe Road has recently opened. In addition to its bedrooms there are specialist facilities such as a hydrotherapy pool and a music studio. It has been located sympathetically in this small area of woodland. The architects were Barefoot & Gilles and the builders Barnes Construction, both local firms.

### **Boxes full of boxes: the growth of containerisation and the Port of Felixstowe**

In the 1960s over 50% of the British workforce were employed in manufacturing, a figure that is now less than 15% (and in Ipswich considerably lower still). Why? It is so much cheaper to import manufactured goods from the Far East, where labour is cheaper, and ship them into Felixstowe. In the 1960s over 30% of the cost of imported goods was transportation. Today the cost of using containers is 1% of the retail cost of the goods.

# Touring the Olympic Sites

This was the perfect day out for a society like ours. All the fascinating issues of area regeneration, architecture, housing, landscaping, transport and history were brought vividly to our attention in addition to the obvious sporting interests.

For the last two or three years we've been able to see from the train passing through Stratford station the gradual progress, but it's been hard to appreciate it accurately. The vast steel frame near the station I'd assumed was the multi-storey car park, until it became 'Westfield Stratford City' shopping centre - it's not only 'exit through the gift shop' but 'entrance' too! And from the train it's hard to see the velodrome, basketball arena and other venues.

So it was a pleasure that our coach took us round the far side for a closer look at these and the Olympic village itself which will house competitors in single rooms and then be converted into flats, including some with three or four bedrooms, for permanent homes. Add in a large academy and a polyclinic and it will create the legacy of a small town. (Our guide, Carol, thought the emphasis on 'legacy' was the salient factor in London's successful bid for the games.) While here, we also heard that this huge polluted area, which had included West Ham's hundred year old council tip, had been cleaned in 'soil hospitals' so that 93% of the spoil could be re-used on site. Thirty-nine electricity pylons have had to be removed as well!

We then drove past the completed velodrome (the most handsome of the structures at present) and the media centre for 20,000 journalists and its multi-storey car park, the only car park on site, because spectators will arrive by public transport. (Stratford is already a great hub for mainline trains, the Underground and buses.) Then to the large viewing platform quite close to the main stadium. Some of us would have liked to be even closer but the whole area is still a building site and will look very different in a year's time when grassed over and with its 2,000 mature trees planted. The stadium is simple and functional. Our guide, probably a proud Eastender, was indignant that a certain North London football club had wanted to take it over, rather than the local boys, West Ham - this is after all the Borough of Newham!

The aquatics centre was something of a shock. What had been an elegant swooping building seen from the train is now flanked on both sides by steep raked seating. But that is temporary extra seating which will be removed after the Games, so that ever after we'll be able to admire Zaha Hadid's unique structure.

After lunch at the Railway Tavern, where they are entertaining a coach party every day now, the coach took us along West Ham's multi-cultural Green Street, past the Excel Centre which will house seven Olympic sports, and down to the Thames. We crossed on the Woolwich Ferry, an unexpected if short voyage! Touring around Woolwich many of us were amazed at the vast area of historic military buildings. The Olympic shooting will take place at the Royal Artillery Barracks. Tea at Woolwich Arsenal (23 Listed buildings here!) was welcome - and surprising when young soldiers in uniform removed the trays. Nearby is the Woolwich Heritage Museum close to a building allegedly by Hawksmoor - and well worth a visit.

Our guide was brilliant, our organiser Barbara Barker deserves much credit for coping with us - and with the 100+ original applicants. Those who will be lucky to go in October are in for a great treat.

*Neil Salmon*

# Tourist Guides Visit Ipswich

## **Biennial Conference for East Anglian Tourist Guides**

The Ipswich Tourist Guides' Association hosted this prestigious meeting of Guides from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, St Albans and Bedford on 2 April 2011. The venue was the roof garden of the Willis Building and the theme of the conference was 'Reflections on the Past, Present and Future'. The Mayor, Councillor Jane Chambers, welcomed the Guides.

Our keynote speaker was Dr John Blatchly who reflected on 'Thomas Wolsey, Ipswich's Greatest Man'. Jo Leah, our guest speaker from Ipswich Building Society, spoke of the present and future in terms of 'Identifying New Markets from a Business Perspective'. Between them they provided fascinating insights into Ipswich. In the afternoon, a choice of three guided walks was available and Ipswich looked its best in glorious spring sunshine (and temperatures reaching 20°C!) From the feedback it is clear that our town made a favourable impression on our visitors. Many expressed delight and surprise at what we have to offer. Clearly, Ipswich has much to be proud of and we feel privileged to be able to show off our heritage on occasions such as this.

*Diana Lewis*

## A New Book

**'Petitions from Suffolk, Before and During the Civil Wars & Interregnum'** is the clearly named title of a variety of documents selected by Frank Grace, local historian, former lecturer at Suffolk College and Ipswich Society member. There are petitions addressed to King Charles I, to Parliament, to Cromwell, to Fairfax, etc. They illustrate the importance of religion and the fears created by the political crisis and the consequences of war. Each of these documents is introduced with a contextual commentary. Copies can be obtained from Frank Grace, 5 Oban Street, Ipswich IP1 3PG, price £7 + £1.50 p&p.

## A Blue Plaque

### **Dedicating the Society's Blue Plaque to the memory of a great man, 8 April**

The previous Newsletter described Felix Thornley Cobbold (1841-1909) as "the town's greatest benefactor". It is appropriate that the Plaque should be on the Reg Driver Centre in Christchurch Park because there wouldn't be either Park or Mansion without Cobbold's gift. The photo shows L to R: Pat Grimwade and Tom Gondris (of our Society), Richard Wilson, (Chairman of The Friends of Christchurch Park), Anthony Cobbold (Keeper of the Cobbold Family Trust) and Jack Chapman, (Ipswich Society Chairman).

# Roads at a Price

As a nation we spend more than £100 billion per annum on road travel- a sum greater than the amount we spend on food, drink or clothing. Thus the building and maintenance of roads should be regarded as an activity that helps economic growth as valuable as any other nationwide investment. We make the assumption that roads are free at the point of use but this belittles their true value and fails to differentiate between different roads and the different times these roads are used. We pay for roads, indirectly, through road tax (Vehicle Excise Duty) and the taxes on fuel and insurance premiums, and occasionally through other forms of taxation. Those taxes take no account of the time of day or the type of road we are driving on. Expenditure does not have a major influence on behaviour. The recent hike in the cost of fuel saw a reduction in the number of journeys made but this figure is already creeping back to the 2010 average and morning rush hour congestion is just as bad as it was before the January VAT increase.

Congestion is a major problem that is proving difficult to solve, yet it affects the quality of life for a substantial proportion of the working population. It is also an unnecessary hindrance to economic growth.

The use of roads is rationed by queues (because of the inefficiency of the road to carry the demand in traffic) and because we cannot build more roads we therefore need to reduce demand. Budget airlines solved a similar problem by varying the cost of travel entirely dependent on demand. Popular times of travel and popular destinations are charged at a higher rate than flights that would otherwise be less than full. Thus they have been able to spread the demand to suit aircraft and flight crew availability.

Should we do the same with roads? We have the technology: we could fit a sat nav tracking system in every car and charge for the use of the road, at different rates dependent on the likely congestion predicted. Quiet roads in rural Suffolk would be free. Joining the queue on the docks gyratory system would attract a premium. Ideally, as the queues reduce, the road charge also goes down until the balance of freely flowing traffic is reached. Road charging would replace road tax and the duty on fuel; thus the cost of motoring is directly related to road use. Charging would be similar to that of mobile phones and credit cards; you simply receive a monthly statement of road use and pay by direct debit.

Importantly, road charging must be a cost neutral replacement for existing taxes, but it could have one further significant advantage. There could be reduced charges for disadvantaged individuals dependent upon their circumstances so that they are not priced off the road. This could include residents of rural backwaters without public transport, essential workers on their way to work and people currently in receipt of a mobility allowance. Investment in roads (and to a certain extent railways) is however a political decision rather than an economic one.

*John Norman*

# Where You Paid Tolls

At the start of his lecture on Suffolk Toll-houses on 9 March, Patrick Taylor said he hoped we wouldn't be disappointed. Houses which looked the right age, some of them octagonal and close to the road, often weren't the real thing, even if called 'toll-houses'. Whereas real toll-houses could be humdrum houses or bungalows (though with side windows for the keeper to look up and down the road) and could easily remain anonymous. However, we weren't disappointed because it is an unusual historical subject.

Roads which had been the responsibility of each parish to maintain were often in poor shape, so private companies forming trusts were authorised by specific Acts of Parliament to erect turnpike gates and collect tolls for their stretch of road. Starting in 1663, they became common in the 18th and early 19th centuries, but with the coming of the railways business declined and most tolls were abolished between 1870 and 1890.

The surviving toll-houses fascinate Patrick partly because of their local distinctiveness. As a Cornishman living in Suffolk he has written books on both counties' toll-houses, noting their strikingly different building materials and styles. His well illustrated talk showed us first some of the 'imposters'. For example the Round House at Walton on the way to Felixstowe is hexagonal and close to the road - but there was no turnpike road here. It was often a case of this shape of house becoming quite popular and in some instances being used as attractive lodges for rather grander houses. There are also 'toll-houses' at Lavenham and Bury where market tolls were collected, not turnpike road tolls.

The most striking 'traditionally' shaped toll-houses in Suffolk are at Sicklesmere (on the Sudbury-Bury road) and Botesdale (Scole-Bury road), the former two-storey and the latter single-storey. Much more typical though are the long bungalow toll-house at Copdock and the two-storey house at Claydon, both with their tell-tale side windows.

Toll-houses were usually a few miles out of towns so as not to deter visitors from the near-hinterland from coming to town for business. Patrick didn't dwell on the public's attitude to the cost and inconvenience of tolls but he did say that thatched roof toll-houses were not common - they could be easily torched!

His book, *The Toll-houses of Suffolk*, Polystar Press, is published at 277 Cavendish Street, Ipswich, IP3 8BQ ([polystar@ntlworld.com](mailto:polystar@ntlworld.com)) and covers all this material and much more.