



This month we seem to have a woody theme.

As you read this you may still have time to join us for our meeting on **October 2<sup>nd</sup>** for **Nicky Reynolds'** talk on the **Lumber Jills**. These were ladies of the

Women's Timber Corps who during World War Two were employed by the Home Timber Production Department to source suitable home-grown timber for the war effort.



Our next meeting will be on **November 6<sup>th</sup>** when **Dot Marsden** takes us across Stowmarket to **Stow Lodge**. We can hear memories of her time as matron as well as her research in its past, from its origins as **The House of Industry** for Stowmarket and surrounding areas to being the local hospital. This photo is copied from *The March of Time* by Harry Double (p22)

Looking back to August, we rekindle our wood theme. Usually, it is Jerry, our secretary, who we thank for taking notes during our meetings so he can construct a short review to share with you. In Jerry's absence we must thank Neil for the following account of Robert Halliday's talk about some remarkable examples of church carpentry.

It had been a few years since we last had the pleasure of hearing Robert Halliday give one of his entertaining and knowledgeable talks. This time he took as through examples of bench-end carvings that are a feature of many of Suffolk's parish churches. The journey from A to Z was not based on place name but of the subjects of these carvings from Antelope to Zither!

Maybe surprisingly many of these carvings are not always obviously religious in subject matter although as Robert noted some of the creatures both real and mythological could have a moral or religious parable behind them. We saw such imagined beasts as a Cockatrice at Stowlangtoft, a Griffin at St. Mary's Bury St. Edmunds, something called a Sciapod at Dennington as well as various mermaids. More familiar animals encountered were hares, foxes and camels.

The most creative carvings seem to be from the 15th and early 16th centuries. There must have been many more examples that have not survived the various church restorations, and of those that do some are so worn and damaged that their identity is barely recognisable. However, a second hey-day of church carving came in the Victorian period. The master in Suffolk was Henry Ringham of Ipswich who's work often equalled that of the Mediaeval carvers. Visit Combs church to see some of his best. The art was not completely forgotten in the 20th century, a series of characterful faces from the 1920s can be seen at Aldham near Hadleigh. Wilby's battered originals have been copied to show how they may have originally appeared.

You may have discovered that as well as giving you the opportunity to read his accounts of our speakers talks Jerry has also recorded them and these audio versions can be heard on our website. Whilst Jerry's reviews have their own charm it is the speakers' presentation and accompanying images that really do bring the subject matter to life.

Looking ahead to Dot Marsden's talk on Stow Lodge, reminded me that we know of at least one local resident who spent her last days there, I am not sure of the exact years but probably the late 1930s. She was Sarah Brame, the grandmother of the Rev Leslie Brame. Her family had been very reluctant to have her admitted to the hospital as memories of it being a workhouse for the poor lingered, but it was not as unpleasant an experience as they had anticipated.

You may remember in an earlier edition of Telstar we shared what we knew then about the Rev Leslie Albert Brame. A very shortened account of his life is that he was brought up in one of the Church Walk cottages, along what is now the A1120. In the 1940s he left Stowupland to work as a missionary in China before finally settling in New Zealand.

Since then, thanks to one of our members, Joyce Gardiner, we now know an awful lot more about his family, his life and Stowupland. In later life the Rev Brame wrote down many memories of his upbringing in Stowupland and his time abroad. The documents have eventually found their way home to Stowupland and Joyce is looking after them for now on behalf of the Congregational Church. SLHG is extremely grateful to her for loaning them to us, and I am being kept very busy making notes about his memories of Stowupland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With this month's theme of wood, I have focused on his memories of his Dad's working life in the carpentry and construction trade. In the future we will share more either in Telstar, on our Local History Website or at our meetings. As so often happens with historical accounts some of his memories seem to be at odds with what we have from other sources, but *ho-hum...*



This photo shows Rev Leslie Brame with his parents (Thomas William and Ruth) outside their home in Church Walk, Stowupland. He remembered helping his father to build the porch, just one of the many projects that his father completed to improve their home.

Leslie's father was born in Earl Stonham in 1873. Although his given name was Thomas William Brame, Leslie refers to him as Will or William. Will was an only child and in 1881 at the age of 8 he started his working life as an apprentice to a Mr Elliott who was a builder-carpenter. His father could read, write and knew his numbers, but Leslie thinks this had come from attendance at Sunday school. His early apprenticeship served him in good stead as he became known as a journeyman- carpenter able to make anything from **'a barn or a bungalow to a chest of drawers or a coffin'**.

After the death of Mr Elliot, possibly after William had married and moved to Stowupland, he found himself a new job working for Mr W. Meakings, a builder at

Creeping St Peters. Although Leslie does not give much detail about Mr Meakings or dates, he does give us a lot of detail about the layout of Mr Meakings yard and the wide variety of processes that his father undertook, there. The following paragraphs tell only a small part of the bigger story.

He described it as a ***‘complex of building activities. It was a large yard, at one end a sawpit fitted for sawing trees into boards. In those days the carpenters’ work started with the tree, generally oak, elm or ash. Pine wood was called deal and imported entirely from Canada. Special mahogany came from Africa, teak from Malaya or Burma.’*** After the logs had been stacked in the yard to season for a few years ***‘the log would be laid on a horizontal rack .... held fast by a system of chains and levers while the huge eight-foot saws were worked, by one man standing above the tree or on it , and another in the pit. The man on top had to guide the saw to make a straight cut while the one underneath had to stop himself choking to death with the sawdust.’***

On the same site, they also ***‘did a lot of wagon building and wheelwrighting. Making a wagon wheel was a very complex task involving carpentry skills and metal working and experience... mathematics could not work all that out’.*** Because the ***‘smith’s main work was shoeing horses’*** a forge was at the front of the yard but ***‘just inside the yard were two circular trenches for the two sizes of wagon wheels. There was a charcoal fire to heat the steel rim, and when it was red hot, it was lifted off the fire, two or three men were needed to place the wheel carefully in the rim. The wooden fellies would be seared by the red-hot steel, and the whole rim would then be doused in cold water, sending up clouds of steam.’***

Then the wagon wheels had to be painted in the correct traditional colours. There were no ready-made paints, William had to make the paints from scratch from the ingredients which were kept in the paint shop – ***‘linseed oil, turpentine, driers, spirits, pigments, lead base and zinc oxide’***”

This is only a small taster of what Leslie remembered about his Dad’s craft skills, but he concluded that his ***‘Dad could master any job if it was capable of being processed with a handsaw, plane, chisel, spokeshave, and hammer or mallet. Of course, the tools had to be cared for. Dad would sharpen and set his own saws, from the finest tenon saw to the giant two-handed saws used in cutting planks. He had a grindstone dipping in water for grinding chisels and planes, and kept an oil-stone on his bench for honing them, and a leather strop hanging from a post to get them razor sharp. As he was fond of saying, “a good workman never blames his tools, because he keeps them in good order!”’***

## FROM MEMORY LANE



Do you remember Wilfred Pickles and Mable who hosted the BBC radio show 'Have A Go'. They are seen here at Stow Lodge in 1957 visiting 98-year-old Walter George Philips, photographed by George Wilden, (copied from Stowmarket, Then & Now: Book 2. ed Mike Durrant.)

We know that in the 1980's a TV programme was made about Gipping Farm, but do you remember any other TV or radio programmes that featured Stowupland?

**If you have any queries about our meetings or Stowupland's past, please contact  
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