



# Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter December 2022

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.

### Christmas Notes from the Chairman

The Society is still without a Secretary, and no one has inquired about taking on the role. We also have other vacancies on the committee. Angela and other committee members are sharing out the work pro tem, but this is not satisfactory long term. This and general membership issues, plus the change and growth in Desford since the society was founded, led the committee to try to look forward and make the growth an opportunity to look for ways to widen our appeal and thus increase membership.

The society has achieved a lot in its forty years: what about the next ten?

To recruit new members to ensure a flourishing Society in the future, we believe, means broadening our appeal: for example, occasional events to engage families and/or schools, perhaps starting a family history section, and establishing links with other local history/heritage societies, all building on our current activities, not replacing them. Good talks and historical trips and visits would remain at the core of the society's work, along with looking after the archives and promoting our activities through our new website [www.desfordheritage.org](http://www.desfordheritage.org) and social media.

But this does mean reaching new people and especially recruiting new members interested in working on such new activities, and as part of this approach, the committee suggested a re-branding would be very helpful, changing to a more modern and, we would hope, more broadly appealing name which would include "Heritage". This, we feel, would reflect the shared endeavour we all experienced during the Heritage Festival Weekend with other societies and groups, and appeal more to younger residents.

There will be a motion to the AGM asking for this name change as a first step in a multi-year plan: 2023 to be a year of continuing consolidation after COVID, and 2024 to be a year of outreach to younger generations. The new committee in 2023 will work to put ideas to all members for 2024 and beyond: your individual views will be sought, possibly by a survey.

Sorry about all the unseasonal but necessary organisational issues: what really matters is that I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!

Bernard

It has been a busy few months since our last news letter and our participation in the Heritage Festival. The transformation of The Village Hall into a museum was extremely successful and saw many visitors and lots of chats about Desford and District in the past. All this information kept in the archives built up over many years by the

## The Heritage Festival



Master & Under Warden

Photograph courtesy of Stephen Thorpe

On 3rd July, my wife Mary & I, together with Under Warden Matthew Ellis, were invited by Freeman Caroline Wessel (wife of PM Anthony Wessel) to attend the second day of the Desford Heritage Festival. There were several heritage zones, one of which was based on framework knitting, which has a strong history in Desford village.

Outside of an old knitters cottage, several artefacts relating to the industry were laid out together with a mock-up of William Lee's wife. This was because her constant clicking knitting needles had first encouraged him to develop the mechanical knitting machine.

I made a short speech to the gathered audience on the history of our company and the City of London Livery movement in general. This was followed by Matthew giving details of the origins of our Almshouses in Oadby and their connection with the Corah family. We were both very kindly presented with a pair of hand-knitted socks with our initials on.

After a tour of all the different zones in the village, we were given a very pleasant lunch in the Rectory gardens, after which we had the great pleasure of listening to the famous Desford Colliery Brass Band.

The Master

archivists. The frame work knitting as one of the village activities was also well represented. (Caroline will be talking about that in her contributions later)

Our first activity of the autumn was the visit by some of our members to the village of Whissendine on the 28<sup>th</sup> September. Angela has written a piece about it for those who were not able to go.

### **Whissendine Village Walk 28<sup>th</sup> September**

Our first visit post Covid saw 15 society members meet for a pleasant afternoon walk around Whissendine, Rutland. The older part of the village is on high land to the east and buildings are grouped around the church. Later buildings are in the west. The village is divided by the Whissendine Brook.



Many houses in the village pre 19<sup>th</sup> century were single story and built of stone. As bricks became cheaper due to industrialisation houses had another storey added built of brick. This cottage is a fine example.

The Red House was a Brewery from the 1870s until 1893. It is now a private house. It would have been an imposing building, but less so when the top story was removed, and it was converted to a hunting box; fox hunting was very popular and provided employment. Unlike Desford, there is no conservation area. Old buildings, some Grade II are interspersed with more modern ones.



A highlight of the afternoon was Whissendine windmill, where we met Nigel Moon, the miller. He was very pleased to talk to us. He bought the mill in 1995. It had last worked in April 1922, but was damaged in a gale and not repaired. Nigel has spent many years repairing the mill and has replaced the top and sails. It finally worked by wind power in 2009. Nigel produces many types of flour including spelt, barley, rye as well as bread flour. (Angela and Huw have used it in their bread maker for many years)

The windmill was working, although not by wind power. Those who wanted to were allowed to climb to the top of the windmill up steep well worn stairs and ladders and emerged later white with flour! No health and safety instructions!

Nigel is a well known figure in the world of windmills and very keen to promote their conservation.

We finished our village stroll in the middle of the village at The White Lion pub for an excellent meal.

Many thanks to Pat Crane for organising our visit and telling us

some of the village history. *Photos: Huw Thomas*



Our last two talks were a bit of a double act.

The September talk about "The Struggle for Women's Suffrage in Leicestershire" given by Jess Jenkins with readings from various sources undertaken by her husband and our talk in November about "The Base Hospital in Leicester 1914 - 1918" given by Robin Jenkins with Jess becoming the reader this time; were both extremely informative and enjoyable. Few realised how involved Leicestershire was on both occasions and the accompanying illustrations added greatly to the two talks.



**And** of course we must remember that the talk in November was also the celebration of 40 Years of the Desford and District Local History Society. Over 50 people ate cake with our logo on top and joined in a celebratory bubbly drink of Nozecco.



Our Chair, Caroline, cut our large cake and blew out the candles.

It was a most pleasant social occasion.

Thank you to all who were able to attend.





Finally at the end of November Angela, Jane and Linda put up the Christmas tree.  
Can you guess the film?  
Find out if you were right at our next meeting

**AGM 2023. January 17<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm at the Free Church.**  
More information to follow.....

If you have not looked already check out our web page and let us know what you would like to see on there. We have lots more photos and other information in our archives.

<https://www.desfordheritage.org>

and of course, on Facebook [Desford Heritage Leicestershire UK | Desford | Facebook](#)



## Caroline and Anthony at Plaisterers' Hall

As most of us know, in the nineteenth century one of the principal occupations in Desford was framework knitting and at the recent Heritage Festival weekend the former Frame Work Knitters cottages in Cottage Lane were decorated appropriately.



On that occasion the Master of the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters was our Guest of Honour and he recently gave a big dinner in the City of London, attended by the Lord Mayor. It was held at the splendid livery company Plaisterers' Hall and Anthony and Caroline Wessel were invited as guests of the Company, as this year marks Anthony's 50th year as a liveryman. He was Master of the FWK in 1993, the seventh member of his family to do so, as he is a Corah through his grandmother.



So it was a case of looking out all that posh gear - Anthony's tails had belonged to his grandfather and his Past Master's badge was his father's before being passed on to him. All a bit different from our usual gardening clothes! But it was a glamorous and most memorable evening, consuming a delicious dinner, meeting up with old FWK friends and listening to excellent speeches.

The whole of the next section is from Caroline with an interesting article about the Faire family mentioned in the talk in November

## The Faire Family - John Edward (1843-1929); Sir Samuel (1850-1930); Sir Arthur William (1854-1933); Lady Sarah (1854-1925)

[three oval photos from Pike]

From the start of the proposal for a University College in Leicester the Faire family was involved. Although John and Samuel ran a large and prosperous boot and shoe accessories business with branch factories that took them all over the world, and supported a great number of local causes, they still found the time and energy to contribute to the new College, both financially and as Council and committee members. They both lived in imposing residences, John at Evington Hall and Samuel at Glenfield Frith Hall, but the three brothers' philanthropy was at grass roots level,



serving their home town - the magistracy, church, adult education, disadvantaged children, health, and in particular the Temperance Movement - as their father had come to Leicester specifically to support the Temperance

work of Thomas Cook, the Leicester travel agent pioneer.

*Glenfield Frith Hall*

**John** went into his father's factory aged 12 years, starting work at 6 am and working a ten-hour day. He rose to become senior partner and later Chairman of Faire Bros. & Co. and was remembered as a kindly and just employer. By 1917 the firm, that made and supplied shoe laces, elastic webbing and small wares for the shoe trade, had seven factories and would become the largest business of its type in the world. John Faire was a magistrate, High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1921 and served on the Leicester Prison committee. He was also Chairman of the Leicester Provident Dispensary, that provided medicines for working people, which by 1903 had 13 local branches, serving over 48,000 members. The same year saw the opening of Leicester's Provident Dispensary Hospital that was later renamed the John Faire Hospital. John generously donated £5,000 (£60,000 in 2017) to the University College and included a bequest to it in his will.

**Sir Samuel** was a borough and county Magistrate, President of the Leicestershire Humane Society, and of the Private Fire Brigades' Association, the Ragged School Mission and the county's School Swimming Association; also a representative of the Shipwrecked Fishermen Benevolent Society and Treasurer of Leicester Boy's Club. As early as 1919 he was on the Finance sub-committee that was planning the new University College's funding and in due course



became a driving force as the Finance Committee Chairman. He also served on the College Council, was Vice-President of its Court of Governors, and in 1928 attended the College Officers' Conference. He donated £5,000 to the early appeal, made contributions for the rock garden, the purchase of a telescope and gave a donation to the Scholarship Fund. He was one of nine University College trustees appointed by Fielding Johnson, whose names are listed on a plaque that still today hangs at the entrance to the Fielding Johnson Building. In 1905 Sir Samuel was



knighted 'for his social and industrial services to the City of Leicester'; he was High Sheriff of the county in 1919; and Lieut-Colonel of the Leicestershire Volunteer Reserve. Both John and Samuel made further generous gifts, such as £1,000 each, during the 1920s.

*Sir Samuel cartoon in the Leicester Mail*

Samuel's wife, **Lady Sarah**, sister of James Pickard, another early University benefactor, also gave a donation to the new College and was on its Court of Governors (1922-1925). She played a significant part in the large-scale week-long University Bazaar of 1922, serving on its ladies committee and running a stall with her daughters, while her husband and the John Faires also took part.

[PHOTO of Lady Sarah from Bazaar prog p.8]

**Sir Arthur** was a director of the Leicester boot and shoe manufacturers, Smith Faire & Ltd. He was a Magistrate, Treasurer of Leicester Working Men's College, Chairman of the Leicester Home for Boys (Waifs and Strays Society) and on its London executive; was Vice-President of St John's Ambulance Association; Churchwarden at St James the Greater; Vice-President of the local Church of England Temperance Society (and on its London Council) and Hon. Secretary of the Leicester branch of the Royal Lifeboat Institution. Arthur was particularly closely involved with Vaughan College in its early days, supporting it from 1882, becoming its Treasurer from 1890-1927 and then Chairman of Governors when its Management Committee agreed to hand Vaughan College over to the University of Leicester. Always passionate about education, Arthur was a member of the Scheme of the Board of Education set up in 1907 and in his will he left £1,000 worth of shares to finance an adult scholarship for Vaughan College students, to enable them to progress to attend the University itself.

*Portrait of Sir Arthur Faire that used to hang in Reception at Vaughan College (courtesy Dr Lucy Faire)*



During WW1 the Faire Bros. firm received a contract to provide one million pairs of braces for the Army, taking a large share of that specialized market away from German manufacturers. However the creation of the new University College as a Memorial to those who fell in WW1 must have been particularly poignant and meaningful to the Faire family, for both Samuel and Arthur lost sons in the conflict. Samuel's only son, Sergeant Clifford Storer Faire (1883-1916), was killed in action at the Battle of the Somme on 15 September 1916, aged 33 years, whilst serving with the New Zealand Infantry. He had moved to live there some years earlier (perhaps



visiting a Faire Bros. NZ branch factory?) and had a New Zealander wife and child. Clifford was awarded the British and Victory war medals and had been recommended for a commission.

Captain Reginald Faire (1891-1915), Arthur's son, was killed during the Battle of Hohenzollern in October 1915, an onslaught that took a heavy toll on the 4th Batt. Leicestershire Regiment, when all their officers were killed and 480 other ranks were killed or wounded. Reginald was aged 24 and the date of his death was given as 11-13 October, suggesting an unidentified ending.

#### *Capt. Reginald Faire*

For the duration of the war Arthur Faire organised the motor transport of wounded soldiers arriving at Leicester station to the 5th Northern Hospital - the future site of the University. Despite the dire shortage of ambulances, through his energies he acquired a fleet of nineteen and in addition persuaded some well-to-do Leicester businessmen to



add their chauffeur-driven cars to the hospital fleet. Just two months after his son's death, Arthur organised a 'thank you' tea party and concert at De Montfort Hall for 600 people. Arthur received a CBE for his WW1 ambulance services and in 1927 was knighted 'for political and public services in Leicestershire'. His brother, John Faire, had no children but he paid for the land purchase and erection of Evington war memorial.

*Wounded soldiers at Leicester station*

No doubt the Faire family felt that their various contributions to the University College - justly founded as a war memorial - served also as a personal memorial for themselves.

Many thanks to Dr Lucy Faire for her family information and her enthusiasm

#### **Key Sources**

Faire private family archives

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Wessel, Caroline (2018) *Beaumanor War & Peace*

University College Annual Reports and early years Scrap Books

Royal Leicestershire Regiment archives

*London Gazette* January 1928

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*Leicester Mail* 5 May 1923

*Melton Mowbray Times* 6 Oct 1916

*Leicester Journal* 17 Dec 1915



# Desford and District Local History Society

## Newsletter Summer 2022

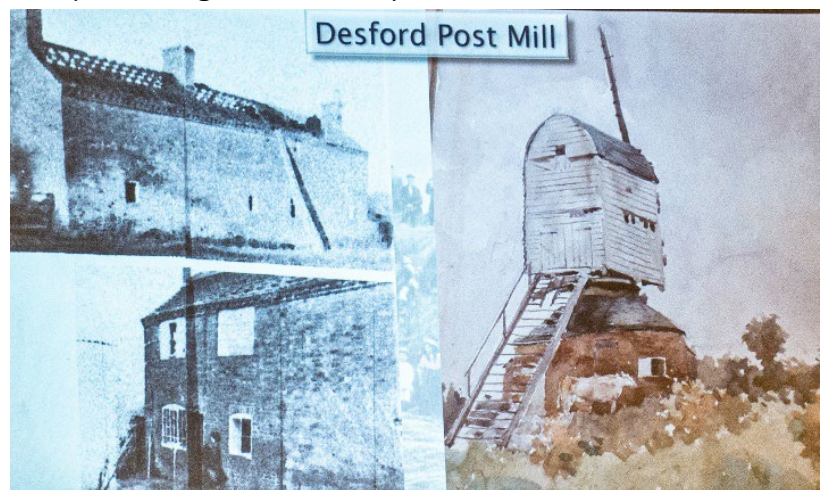


### FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.

Our amazing archival team augmented by some helpers have produced a splendid display for the Desford Museum pop-up for Heritage Weekend at the village hall: (Miners' Institute!). Tea and biscuits etc. from Botcheston W.I.  
So please come and visit us and see what your village is made of! (*Bernard Grimshaw*)

In May and June, we returned to our monthly meetings in the Chapel, which were well attended at both sessions. It was so good to get back to 'a sort of normality'.

Our first meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> March was a talk given by Mark Temple titled "Vanishing Windmills of Leicestershire". It turned out to be an engrossing talk. We learnt that in 1835 there were 158 working windmills in Leicestershire, though now there are only 5 in working order. The windmills varied in construction.



Our Second talk "Plague, Pestilence and the Black Death in Leicestershire" was equally fascinating, given by Steve Baker on the 17<sup>th</sup> May with slides and maps of the directed field work, at a site about half a mile north of the city centre. During the dig evidence was collected about mass burials between the years 1040 - 1080. Of



the 263 burials there were 45 of 5-10 people per grave and 4 were over 10. There was no evidence of violence, so death was more an indication of a major catastrophe; cause unknown. One interesting fact arose from examination of the skeletons about ethnicity, which was that African, Asian, and European were all present. References in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles' state that the 11<sup>th</sup> century suffered both famine and pestilence. (*Molly Marcus*)

(Thanks to Huw Thomas for his photographs)

## **Talks for the remainder of 2022**

July 19<sup>th</sup>: The Archaeology of Board Games by Peter Liddle

September 20<sup>th</sup>: Burning Passions: The Struggle for Women's Suffrage in Leicestershire by Jess Jenkins

November 15<sup>th</sup>: The Base Hospital (5<sup>th</sup> Northern General Hospital) in Leicester 1914 - 18 by Robin Jenkins

## **Desford History Society takes over the Village Hall to become Desford Museum for the festival weekend!**

Want to know what this machine is and its significance in the story of Desford?



Come and see a real machine at the museum and learn more.



See the model of the Comet engine.  
Why is it here?

Using material from our archives we are delighted to be able to share some of our history with an exhibition of Desford through time, from Romans (yes, we have been here that long) to the present day.

Did you know Desford had a coal mine and an airfield? Where were they?

Find out this and much, much more...

The society would like to find out about your stories and memories of the village to add to our archives. They could provide the basis for some future research.

Write them down and place them in the **red post box** you will see at the museum