



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025

Dear Friends,

Valerie Fenwick

Sadly, I have to report that Valerie Fenwick, formerly an Orford Museum Trustee, died on 3 January this year. She was a noted archaeologist and historian with a deep love and knowledge of the archaeology and history of this area. She contributed much to Orford Museum, both with advice and information and through her many articles for *The Orford & District Local History Bulletin* and, latterly, to *The Orford Historian*. We will be publishing a full obituary in *Issue 4 of the Orford Historian*.

New Orford Museum Guide

This Newsletter comes to you with a copy of our new guide to Orford and the Museum. Previously, we had a publicity leaflet for the Museum in Orford Castle and a separate guide to parts of Orford village. Both of these were badly out of date and we decided therefore to combine the two publications into one booklet. Both text and design are by Edward Martin, archaeologist and historian with a longstanding interest in the history of this area, and Orford Museum is most grateful to him for what, I hope you will agree, is a very successful result. We are also grateful to the Iken Trust and the New Orford Town Trust for funding this project which has enabled us to distribute the booklet free of charge.

New Friends' Administrator

We are very pleased to welcome Kim Puttock to the Orford Museum committee as our Friends' Administrator. Kim lives in Orford and her day job is that of Clerk to the Aldeburgh Town Council. She also

handles all the advertisements for The Link and is a member of the Orford PCC. This appointment will make life much easier for our Treasurer, John Grayburn, and we are very grateful to Kim for coming forward. She will also join the Trustee board. All membership enquiries should still be made to:

info@orfordmuseum.org.uk

Elizabeth Spinney
Chairman

Events at Butley Priory

Since our last Newsletter just before Christmas, we have had an excellent lecture by Jamie Lowther Pinkerton on the Battle of Agincourt and the three-day History Festival at the end of February when we had six diverse talks spread over three days. In March Sir Alex Younger, formerly head of MI6, spoke to a capacity audience about the life of a spy and in April Baillie Gifford prize winning author, Lucy Hughes Hallet, talked about her book on the Duke of Buckingham, favourite of both James I and Charles I.

Looking ahead to the summer, Orford Museum is delighted to welcome the travelling theatre group, **Three Inch Fools** (www.threeinchfools.com), to Butley Priory on **Tuesday, 26 August 2025** to present a musical version of Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Formed in 2015 by brothers James and Stephen Hyde, the idea for the Three-Inch Fools is simple – to stage a production that is inventive and fast-paced and to use music to bring to life Shakespeare's timeless stories. Over the past seven years the company has staged fourteen plays around

the UK including Macbeth, Romeo & Juliet and Twelfth Night. The performance will start at 6.30pm, doors open at 6.00pm. and will take place outside, so please bring chairs, rugs and a picnic. There will be a 20-minute interval. Tickets cost £20 for Orford Museum Friends, £25 for non-Friends, children under 16, £14 and children under 8 free. Friends and guests, please use our online booking system. For non-Friends, please use our booking form. If you have any queries, please email us at info@orfordmuseum.org.uk

Following this on **Monday, 8 September**, **Ian Collins** will talk about his book **Blythe Spirit: The Remarkable Life of Ronald Blythe**. Ronald Blythe (1922-2023), author of the inimitable **Akenfield**, was a prolific and poetic chronicler of rural and spiritual life, nature and literature. He spent a joyful century close to his Suffolk roots, time-travelling in his imagination and publishing 45 books and thousands of essays. Ian Collins has drawn on decades of friendship for an intimate and candid biography.

Ian Collins is a radio and television presenter, author, comedy writer and journalist. For many years he was arts writer for the **Eastern Daily Press**. His numerous biographies and monographs include **John Craxton: A life of Gifts** and **James Dodds: The Blue Boat**.

On **Thursday, 9 October**, **Peter Gutteridge** returns to Butley Priory to continue his very popular series of talks on Nelson with one entitled **Nelson – Disaster at Tenerife and the Battle of the Nile**. Peter is a retired senior partner of a large law firm and now a regular speaker on Naval and Maritime History subjects and, in particular, Horatio Nelson. He is a long-standing member of the Nelson Society and has Masters' degrees in Maritime History from Greenwich University and History from Cambridge University. His interest in Nelson was originally fostered by his grandfather, Professor H.C. Gutteridge, who was a

distinguished academic and author of **Nelson and the Neapolitan Jacobins**. On **Thursday, 6 November**, well-known journalist and Woodbridge resident, **Simon Pearson**, will talk about his book **The Great Escaper: the Life and Death of Roger Bushell** which tells the story of Roger Bushell – aka “Big X” – the man who masterminded the “Great Escape” in 1944 and was played by Richard Attenborough in the famous film 20 years later. The real Big X, head of the escape committee at Stalag Luft III, however, was a far more compelling character than the man portrayed by Hollywood and renamed Roger Bartlett. Bushell was a Cambridge-educated criminal barrister and the fastest skier in Europe before he was shot down in his Spitfire over Dunkirk in 1940. A talented linguist who spoke fluent French and German, he turned Stalag Luft III into an unlikely outpost of British intelligence and organised the digging of the famed tunnels Tom, Dick and Harry. He was also a great romantic who conducted a dangerous affair with a member of the Czech resistance while on the run in Prague in 1942 and rekindled a relationship with a beautiful British aristocrat on the eve of the mass breakout – with tragic consequences for all. Simon is a former obituaries editor of **The Times**, where he held senior positions for more than 30 years. He has also worked for the **Daily Telegraph**, the **Sunday Times** and the **South China Morning Post**. He wrote the best-selling biography of Roger Bushell – **The Great Escaper**, published by Hodder in 2013 - after being given exclusive access to his papers and letters by Bushell's family. His latest book, written with his wife, Fiona Gorman, in 2023, is a biography of the pioneering heart surgeon Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub.

Orford Museum is immensely grateful to Edward and Clare Greenwell for allowing us to use Butley Priory for our events and we thought that those of you who are regular visitors (and to encourage those

who have not yet been) to these might like to have the following history written by Edward Greenwell. You can also watch the video of the **Son et Lumière** held last August which told the Priory's story by means of narration by actors, pictures, music and light effects. This can be found at <https://vimeo.com/1004873122>

The History of Butley Priory

The Priory was founded by Ranulf de Glanville in 1171, a clever lawyer and chief political officer to King Henry II. He endowed it with the tithes of 7 local churches, a number which grew to 27 over the next 300 years.

The duties of an Augustinian Priory were **Prayer, Alms and Hospitality**. For 350 years, Butley Priory fulfilled those duties. It became the second richest monastery in East Anglia after Bury St Edmunds. Its income in 1535 was £318 per year.

The founding charter of Butley Priory laid down that a sum of money should be distributed to the poor of Butley on seven feast days each year. In 1535, this sum was £10 6/8, just 3% of Butley's income.

150 years after its foundation, in the early 1300's, Butley Priory had become very prosperous. It enlarged the church and at 235ft. long and 104ft. wide, it was huge, far out of proportion to any local congregation. The coats of arms in the armorial range from the great powers of Europe of the day... the Papacy, the Holy Roman Empire and the crowns of England and France ... through grandees of England and on down to local squires. Tradition has it that somewhere in the Priory grounds is buried a silver coffin containing the body of the third Earl of Suffolk, who fell at the side of Edward, Duke of York at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

Two very significant Butley Priory documents survive. One is the '**Dissolution List**' of all those in the employ of Butley Priory at its dissolution, on March 1, 1538, 84 names in all. It lists:

12 canons and 2 chaplains. There were also keepers of the ferries and weirs, warreners, bakers, brewers, maltsters, a keeper of the garden and ponds, 6 women in the dairy and laundry, farmworkers, shepherds, a keeper of the swine, as well as 'two old beadsmen being impotent', whose sole job was prayer.

The other rarity is the **Butley Chronicle**, kept by one of the canons from 1509 - 1535, a most unusual survival. Lost for 130 years, it turned up, mislabelled, in the Bodleian library in Oxford in the 1930's. It records not only great public events like the birth of Henry VIII's first son, and his death 6 weeks later, the death of Cardinal Wolsey and the execution of a Duke of Suffolk in 1523 but also lots of local detail about the weather, storms and floods (constant complaints about inundation from the sea). It also tells of the occasion when careless servants set fire to the kitchen roof and the visits of great people, such as Mary, once Queen of France and later Duchess of Suffolk. She was Henry VIII's sister, married aged 18 in a dynastic alliance to 53-year-old King Louis XII of France. Louis died three months later. Mary's brother Henry VIII sent a party out to France to re-negotiate her dowry in the light of the brevity of her marriage. The party was led by Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who had been Mary's great love in the first place, before she had been traded to be Queen of France. He and Mary married secretly in France, without Henry's permission and to his huge fury, only placated by a huge fine.

The next Summer of 1516, the Duke of Suffolk and his new wife made their first visit to Butley Priory. A number of further visits took place, the last one in 1527, when the Duke and Duchess stayed for two months. They clearly loved this place and treated it as a peaceful retreat from the frenzy of Henry VIII's court.

From the palmy days in the early 1300's, by the early 1500's Butley was falling into disrepair. The Bishop's visitations over the final decades record: "the Church is

ruinous in the leadwork of the roof and it rains in several places inside” “The choir books are in disrepair”... “It rains in the Refectory”... “the drains for the dormitory are blocked” and “the Refectory is so cold that the canons suffer from gout” .

In 1534 the chronicle records “terrible winds and rain, thunder and lightning, and the charity of many people grows cold, no love or devotion remains in the people, but rather many false opinions and schisms against the sacraments of the church.” In 1538, it all came to an end; Butley Priory was formally closed.

While much of the Priory was plundered for stone and lead, the Gatehouse itself survived relatively well until by 1738 it had clearly fallen almost into ruin. Then in 1740 it was converted into a dwelling, with the addition of the fine cantilevered staircase, and three Georgian bedrooms. It was the Butley Rectory for a while, but by 1926 was again in some distress. It was then that Dr Montague Rendall bought it. Dr Rendall had been Headmaster of Winchester College and was an unmarried academic. He says, “I first saw Butley in August 1926, and purchased it at first sight from Mr Boynton.” He paid £2,000 for the house, then spent a further £7,000 renovating it. He rescued it, both structurally and architecturally, removing some terrible additions and returning to it a strong sense of its Gothic and Georgian origins. However, it was during his occupancy that the Priory came closest to utter destruction. At 4.00am on February 4, 1942, a huge landmine fell 50 yds to the south of BP. It made a giant crater, but fortunately the blast went mostly upwards, and just clipped the gable on the garden side. It knocked off much of that gable and drove the apex beam through to the north, knocking off the opposite gable too. It appears that such was Dr Rendall’s passion for the building that he spent his last penny on the restoration work. He sold the Priory to his neighbour Sir Bernard Greenwell who let him live there to the end of his life,

and whose descendants now own it. Butley Priory Gatehouse has seen 700 years of history... wars, plagues, famines, prosperity and decay... but still stands today, much as it always has. An atmospheric place where couples come to get married in this lovely solemn space, and a reminder of the roots of the England we know today.

Edward Greenwell

The Orford Historian

We hope that *Issue 4* of *The Orford Historian* will be published in the autumn of this year. If you have ideas for articles or would like to write for the *Historian*, please get in touch with our editor, Jack Cooke at editor@orfordmuseum.org.uk.

General Information

To book tickets for the events, please go to our website at

www.orfordmuseum.org.uk/events

Other useful email addresses:

info@orfordmuseum.org.uk

(for membership information).

NB: your Orford Museum Friends’ membership card allows you free entry to the Castle and Museum accompanied by up to six children.

curator@orfordmuseum.org.uk

(for general information and enquiries about the Museum and its archive).

a.spinney43@btinternet.com

to order any of our publications.

Orford Castle Opening Times and Prices:

Orford Castle is now open seven days a week from 10.00am until 5.00pm. To

check prices, go to: www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/orford-castle/prices-and-opening-times/