

Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter

Special Edition Spring 2021



A message from Bernard

" Hello Historians of Desford and District! Two things have struck me this month.

First, how much our Secretary has done for us during lockdown to keep us informed and offer IT possibilities for enjoying local history.

I have tried three of them. One was a Webinar on using Zoom for Local history after lockdown: possibilities, but our strength is the social contact and chatting directly to speakers at our meetings; but if there is anything of national or regional interest that comes up, I can say it is so easy to take part. Then, I tried a specialist archaeology presentation, which was interesting but probably best for students or serious researchers. Last, I tried a local presentation by Coalville Heritage Society which was interesting and helpful: for example, if we wanted to have a talk in the depths of winter. But really, I am looking forward to seeing you all again as soon as we can.

Second, Desford's history is being made all around us: 160 houses going up at two sites to the East of the village and a planning appeal for 120 more on a site just to the West. A lot is going on from the Parish Council and others to present a case against what must be about the daftest place to put extra development in Desford at this point in time. Allied to this is our own historic referendum coming up on 6 MAY 2021, about our Neighbourhood Plan: PLEASE REMEMBER THIS AND TURN OUT TO VOTE!!

I have put a piece in the Graphic and the Parish Magazine and make no apologies for repeating it here: it is vital as many as possible vote "YES" to protect our settlement boundary and make sure no more development before our traffic and infrastructure issues are looked at holistically.



Yesterday I saw my first big bumblebee and a gorgeous large brimstone butterfly: harbingers of a decent Spring, let us hope.



Regards, Chairman Bernard.

And now a message from our Secretary Angela

Events for 2021

As we will be unable to hold any meetings at the Free Church for the next few months, we have decided to hold some zoom talks. Some of you will no doubt be familiar with this format and others not. For those unfamiliar, you do not need to download zoom. On the day, you click on the link that will be sent to you via email a day or so before.

Please support us and enjoy participating.

Zoom talks

April 20th 7.30pm Mountsorrel Quarry and Railway by Mark Temple
June 15th 7.30pm AGM 2021 + other 'entertainment' TBD
July 20th 7.30pm 50 years of Leicestershire Archaeology by Peter Liddle
(Part of Festival of Archaeology)

We are hoping that we will be able to arrange a visit to the Mountsorrel site, when it reopens. They have a very good tearoom!

We are anticipating that for the meetings on September 21st and November 16th we will be able to meet at the Free Church again. Talks for those dates will be decided later.

Look forward to seeing you all.

Angela Thomas

Research and writing

During the lockdown year Caroline Wessel has enjoyed researching and writing up her forthcoming publication *Desford Personalities of the Past*. The final draft has just gone to the publishers and the book comprises an amazing SEVENTY PERSONALITIES, RANGING FROM THE 14TH CENTURY Master Forester of the Royal Hunting Forest through the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries to our more recent past. This includes Desford Colliery, WW11 Aerodrome, our four International Sports Players - and even George Davies, founder of NEXT, who lived in Desford in the 1980s. Caroline says 'I have much preferred living in the past to the present during the last year and have made so many 'friends' with Desford's colourful personalities of the past. I cannot wait to share it with you all. Pat has promised me a big Book Launch event at the Library (plus coffee and cakes, I am sure) when we are all allowed out!'

Finally before our 'Spring in Desford picture gallery' three more of Caroline's Contributions from Betty Dickson's alphabetical card index:

DES福德 FEMALE FRIENDLY SOCIETY

The earliest year of admission was 1806 and there is a list of names dated 1840. The proposed division of funds was made according to the date of the woman's enrolment. Funds deposited at Pares Leicestershire Banking Co. (that became NatWest) were £415.14s (worth £29,000 in 2019).

ELECTRICITY

came to Desford in 1924/5

Forest House,

in Leicester Lane, was originally a farm but was much altered. Joseph Gimson (1796 - 1848) lived there towards the end of his life. After his death his daughter, Elizabeth, conducted a boarding School at Forest House, but gave it up some time before 1861, as at that date she is listed as Matron at Leicester Royal Infirmary. Mr Sydney Wathes lived there in the 1950s.

Desford's Changing Landscape.

Besides the finished Bellway development, there is still plenty of building happening in Desford. Botcheston so far has no new housing projects in the Neighbourhood Plan.

(Photographs by Huw Thomas and Molly Marcus)



Dukes Field development near Bosworth Academy



New Housing behind the Bull's Head site



Finished houses on the Red Lion site



View down Lindridge Lane



Village Sign



At the side of Desford Library



Spring flowers in the Strict Baptist Graveyard now with its Blue Plaque



St Martin's church from Main Street

Here is Bernard's piece for the Graphic and Parish Magazine as mentioned earlier.

VOTE YES TO PLAN OUR FUTURE!!!

DESFORD PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – THE REFERENDUM

6 MAY 2021

Months after our plan was confirmed and commended by an Independent Examiner, the lifting of COVID restrictions on referendums means we get our vote on the plan on 6 May. Desford Parish Council will put out information about what it says, but they cannot campaign for your vote: they have to be neutral by law.

But I as an individual can ask you to support the plan. I am a parishioner and I was privileged to be asked to help prepare the plan with a group of Parish Councillors and ordinary parishioners 5 years ago. We did loads of research and the PC engaged a terrific consultancy firm to guide us through preparing a plan. Throughout, our group tried to make the plan fit in with your views and wishes which you told us about when we consulted parish wide. Our plan has passed a Strategic Environmental Assessment and been commended with modifications by an Independent Examiner. It only needs your support on 6 May to become part of the Development Plan and influence planning applications.

There are several important parts, dealing with our environment and amenities and some Community Actions which will make the parish a better community if they can be pulled off. But it's housing I am concentrating on because this is the area where your support is most vital. The plan allocates 2 sites for 160 houses at the east of the Village and says any more than that must be allocated as part of the borough-wide Local Plan, where all other towns and villages will have to take a fair share of development and the problems of traffic which have been concerning the village since 2001 can be looked at before more housing is approved.

A "yes" vote is important: many of you will know that a Developer has gone to appeal for permission to build 120 houses at the west end of the village, opposite the Kirkby Road Recreation Ground. The inquiry will take place in late June, by Zoom or in person we don't yet know. But if our plan is approved on 6 May, it will add even more strength to the really strong cases the PC and Hinckley Borough have already submitted in writing.

The law actually says that for 2 years after a successful referendum our plan will "normally" prevail against development. So: let's go for our Local Trinity: Borough, Parish and People united in planning the future of Desford.

VOTE YES ON THE 6TH OF MAY!!

***Bernard Grimshaw,
Chair, Desford and District Local History Society
Co-opted, non-councillor-Member since 2016 of Desford Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan
Working Group
Botcheston resident since 2009.
grimshawmfc@gmail.com***

Desford and District Local History Society

Invite you to a **zoom talk**
Mountsorrel Quarry and Railway



By

Mark Temple

On Tuesday April 20th 2021 at 7.30pm

Non members are very welcome and should email

Angela Thomas, secretary

angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk

for the zoom access link.

Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter Christmas Edition 2021



A message from our Chair, Bernard Grimshaw

Dear All,

Straight in to wishing you all a Happy and Healthy Christmas and a 2022 that carries on progress towards normality!

As I write this, we have had two very successful talks in the Free Church. The hall is tall! And we can sit reasonably spaced out wearing our masks if possible, so things seem as reasonably safe as they can be, especially for those of us who have been double jabbed and boosted!

I am looking forward to our AGM on **18th January, 2022**, when I and the committee hope to see as many of you as possible. I have mentioned before our need for a new Secretary and some help with preparing for the Heritage Festival in early July next year: please come full of Christmas Goodwill and positive New Year Thoughts, as Your Society Needs You!

We will also be taking a thorough look at our finances and subscription levels, and the committee will report back on progress with our website and social media, and on a programme for 2022.

At the AGM, Kate Twitchin will bring us up to date with progress on the Heritage Weekend in July 2021 and the committee will present a programme for next year, with supporting that Festival as one of the main events.

I end as I began: Season's Greetings and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM!

DDLHS President's letter for December 2021 NEWSLETTER

Dear Members,

Well, it was all down to you! When I started writing up little pieces about Desford personalities for our History Society newsletter, I fairly soon realized that this information and these delightful quirky anecdotes should be collated and put together on paper - not just disappear into the ether after our digital newsletters have been read.

So what was the result? A substantial 270-page publication, entitled *Desford Personalities of the Past*, that was launched on November 20th at a splendid event at Desford Library, where homemade cakes and hot drinks encouraged brisk sales.

On that day alone over seventy books were sold and the number is now up to around ninety. Seventy seems to be a special number, 270 pages and there are stories about seventy "personalities" in my book who, during the isolation and anxiety of the lockdown year, became my firm friends.

Already one more fascinating anecdote has come back to me. Major Reid of Desford airfield (see REID) had a beautiful grand piano and when he sold up to retire and move to Jersey his home was visited by a little girl aged ten, (just recovering from chickenpox), accompanied by her mother. They bought the piano which is still in their family. The little (spotty!) girl was the granddaughter of Mr Lane (see LANE), headmaster of Desford Industrial School and her mother was Mrs Joan Moore, Lane's daughter and wife of WWII hero, Colonel Moore (see MOORE). She remembers Major Reid as a handsome man, somewhat balding by that age, so now when you read about him you can picture him even more vividly.



Happy reading - and do get your friends to buy the book too. It is on sale at Desford Library, cost £10.



You will soon be seeing this a lot around the village.

This event will take place in Desford on the weekend of July 2nd and 3rd 2022. Its primary aim is to officially open the Desford Heritage Trail which consists of 16 large information boards in key sites of historical significance around the village. In addition, there will be a weekend of festivities celebrating this heritage and educating residents and visitors in the long history of Desford.

To date, all the community groups we have approached such as the church, the schools, the pubs, the shops and interest-based groups have all agreed to get involved.

The village will be divided into zones by time periods such as The Tudor Zone, Victorian Zone etc. Each zone will offer entertainment, interactive experiences and information to help residents and visitors to understand what life might have been like for people of the village at each time. (Kate Twitchin)

**To Hear More Be There At Our AGM
18th January 2022!**

“er in Bronze” by Peter Wocha (Previous Deputy Head)

In the early eighties, a South African, Ron Florenz, came to Desford Primary school to lead a clay workshop with the older children. He spent all day with us and taught us various techniques for sculpting heads by adding pieces of clay to parts of our models or carving pieces from them. He showed us how to measure the proportions of the head and face so that most of the children finished with very pleasing results.



Mrs. Catherine Byron and her two daughters Emma and Naomi admire the sculpture. With them are Mr. Ron Florenz, the sculptor, and Mr. Oliver Hirst, headmaster.

None of us at the time knew that Mr. Florenz had an ulterior motive for holding the workshop. He was studying the children so that he could use one of them to be a model for a statue he had been commissioned to make for Mr. Mrs. Byron, parents of their two children attending the school. Allison, a year five child was chosen and went to his studio in Nottingham. There he sculpted her head and shoulders in clay using the same techniques he had shown the rest of the children.

In February 1982 the finished statue was erected outside the large hall. There was great excitement among the children at the time. We had discussions about Hayley's poem was entitled “er in Bronze” and we never questioned her choice of metal. The whole statue looked metallic and had a patina on its back. I found out that the statue is made of fibre glass resin but that was in 2019! My colleagues and I still think of her as “er in Bronze”. “er in Resin” doesn't sound quite the same.

In 1985 the statue was moved to a small quadrangle outside the Head Teacher's room. At that time there was no security fence around the school and increasingly, we became concerned that the

statue would be vandalized . It remained in that place for the next twenty years. Many of us, though knowing the reasons for the move, were saddened that so few people could now see the statue and appreciate it.

The second move happened circa 2003/4. The school population was expanding, and the foundation unit needed the courtyard space for a wet play area. By that time the security fence had been erected so a site was selected in the Millennium Garden outside the reception office. The school continued to expand, then circa 2008/9 the office was extended so the statue was moved again. This time it was not re-erected because in 2018 I spotted it lying under a bush in the Millennium Garden.

The school was part of Desford Open Gardens scheme, and the Head was there in the garden, so I spoke to him about the statue and its



significance to the then parental body, many of whom had attended the school and remembered the statue.

The following year I discovered that the statue had been moved to a small car park next to the school kitchen. It was in a poor state of repair. Where the three legs joined the body, much of the resin had fractured and fallen off. There was a large crack across the back and the bird had disappeared altogether. I met with Les, the then school premises officer, and he produced both the bird and the brass plaque that had been in the small courtyard.

I was fairly confident I could repair the damage and contacted the Head, Colin Wilson about re-installing the statue somewhere inside a security fence. Colin and I carried the statue into the Millennium Garden and agreed on its site. We decided that the repair work should be done once the statue was erected. A stalwart band of septuagenarians and one



octogenarian started to dig one of the three holes. Very quickly we realized that the task was beyond us because we hit compacted quarry waste just under the surface. A mobile classroom had been sited there in the 1970's. Colin came to our rescue by telling us he would get County Hall contractors on the job.

I completed the repairs after it was erected, and the concrete had set. I'd colour matched the original paint on the bird before I attached it to the hand so the whole project was finished in a couple of days.

I owe my fellow "diggers" a big thank you and a special mention to Colin Wilson for his unstinting support for the whole project.

(Thanks to Huw Thomas for his photographs)



A preview of some of our programme for 2022

January 18th 7.30pm at Desford Free Church

AGM followed by a buffet.

Kate Twitchin will enthusiastically tell us the plans for the **Desford Heritage Festival 2022**. It will be good!

March 15th 7.30pm at DFC

Lost Windmills of Leicestershire *by Mark Temple*

May 17th 7.30pm at DFC

Plague, Pestilence & the Black Death in Leicester *by Steve Baker*

See you at the AGM. Minutes, agenda etc. will follow.