

DESFORD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March 2015



Welcome to Spring

How good it is to see the emergence of spring flowers and longer, brighter days after the gloom of winter.

We can look forward to our new programme of talks and visits as outlined at the AGM. It was good to see many of you there and we were delighted to welcome some new members. It is not too late to encourage others to join. If you did not come to the AGM please pay your subscription at the next meeting. The subscription remains the same as last year, £12.

We no longer have a rota for refreshments. We are looking for volunteers. If you can help with refreshments please contact Gwyneth Reed on 823557. You do not need to commit to more than one meeting.

Your committee for 2015 is: Colin James - Chairman, Angela Thomas - Secretary, Bernard Grimshaw - Treasurer, Pat Crane, Gwyneth Reed, John Richards, Brian Ward, Steve Thorpe and Molly Marcus.

Visits

Anderton Lift and Nantwich – June 20th

At the March meeting please pay Brian Ward (Des. 823073) for the annual trip. Details were in the December newsletter. There are some places left if you have not signed up.



The Anderton Lift and surrounding area in 1972. Photo: *Huw Thomas*

The lift opened in 1875, allowing the transport of boats between the different levels of the River Weaver Navigation and the Trent and Mersey Canal. For over 100 years it facilitated the transport of

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many things, primarily coal, salt and pottery. By 1983 it was mostly used for leisure traffic, and closed when structural problems were found. In the 1990s, £7m was raised by a partnership of canal organisations and Heritage Lottery funding and it reopened, after restoration, in 2002. It is now mainly used for leisure traffic. It will be very interesting to see the restoration and regeneration of the surrounding areas and the visitor centre. The boat trip is not to be missed either!

Stoneywell – May 20th

Please sign up for the visit to **Stoneywell** at the March meeting. Entry is by timed ticket only and we have booked 20 places for 2pm.

Stoneywell, Ulverscroft (National Trust) was designed by Ernest Gimson (arts and crafts movement) for his brother Sydney in 1899.

Entrance is free for NT members. For non-members it is £9; unfortunately there is no group rate. We will be organising car sharing for those with no transport.

Further details at the meeting. If you cannot get to the meeting, and wish to book a place, please contact Angela Thomas, details below.

Next meeting March 17th

Earl Shilton to Waterloo

By Paul Seaton

7.30pm, Desford Free Church

200 year anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo – A talk tracing the history of 6 men from Earl Shilton who fought at the Battle of Waterloo 18th June 1815

Thursday April 23rd at 7.30pm Admission Free

The Astonishing Life of John Newton

A Slave, Slave Trader and an Abolitionist

A talk by Marylynn Rouse at Desford Free Church

Marylynn Rouse works for the John Newton Project. Her recent research has been on Newton's journal. She will outline the life of John Newton. He worked on slave trading ships and, after running into debt, ended up being treated as a slave himself in Africa. Later he became the captain of a slave ship but eventually he came to see that this trade was incompatible with the Christian faith to which he had been converted. He then played a crucial role in the early years of the abolitionist movement which finally led to the success of Wilberforce in the Abolition Bill of 1833. She will talk of Newton's work in the Midlands, where he became a priest and visited Leicestershire. *John Russell*

NB: This talk is arranged by the Free Church not DDLHS

Contact: Angela Thomas, 8 Oxford Road, Desford angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk 01455 822934

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May 2015



Many of you were present for **'Earl Shilton to Waterloo'**, an excellent talk by Paul Seaton. Paul told us of his family history research and his ancestors' links to the battle of Waterloo. Caroline Wessel has shared a photo of Paul and a family member in uniforms of the time.

On Sunday 14th June, 10.45am at St Simon and St Jude Church, Earl Shilton there is a service to remember and commemorate Earl Shilton's Waterloo heroes, followed by the unveiling of a monument in the nearby Hall Field. This will be in the shape of a gun carriage wheel and will be engraved with the names of Earl Shilton's Waterloo men: George, Samuel and Nathaniel Almey, Thomas and George Chapman, and Jacques Raven.

Paul has invited members of DDLHS to this unique event on the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. We hope some members from Desford will be able to attend.

The Desford Training R.S.3/4 Aircraft

The planned closure of Snibston Museum has prompted the committee to enquire what plans there are for the 'Desford Training Aircraft, R.S.3/4 built by Reid & Sigrist, which was stored at Snibston for some years. Leicestershire Museums' response was that the aircraft is currently on loan to a company based near Corby where it is being restored. The company hope it will be able to 'take to the skies again'. The Museums' Service has told us the plane remains part of their collections and they will keep us informed of the project's progress. Watch this space.



Next meeting 19th May

Stoneywell NT - a talk by Alan Tyler

Visits Update

Wed. 20th May - Stoneywell

1 place still available - contact Angela (tel.822934).

Sat. 20th June - Annual trip

Brian Ward needs your menu choices by 19th May - contact Brian (tel.823073) if you have not received the menu information.

Sun. 26th July afternoon - Kirby Muxloe Castle - an afternoon stroll

English Heritage members free. Adults £3.80, Concs. £3.40. Pay individually on the day. Lifts can be arranged. **Sign up at the May meeting** or contact Angela.

Sat. 15th August – Swannington Heritage Guided Walk by a member of the Trust

10.30am – noon. Guided walk **down** the railway incline and back along the main road looking at buildings and sites of interest.

Noon – 1.30pm. Robin Hood Pub for lunch.

1.30pm – 3.00pm. Guided walk around the Hough Mill site and Califat Spinney.

Come for the day, or morning or afternoon only. Cost £5, or £2.50 for half day. This is a donation to the Swannington Heritage Trust.

Children who can walk a reasonable distance are welcome (suggest over 8 years old).

Some ground will be rough underfoot - stout shoes required.

Lifts can be arranged. Further details later. **Sign up at the May meeting** or contact Pat (tel.823537).

Wed. 9th September – Eyam Hall NT and Eyam Village, Derbyshire

Coach trip – Leaving Desford 9.00am. and leaving Eyam 4.15pm. Cost £14 - £15 (to be confirmed).

Group visit to Eyam Hall and gardens NT – a small Jacobean Manor. Built 6 years after the plague devastated the village. NT members free, £6.30 non-members.

There is a craft centre within the grounds of Eyam Hall with The Buttery Café (these are not NT). There are other places to eat in the village - or bring a picnic!

Free time to explore the village. Some options are:

- Visit Eyam Museum and learn about the plague – entrance fee £2.00, or
- go on a guided walk of the village with an NT volunteer - cost £5 per person (need to sign up), or
- explore the village at your own pace.

Limited to 28 people (small coach). **Sign up at the May meeting** or contact Angela.

Contact: Angela Thomas, secretary, angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk Tel.822934

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September 2015

Annual Visit : Anderton Boat Lift and Nantwich : 20th June

After a pleasant journey an overcast sky greeted us at the Anderton boat lift visitor centre and coffee shop. We had refreshments and then we were given an overview of the boat lift history, its several incarnations and its more recent resurrection. An interesting, well-delivered talk was given by the husband of a lady who had been instrumental in raising significant funds for its restoration to its present state of full hydraulic operation.

Its purpose was to raise and lower narrow boats some 50 feet from the Weaver Navigation to the Trent and Mersey canal. The picture below shows the river to the left, the lift and on the extreme right the edge of the visitor centre, museum and cafe.



We walked to our boat moored on the river. We could get a close-up view of the structure and mechanism, which are impressive to say the least and well justify the lift's description as one of the seven wonders of the British canal network. The boats are contained in giant tanks or caissons fitted with watertight doors at each end. The caissons are raised and lowered by huge hydraulic rams. The original rams operated with water which slowly became contaminated with salt from the salt mines which dissolved in the river Weaver causing the rams to corrode damage the seals and causing major leakage. The modern replacement rams (3 feet in diameter and 59 feet long) now work in oil and have modern ceramic coating.



A short cruise up the River Weaver was accompanied by a commentary (see image to the right) on the river, the salt workings and views of Nantwich. Salt has been mined from pre-Roman times and led to the build-up of a large local chemical industry (see the background to the first image above).



On our return we entered the lift and experienced its operation as we were slowly raised up to the level of the Trent and Mersey canal. The image to the left shows the view as we exited and the lift gates. This type of gate is known as a guillotine gate and is much used on some canals in Lincolnshire.

Our coach then took us to Nantwich town centre.

After a look around the town's small but excellent museum we were given a guided tour and talk about some of the towns-people and many fine buildings, enjoyed even more as the sun had come out. Part-way through we adjourned to a cafe and enjoyed excellent coffee in front of one of Nantwich's three Grade I listed buildings, the Crown Hotel, whose timbered facade is shown below. A bout of shopping followed in some of the many good small shops which are fast disappearing in many larger towns.

We then wended our way back to the Crown Hotel for an excellent evening meal. A timely and pleasant journey home with views of the Shropshire countryside bathed in evening sun brought to an end another very memorable day out, brilliantly organised as always.

Thank you Brian.

Steve Thorpe 20/8/15



Thanks to Steve for his thoughts on our visit to the Anderton lift and Nantwich.

Our other visits to **Stoneywell**, **Swannington Incline** and **Hough Mill** and most recently **Eyam Hall and village** have been enjoyed by many members and we enjoyed good weather. In July we should have visited **Kirby Muxloe Castle** following on from Peter Liddle's excellent talk on its building and history. Unfortunately it was a very wet Sunday afternoon and the decision was made to cancel the visit as there is little shelter at the site. We cannot re-schedule for this year as the castle closed on 1st September.

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Are you an ex-miner or do you know one?

We were recently contacted by researchers at Nottingham Trent University about the following project and would like to help by putting them in contact with ex-miners and if possible facilitating some interviews in the village. Look out for posters.

Pit Talk East Midlands is a British Academy funded project, established to record and conserve an endangered community language. Dr Natalie Braber from Nottingham Trent University leads the project, with assistance from PhD students Claire Ashmore from Sheffield Hallam University, and Suzy Harrison from Nottingham Trent University. Over the next year the project aims to examine the language of coal miners around the East Midlands to explore the similarities and differences between the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. Through interviews, we are conducting an innovative investigation of 'pit talk' in the East Midlands, engaging with the mining community to collect, record and analyse its unique and endangered language. If you are an ex-miner we need your help! Please email us at pittalkeastmidlands@gmail.com, or phone 0115 8483011.

You can contact them directly, but we would be interested to know if you have done so, or contact a committee member if you or someone you know would like to participate.

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Our congratulations to John Weston on completing his wing walk. What a way to celebrate your 90th birthday! John was raising money for Alzheimer's Society in memory of Jean, his late wife. Well done, John. Donations can be made via the web page <https://www.justgiving.com/John-Weston2>.

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**Next meeting
September 15th**

'But for These Things: Leicester and its People in WW2' by Vince Holyoak

Angela Thomas, secretary 01455 822934 angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk

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November 2015

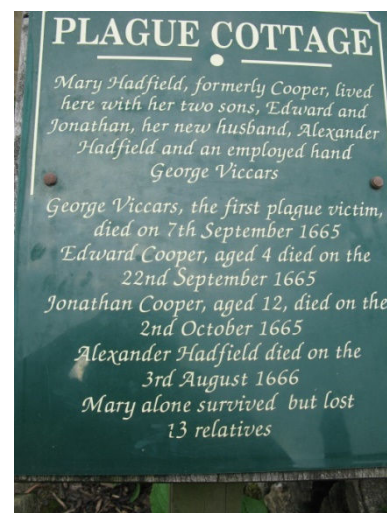
Our last newsletter of 2015. Your committee is busy arranging next year's programme of talks and visits and looking forward to the January AGM. If you would like to be more involved in the Society, help to arrange visits, have some 'fresh ideas' – **then we would welcome you on the committee; nomination forms will be with next newsletter.** *(Your ideas and suggestions are of course always welcome whether or not you are a committee member).*

September visit to Eyam

The village of Eyam in Derbyshire is written into the folklore of Britain. Most of us know that it was a 'plague village' and that valiant attempts were made by the community to keep the disease away from the rest of the country. Beyond those basic facts I confess I knew little more, so the chance to visit the village and learn what happened in more detail couldn't be missed!

The National Trust has established, with other organisations, a lively visitor centre in an old stable yard in the village. Besides a National Trust shop there are craft units selling textiles, woodwork and ceramics, and a very pleasant café. We were met by a National Trust volunteer who gave us a guided tour of some of the main places in the village that featured in the plague era. It was a salutary experience to witness at first hand some of the significant dwellings and hear the stories from that time. Some of the houses have plaques on their walls listing the names of those who died.

The outbreak started in 1665 and it is thought that the source of the disease was a damp flea-infested bundle of cloth that was sent from London to the local tailor. His assistant George Viccars hung out the cloth to dry and within a week he was dead! Over the next 14 months 260 more people were to pass away. It is estimated that a third of the villagers died during the outbreak. We were told some harrowing stories. Perhaps the most dramatic was that of Elizabeth Hancock who in eight days in August 1666 dragged, dug and then buried her husband John and six of her children in a field on the outskirts of Eyam. She survived, as did a number of other women. Apparently modern research suggests that some of the women may have had a genetic resistance to the disease.



Famously, two clergymen, William Mompesson and Thomas Stanley persuaded the villagers to take precautions to prevent the plague spreading from the village. A boundary was imposed and people were not allowed to leave or enter the community. Church services were held outside and people were buried in their own gardens. It is thought that this heroic stance prevented the illness spreading.

In the afternoon we visited Eyam Hall which is managed by The National Trust. Unlike other NT properties the building is leased rather than owned by the organisation. It was given as a wedding present in 1672 and has remained with the Wright family for eleven generations. Although the Wright family have moved out, it still has a pleasant lived-in feeling and with lovely gardens was well worth the visit.

I felt we had only scratched the surface of Eyam; it would be good to return and find out more.

David Marcus

A Desford resident who has a long and historical connection with Desford had a very special birthday

On 26th September 2015 Mrs Kathleen Taylor celebrated her 100th birthday in style, with a large and lively family gathering at The Blue Bell pub, where relatives came from all over the country to honour this great lady's achievement.

Mrs Taylor (nee Starbuck)'s family were for fifty years landlords of The Blue Bell public house in Desford, where she spent an idyllic rural childhood in the twenties. Her parents were highly respected and played a prominent part in village life. After marriage she lived in London for a while but, when her home was completely bombed out during WW2, she returned with her husband and young family to the Desford roots she loved so well and has been here ever since.

Almost twenty years ago DDLHS President Caroline Wessel spent many hours talking to Mrs Taylor in her own home, taking copious notes about her early years in Desford. Caroline then transcribed and sorted the material, gathered it into categories for different chapter topics, obtained copies of some of Mrs Taylor's old family photos and in 1996 published a book, jointly with Kathleen, entitled *A Desford Childhood: a publican's daughter remembers the twenties*.



The freshness and charm of the text, with its colourful stories of life in our village in the 1920s, invokes much nostalgia in people who remember those days and - for many who do not, especially the children of Desford - it paints a vivid panorama of a simple but joyful way of life that is now almost gone, but is to be much valued today.

Thank you, Mrs Taylor, for sharing these memories with the people of Desford, and congratulations on your special birthday.

Left: Mrs Taylor and a family member at her 100th birthday party.

Caroline Wessel

The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society, Programme 2015/16

All lectures are held at New Walk Museum on Thursdays and start at 7.30pm

26th Nov. 2015 - 160th AGM followed by **Enigma and Beyond**, John Alexander, Associated with National Museum of Computing, Bletchley.

10th Dec. 2015 - Toil and Trouble at Kirby Muxloe. The archaeology of Glenfield Park, John Thomas, University of Leicester.

14th January 2016 - The distinctiveness of mendicant communities in the Middle Ages, Dierdre O'Sullivan, University of Leicester.

4th February 2016 - Genetic approaches to the history of the British Isles, Prof. Mark Jobling, University of Leicester.

25th February 2016 - Members' Evening.

10th March 2016 – (W. Alan North Memorial Lecture) Herculaneum: past perfect, future conditional, Prof. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, University of Cambridge.

7th April 2016 - Romano-British mosaics of Leicestershire re-visited, Susan Tebby.

28th April 2016 - History of 'stopping places' used by Leicestershire travelling families of the 'horses and wagons' era, David Smith, Hon. Vice President LAHS.

12th May 2016 - Mary Sloane revisited: private viewing of the Mary Sloane exhibition, led by Simon Lake, Leicester Arts and Museum Service.

Our Society belongs to the LAHS. If you wish to attend a lecture free of charge please contact Angela Thomas, secretary, who holds the membership card.

Next meeting

Honest Men but Destitute: the Plight of Leicestershire's Framework Knitters

Jess Jenkins

Contact: Angela Thomas, secretary. 8 Oxford Road, Desford, LE9 9JN, 01455 822934, email: angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk

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December 2015



Wishing you all a Happy and Peaceful New Year

The AGM will be held on Tuesday 19th January at Desford Free Church at 19.30pm

followed by

**Leicester Forest – a learning experience
a talk by Dave Claricoates, Bosworth
Academy**

Want to know more about the map, how
and why it was produced?

Maybe learn something new about Desford
and Leicester Forest.



Enclosed with this newsletter are additional items for your attention.

a) AGM agenda b) AGM 2015 minutes c) Nomination paper e) Annual trip information and signing up form

At the AGM, a committee will be elected to serve the Society for the next year. Some members of the present committee have served for a number of years, and although willing to continue we would very much welcome some new people who would like to become involved in the running of the Society.

Committee members are responsible for arranging an interesting programme of speakers and visits, maintaining the archives, researching and producing material for display at events and overseeing the financial affairs of the Society. You do not have to be involved in all of the above, or have any special skills. You chose, in what area you wish to contribute.

What is important is enthusiasm, commitment, and a willingness to take the Society forward in promoting and recording Desford's heritage for the benefit of the community.

Please DO consider standing and return the nomination paper provided to;

Angela Thomas at 8 Oxford Road, Desford, by Friday 15th January.

Look forward to seeing you on the 19th January