

Polstead Village Recorder's Report for 2010–11

During the past year we have continued to develop our collection of records of Polstead and have received many welcome additions to our collection of records, documents and photographs. We are continuing to organise these to make them as accessible as possible, particularly to local residents and those with past links with Polstead.

Our main activities have included the following.

Current events

We have continued to record events in Polstead which we feel may be of particular interest in the future. These have included, first, the consecration of the extension of the churchyard by the Right Reverend Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, on 8 December (*see below*). Bishop Nigel also dedicated the recently reordered South aisle to St Cedd (who is said to have preached under the Gospel Oak in 653 AD).



Completed churchyard extension



Consecration of the churchyard extension



Bishop Nigel at Polstead Church

Secondly, two recent developments beside the village green are worthy of mention. The first was the erection by the Parish Council of a shelter for those waiting to meet school buses etc, on the South side of the village hall (*see below*). The provision of shelter, which was held up for many years due to doubts about where it should be sited, sadly comes after the cancellation of many day time bus services. Second was the remodelling and planting of the bank opposite Cock Farm which was carried out by the Village Hall Committee and the Community Shop (*see below*).

Thirdly, we have continued to record other on-going events, as opportunity offers, for example, the Gardening Club walk in Stoke by Nayland Cherry Wood in Spring 2010 (*see below*).



Shelter on Polstead Green



Bank by Heath Road



Gardening Club at Cherry Wood

Pictures of local events are always welcome; and if anyone feels that an event should be recorded please contact one of us and we will do our best to respond.

Records of the past

We have made a number of further important additions to our collection of records, to add to the many photographs and other records we already hold.

Burial records

Martin and Jackie Mitchell have been very kindly up-dating of the index to the detailed burial records we have from 1876 to 1986; and revising the map that was originally compiled by the Women's Institute in the 1980s. Final updating continues to fill in the gaps as far as possible and the information will be available soon.

History of Polstead School

Anne Lewis has compiled an excellent set of records on the history of Polstead School (1886 to 1990), which is available for anyone interested to consult. Anne would still welcome any further material, such as photographs etc., which may be available.

Public Houses in Polstead

Anne Lewis has also extended our collection of records of past public houses in Polstead. She would very much welcome any further information or old records about them that anyone may have. In particular, she would like to learn more about the Black Horse in Polstead Street, Stoke by Nayland, which until the second quarter of the twentieth century was in the parish of Polstead.

Brewery Farm

Hugh Lilley has kindly lodged with us records from Brewery Farm, Bower House Tye, dating from the last years of the 19th century onwards, when the farm operated as what today would be known as a micro brewery, making quantities of ale for local farms to keep their workers going. In 1894 beer was being sold for 10d per gallon.

Report on the excavation of the churchyard extension

We now have available the first report by the Suffolk Archaeological Team on their excavation of the churchyard extension in 2009. A copy can be made available for inspection by anyone wishing to read it. This was the first full archaeological intervention at Polstead and has confirmed the history of settlement here going back well before the arrival of the Romans in the first century AD. A number of Late Iron Age remains were discovered, including what are thought to be two "feasting pots", which are still undergoing detailed analysis. Some worked flints also came to light. It is evident that settlement on the hill around what is now the site of the church has a very long history. A further report is due to follow once full analysis of the finds has been completed.

Open Day

We held a second successful Open Day at Polstead Village Hall on Sunday 14 November 2010. The event again generated a lot of interest and was very well attended by local people and others looking through the many varied records, some seeking information about their past relations and everyone enjoying the social atmosphere.

The date coincided with Remembrance Sunday and Martin Mitchell kindly produced a special exhibit of the names on the Polstead War Memorial and Roll of Honour in the church. We are seeking further information about, and possibly memorabilia concerning, those from Polstead who fell and those who served in the two world wars.

A further feature was a continuous slide presentation on the hall's large screen of a selection of photographs of Polstead over the last 100 years. Many who came recognised themselves, or others, from days gone past.

At the end of the afternoon we showed two wartime films relating to the area from the East Anglian Film Archive. First, "Wartime Suffolk", about the direct impact of war on the local countryside, and, secondly, "Spring Offensive", about the major effort made in 1940 to bring as much land as possible into cultivation, following the agricultural depression of the 1930s, so as to feed the nation during wartime. (*See below*).



Open Day 14 November 2010



Open Day



Open Day

We again made a surplus from selling refreshments during the day and we have now built up a small reserve fund to cover future activities.

Suffolk Recorders' Day, October 2010

Together with Martin Mitchell, we jointly attended the Suffolk Recorders' Day on 17 October 2010 at Elmswell Community Centre. As usual, this was a very successful day. Topics included a number of very interesting accounts of the activities of other local recorder groups covering contrasting interests; and, as usual, we were left with plenty to reflect on.

Inquiries

We continue to receive a wide range of inquiries, mostly about possible links with past residents of Polstead. During the year these have included:

- (1) An inquiry from the USA seeking confirmation that an early settler in the mid 17th century had been born in Polstead (eventually it turned out that he had been born in Boxford).
- (2) A survey of 17 members of the Lilley family buried in Polstead.
- (3) Two inquiries, one from New Zealand, relating to the Sowman family, which flourished in Polstead in the mid 19th century.
- (4) An inquiry concerning the memorial in Polstead churchyard to George Barnes, a farm labourer at Bower House Tye, who died in 1871 at the early age of 41, leaving a widow (buried in the same grave in 1906) and eight children, the last of whom was still living with his mother in 1901.

Following up these and other inquiries has added considerably to our detailed knowledge of past inhabitants of Polstead.

Future activities

We intend during the next year to:

- (1) continue to develop and improve our records and ensure their safekeeping in good conditions;
- (2) hold another Open Day on **20 November 2011** which, as usual, will be open to anyone interested;

- (3) press on with establishing a recording facility for oral testimony of current residents; and
 - (4) maintain and improve the information available on the Polstead web site.
- Any suggestions about other things we might be doing would be most welcome.

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