



STOWUPLAND LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Hopefully as you read these words, we have had some rain and British weather has reasserted itself. As I was preparing my talk about Saxham Street for our August meeting I was reminded how lucky we are to have mains water. Our gardens may have suffered through the hot weather and hose pipe ban but at least we have fresh water at the turn of a tap. In the 19th and early to mid-20th century many people considered themselves fortunate to be able to collect fresh(ish) water from a nearby pump. Although apparently some families found it more convenient to get their water from a nearby pond.

In July 1895 a newspaper reported that **‘twenty houses (in Stowupland) had no water worth mentioning and ten in Saxon {sic} Street had not water fit for cattle’** (Bury Free Press, July 18th 1895). It would be several more decades before mains water would be pumped into our homes.

A few months back when Don Mobley asked if the group might be interested in hearing about his time at RAF Lakenheath, we hoped that the tensions in the Middle East would have been peacefully resolved by September. Fortunately, not many of us are directly affected or know exactly what the men and women who serve in our armed forces are experiencing today. But on **Wednesday September 2nd** Don will give us a taste of what it was like serving in the American Air force during the period known as the Cold War, in his talk **“On The Nuclear Edge: The F-111F at RAF Lakenheath”**.

In a more light-hearted vein on October 7th other friends from across the water (well Stowmarket is the other side of the River Gipping), Darren Dordoy and Hannah Salmon will share **‘Some Scary Stories of Stowmarket.’**

Now Jerry takes us back a few months to May when he shares his memories of the group’s visit to The Great War Huts at Brook Farm Camp. You can read about it here or go to our website to listen to Jerry.

“SLHG ‘s Away day to the Great War Huts near Bury St Edmunds - 20th May 2026”

The group enjoys “Away Days” and this was definitely different as several of us went off to explore a reconstruction of a World War One Army Camp. This was history in the making as we explored and listened to a talk of how it all came about. We started with a chat, a cup of tea and cakes as we waited for our guide and other groups that were visiting.

The war huts project had started on another site where trenches had been built for use in filmmaking. However the originators saw the potential in creating an authentic Worl War One Army Camp, a vision that snowballed with the opportunity to purchase land at Brook Farm Camp near Bury St Edmunds. The project is still in the building stage, but was started as a result of a discovery of an original first world war hut which had been spotted by one of the group of volunteers. As it was due to be demolished it was to be the start of a collection of authentic huts that otherwise would have not have survived. Arrangements had to be made for it be safely disassembled and transported to its new home where it would then be reassembled.

In the meantime, a lot of work had been taking place to prepare the new site for construction work. As well as the ground preparation, meetings were taking place with

Hawstead Parish Council and the council planning department, to ask their permission to bring heavy lorries through the village - no easy task in these days of red tape.

Other buildings were also found that were suitable for the new project and offered to the group. The group were reluctant to turn down any potential buildings knowing that they would probably be demolished and lost for ever. The buildings that were rescued came with their own stories of how they had been repurposed after the MOD no longer needed them.

Work in progress on the site means three huts have currently been reconstructed and are being fitted out to tell the story of their original use. The aim is to build a camp that reflects how world war one recruits lived and trained before heading off to war. Eventually there will be an 18-bed barrack room with a kitchen and recreation area. A training area for drill and shooting practise. A model of a guard room is also included. The Great War Huts provide a unique setting in which to learn about the people who trained for conflict and were eventually posted to the front lines in France from 1914 1918.

The volunteers realised they had a big area of land to fill and came up with the plan to build a trench line, to bring visitors as near as possible to conditions in France, these have been built from trench manuals and plans from the time of the war, also using materials that are as accurate to the time and conditions. When walking through them you feel very close to conditions of the time, and see life as it was like, dugouts, latrines, inside trench firing steps, and a Regimental Aid Post. As I went round it was very easy to imagine how the soldiers lived and fought in these fortified areas, also the medics working in a small, cramped space giving immediate aid to the wounded as they came back from the heavy fighting that was taking place at the time. These front time medics were the first line of treatment before the injured were transferred down to the line to the Regimental Aid facilities behind the trenches. These trench systems have been used in the making of a number of films about the first world war, and the group have provided a number of costumes and uniforms to the producers of these films.

Although the site is still a work in progress there is a great deal to see and experience. Too often the story of war revolves around those men who never returned but the vision for the Great War Huts is to tell the stories of the many soldiers who for a time called Brook Farm their home. Find out more about the Great War Huts by visiting www.greatwarhuts.org. or listen to "Jerrys Jabbas". Thank you, Neil, for organising this event.

Moving on here is Précis of "The Armoury Through Time Talk" given by Kathleen & John Hallaways on Wed. 1st July 2026

From the middle of the 16th century to the end of the 17th, Mendlesham, like other towns and villages across the country, had a Militia and an Armoury where they stored their weapons and armour. This was in the room over the north porch of the church, called the Parvise. The Churchwardens kept account of all the expenses. But in 1695 all this stopped. The documents were scrunpled up and thrown into a chest and the armour was abandoned. Perhaps the formation of the Regular Army had something to do with it, but in any event all memory of the Tudor Militia at Mendlesham was forgotten.

In 1876 the Churchwardens' Accounts, having been found in the Armoury, were listed and published in the 5th report of the Historic Manuscripts Commission by Mr John Cordy Jeaffreson; and in 1909 the Armour was rediscovered in the Parvise by Arthur Mayfield, the

Mendlesham schoolteacher, and the curate Rev. Partridge. It was restored with the help of the Meyrick Society then displayed.

Throughout the rest of the century the armour was on display in the Parvise. On a number of occasions, most notably in 1988, Armada year, when it was sent to the National Maritime Museum, it left Mendlesham and was displayed to a wider audience.

But the papers remained in the chest, unexamined, until in 1961 they were placed in the Archives. Still, no-one studied them in detail. This was to change after 2020. When the vicar and congregation were able to get back into the Church after the Covid closures, they needed to do repairs to the roof over the Armoury and had to prove that a grant was justified.

This led to the Armoury Facelift Project and the Armoury Research Project, which happily did prove just that!

Kathleen was on the Research Team and they found out many important facts to do with the Churchwardens Accounts and many more details about the discovery of both the paperwork and the armour. Kathleen admitted to being very keen on the British Newspaper Archive and said that she got many of her most interesting details from this resource – including how Mr Mayfield had prepared the armoury to impress the schoolboys and Reverend Partridge when, in 1909, they made their exploratory trip up the stairs into the room over the north porch of the church where the armour was kept.

John was on the Armoury Facelift Team and after Kathleen finished her part of the talk, and we had a refreshing break for coffee and biscuits and a look at the posters and documents which gave further insights into the facts of Kathleen's talk, it was now John's turn to take up the story and tell us what is in store for this fascinating place.

John stressed the uniqueness of the Mendlesham Armoury: its proud claim to fame: a unique survival – the only Tudor armoury still in its original location with some of the original armour and weapons and also documentation. Thus making it of National, even International importance. And he made the point that this status must be safeguarded. The importance of The Mendlesham Armoury is shown by the fact that of the 5 most prominent experts on armour of this period, the team has 3 working for the project, giving their time and expertise free.

He then outlined the aims of the project: Conservation – keeping the history of the artifacts intact and only mending where necessary for display; Information about the exhibits – dating the exhibits and giving detailed descriptions of each piece while noting the inconsistencies in suits of armour made up from pieces of different ages and styles; Presentation: working out a logical order to present the various elements, create the means to hang or otherwise present the items, provide subtle but effective lighting, labels for each item displayed and with an underlying database giving more detail. The room cannot be made accessible to those unable to climb the stairs so they propose to have displays (not the armour or weapons themselves) in the NW corner of the church.

Lastly he pointed out that the timescale for this is not fixed – there are many problems: assessment of what needs to be done takes time; finance – grants etc also take time and are not guaranteed; the volunteers – are giving of their time freely but have their own jobs to do; Faculties, as it is in a church, need to be applied for.

It will be an excellent outing once it is finished – a vital part of our national heritage. However, if people wish to see the Armoury as it is now, it may be possible to arrange a group visit – donations required, of course.....

Interested in learning about Suffolk and/or Stowupland's past:

Please contact Jerry Voden on 01449 703717 or

secretary@stowuplandlocalhistorygroup.org

Or come along to a meeting - first Wednesday of the month, 7:30 at the URC Meeting Hall, non-members just pay £5:00 at the door.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

In June several of us gathered on the Green to unveil a plaque to rename an area of the Green that had been previously known simply as Half-a-Mow, as Judy's Half-a-Mow. I can't do better than share Judy's words about the area as they appeared in a 2006 edition of Telstar.

HALF _A – MOW – the village Green

Newcomers to the village may wonder why the portion of Green opposite Birch close is not maintained as the rest. This is because it is a "half – a –mow" area, part of a scheme launched by Mid Suffolk District Council to encourage grassland to be managed for the benefit of wildlife.

With the support of a District Councillor & the District Council's Assistant Countryside Officer, & following public consultation, the Parish Council agreed to this area being put over to the scheme in early 2001, leaving the greater part of the Green for recreational purposes.

A survey in July 2001 revealed a large variety of plants & grasses, including lady's bedstraw & pepper saxifrage. Apart from the annual hay cut, the removal of ragwort in late summer & the cutting of the roadside verge for traffic safety, the area is left to nature. The delicate ladysmock flowers can now complete their cycle of blooming & seeding, & the orange tip butterfly can lay its eggs on the plants. Insects abound & , in the autumn, flocks of goldfinches feast on the variety of seedheads .

The scheme is working well, &, if it seems untidy in some people's eyes – a concern ~~recently~~ ^{expressed} to the Parish Council – well, we live in the country, don't we?

Judy Clarke – Project Officer (a grand name for liasing with M.S.D.C. when necessary!)