



NOTES FROM THE MUSEUM

The Ravages of the Sea

Luckily the river banks held Friday 9th November and the town was spared this time, but Slaughden was once again under water reminding us of how the sea swept away a thriving community whose development as a port began during the time of Henry VIII. By the end of his reign it was described as “a large and commodious haven where ships of great burden can rest in safety and unload their cargos.” In the 1560’s there were 300 fishermen and 800 mariners at work. During the following century there were three quays with ships of up to 200 tons, owned and built at Slaughden, manned by Aldeburgh men. However by 1650 the river had begun to silt up and only smacks, colliers and barges were being built.

During the 19th century 45 foot fishing smacks built at Slaughden sailed up to Iceland. They returned with their catch kept alive in a well in the bottom of the boat through which seawater flowed. The 1882 Ordinance Survey map showing the extent of the village was used by Tim Collier as the basis for the model of Slaughden which he presented to the museum last year. He also researched at the Records Office and Aldeburgh Museum’s pictorial records to produce an accurate representation of Slaughden at the end of the 19th century. At this time there still was a customs house, a sailmaker, and a dairy farm, but the future was bleak. A scheme to build a harbour and extend the railway to the quay failed. By 1900 the days of trading on the river were coming to an end. The village had a shop, a salt house, a soap factory, a coal yard, a slaughter house and the pub, but only 20 families lived there. Their houses were built with a sea door opposite the back door so that the sea could come in one and go out of the other. During the early part of the 20th century the last buildings were swept away. The Three Mariners, which is believed to have been built on the site of the medieval Anchor Inn, was demolished in 1922, and Lime Kiln Farm, later renamed The Hazards, was the last to go.

As you enter the Moot Hall you pass the whale’s fossilised shoulder blade that was the inn sign at the Three Mariners. The museum holds original sketches of Slaughden in its heyday, which can be seen on the information boards on the sea wall that now covers the last foundations of the village at Slaughden. Paintings, prints and sketches of the village are on display in the Slaughden Room. The museum, which is now closed until Easter 2008, has a web site - www.aldeburghmuseum.org.uk. Museum staff can be contacted email at enquiries@aldeburghmuseum.org.uk.