

Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter Spring 2020



Our AGM was extremely successful and well attended. Caroline Wessel gave a humorous and interesting overview of the year followed by addresses from Angela, (On behalf of our Chair, Bernard who was not able to attend due to a hip operation), as well as her own feed-back about visits. Dennis Casson also reported back as our Treasurer. Committee members were re-elected for another year.

After most enjoyable refreshments the rest of the AGM featured a talk by Kate Twitchin which focussed on the origins of The Heritage Trail project and the vision for its implementation in the village. She concentrated on the logistical and financial hurdles that have to be overcome in order to turn the vision into a reality. There was an update on where we are currently with each of these and then a discussion of the "next steps" which fundamentally means procuring further financial input, alongside the continual research to aid the text of each information board, which will be placed at key points along the trail. Part of the fund raising are the Desford Trail Walks. Her address concluded with two references to chance encounters during the research process that have yielded further evidence on the history of The Red Lion - specifically at the time of the 1908 fire - and the life of Edward B. Yarnall who fell foul of breach of promise law in 1898 following a dalliance with the visiting Emily Patience Smith. The latter caused great amusement when members of the audience were asked to participate in the telling of the tale.



*Red Lion before and after
the fire of 1908*

For those interested

Future Heritage Trail Walks

Mon 30th March 6pm

Mon 20th April 10am

Tues 28th April 6pm

Mon 11th May 10am

Thurs 4th June 10am

Mon 15th June 6pm

Weds 8th July 10am

Thurs 10th Sept 6pm

Tues 29th Sept 6pm

Walks start at the library with coffee and a short introduction. They take about 2 hours.

To book your place, call 823537 or e-mail patcrane33@gmail.com

A suggested donation of £5 per person will be put towards the further development of the Heritage Trail

(Desford in Bloom and Desford & District Local History Society)



Continuing the Alphabetical Card Index compiled by Betty Dickson in the 1950s (Supplied by Caroline Wessel)

Crop Returns for Desford 1801

These were listed in acreage, as follows:-

Wheat 74, Rye 0, Barley 150, Oats 106, Potatoes 5, Peas 3, Beans 0, Turnips 60, Total arable of 398 acres. In 1845 there were 1,400 acres under grass and 549 acres under crop. (There are approx. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres in one hectare).

Curfew

The Curfew Bell was rung every evening at Desford from Michaelmas (September 29) to Lady Day (March 24) for 800 years. Mr Arthur Dilks, grandfather of Amos Dilks, the builder, was the last known person to ring the Bell at Desford. The Norman law which ordered 'lights out' when the bell was rung ended the worker's day. So stringent was the enforcement of this law that not a glimmer of light must be seen. It was of course, a fire precaution. To extinguish the dying fire on the hearth, the Curfew (French: couvre feu) was used, which had a metal cover, usually brass or copper, with a wooden handle.

Continuing Desford Personalities of the past (from Caroline Wessel)

Mrs Taylor was the daughter of Walter Starbuck who was landlord of Desford's Blue Bell pub for fifty years. Her parents were highly respected and played a prominent part in village life. According to Kathleen, she spent an idyllic rural childhood in Desford during the 1920s and in



1996 - following many hours of conversation - Caroline Wessel published *A Desford Childhood: a publican's daughter remembers the twenties*. Mrs Taylor had the most extra- ordinarily detailed memories of those times seventy years earlier, and the chapters of the book include stories about the Blue Bell, her family, school days, friends, neighbours and leisure time. Valuable village

history is documented in the chapters on jitties, shops, calendar feasts and customs and the narrative includes some of Kathleen's sad experiences.

The Starbuck family (Mrs Taylor standing, centre)

Mrs Taylor remembers that at the pub "there were three bars, each one with its own particular character, atmosphere and smell and which catered for different kinds of people". The Tap Room "was where ordinary men would drink. Their behaviour was quite rough; they would swear, drink strong beer and spit into special spittoons".



The Snug "was a small and select room where a man would bring his wife for a smart evening out. There was a handbell on the table and customers would ring this for someone to come and serve them. On Sundays the churchwardens would use the Snug for a drink, after the morning service. The Smoke Room was a lounge bar with comfortable easy chairs where the Starbuck family gathered around the lovely big table for their Sunday tea. It was also a room used for parties and celebrations by members of the village. There were stables for about six horses at the back of the Blue Bell near to the churchyard. Here people would leave their horses and traps, so they could get the train to Leicester from Desford station".

After marriage Kathleen lived in London for a while, but when her home was completely bombed out during WW2 she returned with her young family to Desford. As an octogenarian, she summarised "I have done many things in my life - had lunch at The White House in Washington DC, sailed down the River Hudson in New York and been to the ballet in Russia. I have seen the wonders of Athens, Pompeii, Venice and the EU HQ in Brussels, have travelled to Denmark and France, been on the QEII, to an Investiture and visited the State Rooms of Buckingham Palace. I have even danced with Cliff Richard at our godson's marriage to the singer's sister ... But none of these things can ever take away the joys of my childhood, or the love of my parents."

A Desford Childhood (1996) by Caroline Wessel is now out of print

STOP PRESS

A Message from Bernard

Just to thank you all for your good wishes, by card, email or phone: they were a real morale booster for both of us. All went well and I am doing exercises and walking about.

What is harder, is getting back to concentrating: only today have I been able to compose something on the laptop as opposed to just googling stuff. Reading anything longer than a newspaper article is still hard work, so all the books for my convalescence remain as yet unopened!!!

Bernard.

Talk on Tuesday March 17th 2020

Leicester City, County & Rutland at Risk War Memorials Project

Given by Denis Kenyon

Annual Visit 2020

Ely on Wednesday 10th June.



Ely Cathedral - 'The Ship of the Fens'

Included, will be entrance to the magnificent cathedral with a guided tour. There will be an optional guided walk of the town. Other attractions to visit are, Oliver Cromwell's House and the riverside area. You might even have time for a boat trip.

As usual we will finish with an evening meal at a venue yet to be decided.

Please sign up for this at our March 17th talk. No money required yet!

Organisers: Angela and Huw Thomas,

If you cannot come to the meeting, but wish to sign up, email Angela:

angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk or ring 01455 822934

Desford and District Local History Society

Newsletter - Special Covid-19 Edition

May 8th 2020



Strict Baptist Graveyard, Sunday 3rd May, our walk for the day.

The apple trees have blossom, but it will be a few years before there is a good crop of apples for all to enjoy!

A very warm hello to all our members. We hope you and your families are keeping well in these extraordinary times. Who would have thought at our last meeting, the AGM in January, that we would be unable to meet family, friends and have to observe 'social distancing' - 2 metres apart!

Most of you are 'elderly, active, retired' and are so used to being able to meet at village groups, such as 'coffee and chat', 'knit and natter', Loving Hands and working on the Desford tapestry. Member, Janet O'Donovan has organised the sewers to make 'scrubs' for the NHS. Laundry bags and headbands have also been made, for which the NHS are grateful. Our gardens are benefiting from the extra time we have.

I only have room to mention a few of the many community groups that make Desford such a good place to live, especially during these challenging times. Where would we be without Desford in Bloom keeping the village looking cheerful. The plant tubs are really blooming!

Many of us are missing being able to see our grandchildren, but thanks to modern technology, we can see and hear them. Lynda Grimshaw, told how she read a bedtime story to her 6 year old granddaughter in Wellesbourne, which was lovely. Let's hope we can give our grandchildren a hug soon.

The history society committee send you our very best wishes. Do take care and stay safe.

Important

Due to the uncertainty of knowing how long 'social distancing' will have to continue and taking account of the age of the majority of our members we feel many would be reluctant to attend meetings for the remainder of this year. Therefore, the committee has taken the decision to cancel all talks and planned visits for the rest of 2020.

We hope to commence 2021 with the AGM and a social gathering.

Please be assured that your subscription will be carried forward to 2021.

Desford History Archives

Covid-19 has inspired Caroline Wessel to collect material for a booklet of Desford's responses to the virus. This will form an important part of our archives. The response of the local shops, schools and churches, doctor's surgery, pharmacy, dentist, Desford Support group, and other voluntary groups, are all important for the village history. We would like many pictures (please forward any you would like to share.) If you would like to share your thoughts/feelings in writing that would be welcomed.

Caroline has been writing limericks every day for her family: Below is one written for her grandchildren. Caroline has requested that members 'seek out any children or teenagers they know of in Desford, who might tell them about their own Corona experiences, and - most significantly - how they feel about it and how they think it will affect their future lives.'

The world has closed down with Covid Nineteen,
So grandchildren, dear, write down what you've seen.
For when you are old,
As HISTORY 'twill be told.
Did the world change then from what it had been?

Many of Caroline's limericks have been written with the NHS in mind as her daughter, Lucinda is a matron at the Barnet Hospital site of the Royal Free Hospital and working very hard throughout the Covid-19 crisis.

The Royal Free Hospital features in two 'Hospital' programmes on Mon. 11th and Tues 12th on BBC2 . Lucinda gave some of the limericks to the production team.

Clap your hands with all your might;
Bang, shout, sing - but be "distant right
Young and old do it;
We'll help get them through it;
CLAP the NHS - 'cost it's THURSDAY NIGHT



NHS clap on Cottage Lane (Photo: Steve Thorpe)

In villages like Desford, Leics,
The people are sorting this mess,
Helping hands at each door
They help ever more,
God bless you, friends, for saying "Yes!"



Seen on St. Martins Drive



Seen on Oak Road

The discharge of one patient more,
And a *special* man came through the door.
The staff clapped and cheered,
Had a pop star appeared?
No, 'twas a Covid chap aged ninety-four.

A Domino pizza or cup cake,
Home made soup for the night staff to uptake.
Free hand cream as well
Where's this posh hotel?
It's the gifts that the Barnet shops make.

*(the local newsagent sends in biros, as those
used in Corona wards have to be destroyed
each time they are used; a young girl gets up
in the middle of the night to then work non-
stop making visors for PPE; a local lady has
made Lavender bags for all the nurses, to
help them sleep better)*

Our family's all in isolation,
A time of boredom, frustration;
Gardening, sewing and piano,
Then just one more marshmallow ...
To aid Buddhist deep meditation.

No Olympic Games, nor Wimbledon;
No TV sports, no summer fun.
As Corona keeps winning
Nurse, keep the ball spinning,
For the only match that must be won.

There's now only two beds to let,
And the needs have not nearly been met,
But Nurse Wessel says "Come,
Jump in MY bed, for fun,"
So our Bed List can always be met.

*(Lucinda is in charge of the patient Bed Rota;
they have to meet thrice daily)*

A little girl whose hood was red
Found a Corona wolf in Granny's bed.
He'd tried to eat Gran,
But Royal SAS ran
To strike him down - "BANG!" - on the head.

*(SAS = Surgery and Associated Services at
the Royal Free Hospital)*

Nurses, carers, doctors, cleaners,
Physios, cooks and in-betweeners,
The Barnet army will fight
All day and through the night,
To shoot down Corona in all arenas.

The Incident Room at Royal Free
Is always hard-pressed, as you see.
A nurse was evicted
'Cos she's Covid restricted,
So they found her a hotel room for free.

*(her landlord had evicted her because she
was working in a hospital Corona ward!)*

A Care Pack from Barnet is flown,
To those stuck at home, all alone.
Pasta and jam,
LOO PAPER, tinned ham;
In this gift seeds of LOVE are deep sown.

*(Care packages are sent to staff isolating at
home and Covid patients recently
discharged)*

At least it's Boris, not Trump we've got.
Bojo is sane compared with that CLOT!
"With Dettol infect,
Then me re-elect,
If a few more folk die, I don't care a jot"

**Many thanks to Caroline for allowing
us to use her limericks.**

Please forward any contributions you have
for the Desford Booklet to
Angela Thomas:
Email: angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk

Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter Special Edition 2020



Dear All,

It is such a long time since a newsletter was circulated. Everyone on the History Society Committee decided that we need to keep in contact until the time comes when we can all safely meet together. Various people have written articles which we hope will still keep our History Society alive and interesting. (Molly)

A message from Bernard

Fellow members: by the time you receive this newsletter, who knows where we will be with this wretched virus: what is certain, sadly, is that our AGM in January cannot go ahead whatever the level of lockdown Desford is in by then. So, whatever solution to this problem your committee suggests is going to need approval from yourselves as it will definitely be unconstitutional!

We did look at the possibility of a Zoom meeting, but preferred the option of postponing the AGM to next June, 2021. All the existing committee members and officers are willing to continue on that basis, and it seemed a bit artificial to go through the motions of calling for new volunteers when nobody knows what freedom there will be to have meetings and activities. A summary of our current financial position is part of this newsletter, and having regard to the balances we have built up and the likely lack of activity for at least part of next year, your committee recommend that no subscription be levied for 2021 unless a future AGM decides differently, and that all existing memberships be extended until the next AGM.

Your committee are going to look at ways of keeping up interest in local history: such things as zoom presentations, newsletters with articles, individual/small group visits with reports to the society via email or in said newsletters, occasional quizzes and anything we can glean from other societies.

At this present moment, what we would value most is some ideas from yourselves: what have other groups you know about done? What would interest you? Our President, Caroline, has written something for this newsletter: can any of you submit something for future ones? Anyone got any photographs of sites/buildings/people from the past that Molly could publish in a newsletter?

And, even more relevant for future historians: have you done anything or has Covid19 affected you in a way that could be worth recording for posterity (and for a possible future newsletter)?

So: to sum up this formal part of the newsletter: could you please email me or our Secretary, Angela and tell us whether you support:

1. postponing our AGM until June 2021, or earlier if circumstances permit, with the existing committee members' and officers staying in post and
2. not levying a subscription for 2021 unless a future AGM decides otherwise.

grimshawmfc@gmail.com or angelthom1948@hotmail.co.uk

Also, if you have any suggestions for things to do during whatever restrictions are in force next year, please let us know.

After all that, it is hard to look forward, even to Christmas, with a great deal of positivity. The thoughts and prayers of your committee are with any member or those close to them, affected by Covid19: be it, sadly, condolences, or positive good wishes for full recovery. To everyone, we wish you a Happy Christmas and the hope that 2021 will truly see the pandemic quelled and the road back to whatever the new normality will be.



Treasurer's Financial Report from Dennis



Treasurer's Report

Current A/C on 4/10/20 = £617.11

Community Savings A/C on 17/10/20 = £795.12

Expenditure

The archivists are continuing their activities at a social distance.

Archive and administration spend = £51.90

The society has continued to support county history groups with annual subscriptions namely:
Leicestershire and Rutland Heritage Forum = £30

Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society = £25

Our secretary emails links to news items from these groups.

There will be a full record of the accounts in January 2021.

Your committee are proposing that there will be no request for subscriptions for 2021.
Hopefully we will be able to safely plan for some meetings later in 2021,

Bernard has sent another contribution with his own thoughts about the Desford Neighbourhood Plan.

DESORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

"Tomorrow's History being made Today?"

Five years ago, Desford Parish Council called for volunteers to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan to send to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council so they could arrange a Referendum for parishioners to decide if it was what they wanted to guide the Town Planning future of the parish.

At last, we have got there! The final version as modified by an Independent Examiner and eventually agreed by the parish and the borough council is on both Councils' websites: all the detailed supporting appendices etc. are on the parish website.

This "Referendum Version" is for us all to adopt or reject! But, because of COVID regulations, we cannot even think about a referendum date before May 2021.

So what is DPC asking us all to accept as an important and significant guide to planning and improving the parish in the interim, and which they hope you will adopt permanently by voting "YES" in the eventual referendum?

Let's start with Housing development: this is probably the big area of concern and controversy for most parishioners, but there is a lot more good stuff in the plan, which I will come to later. Generally, on housing, the Borough planning department was being pressured by the government to get as much housing as possible built, regardless of the Borough's Local Plan which required no new development in Desford before 2026, when a new local plan should be in force. That pressure was passed down to DPC, who suggested the Barns Way development. HBBC Planners wanted to approve the Peckleton Lane (land to the East) development, but, thanks to our 3 ward councillors, the application was refused. Sadly, with little positive help from HBBC planners, DPC's case was rather brusquely dismissed on appeal. (Just an observation: despite all the claims of urgent need at the inquiry, nothing at all has happened on-site at Peckleton Lane!)

Borough Planners made it pretty clear they were going to approve the Davidsons and Jelsons proposals to the west of the village, but DPC fought on and the Independent Examiner of the Neighbourhood Plan agreed to the extent that those 2 sites must wait and be considered during the borough wide Local Plan review. This gives the parish a chance to argue for a fair distribution of housing throughout the borough and not a continuation of the "Dump it on Desford" strategy to get HBBC planners out of a hole on their 5-year land supply numbers.

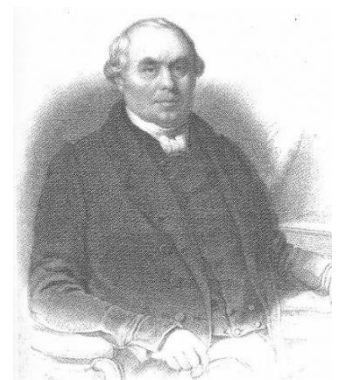
Otherwise, there are provisions to get high quality sustainable development with designs compatible with their surroundings and to secure affordable housing.

The environment, open spaces and amenities in the parish are protected and there are ideas to improve them. Matters such as renewable energy are considered as is the future traffic through and in the village: this last seems pretty intractable and DPC believes should be a real constraint on future village expansion: we all need to support DPC when this comes up in the Borough plan review. I will give more detail on the other sections of the plan in future newsletters.

Now for a contribution from Pat about the Strict Baptist Chapel Graveyard

The Gadsby Connection

William Gadsby became well known in the Hinckley region in the late 18th century as a leader of the Strict Baptists. They had a chapel in Hinckley and Gadsby would preach in Hinckley in the morning and walk to Desford to preach in the afternoon. In 1800 a chapel was built on High Street in



Desford, a plain building, with uncomfortable benches seating 129. There were 18 members when the chapel first opened. Gadsby's pulpit was recently tracked down in Luton and has been donated to Hinckley Museum.



The following advertisement appeared in the Leicester Journal in July 1800

'Desford Baptist Chapel will be opened for divine service on Wednesday, the 30th July 1800; at which time Rev. Mr. Gadsby will be ordained. Rev. Mr Aston, Chester; Rev. Mr Vorley, Northampton; Rev. Mr Hall, Irthlingborough are expected to engage. Service begins at half-past ten o'clock.'

People would have travelled from Leicester and surrounding villages for the ordination. Gadsby moved to Manchester in 1805 where his fervent preaching earned him the nickname "The Apostle of the North." The Chapel went into disuse and disrepair around 1900 and was eventually pulled down, but the graveyard remains. It is now owned by the Parish Council, although some members will remember a time when it was almost lost into private ownership.



Were you part of that protest? Over the last two years, a group of volunteers have worked to enhance the graveyard as a community garden. Seats have been installed, apple trees and various plants to create a peaceful place to sit. This autumn a small circle of wildflowers will be installed as our aim is also to be mindful of bees and insects. At present the graveyard is entered by two rather steep steps, but hopefully next year will see an



improvement made to the access.

Understandably, we will need an archaeological investigation before this can be done. We also anticipate a blue connection to William interpretation boards Heritage Trail.



plaque to mark the Gadsby, and one of the as part of Desford's

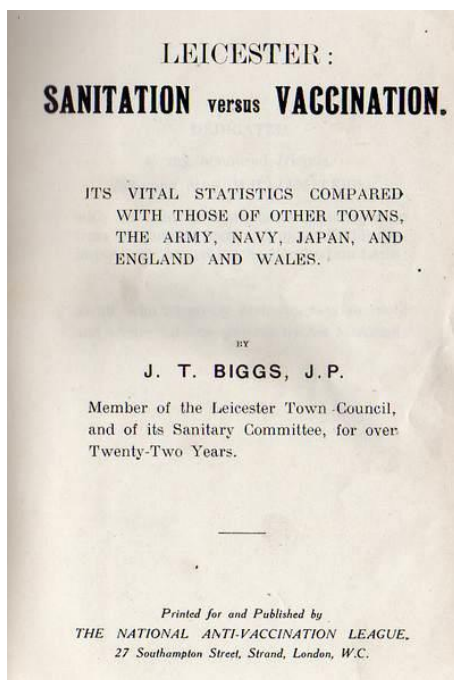
The last person to be William Gregory, a

in 1922, although no gravestone has been found for him. Not all the families were Desford residents, as people of this denomination came from surrounding villages to worship here. One of the names that occurs several times is Boulds. Samuel Boulds, born in Desford in 1805, was a tailor, as was his brother Benjamin. Their sister Eulalia was a glove maker and seamstress, and another sister Sarah was also a seamstress (as well as working as a servant for Thomas Prior). We have a copy of Sarah's will in our archives.

Simon Easom was born in Kirby Mallory, but married Jane Crowson of Desford and settled here. He was a framework knitter and weaver of Worsted stockings.

These were typical occupations of this period and putting flesh on the bones of these people helps to paint a picture of life in Desford. I have notes on the background of some of the other Strict Baptists if anyone wants to know more.

Finally another of Caroline's Contributions Leicester's Anti-Vaccination League



As we struggle with a second Lockdown, it might be of interest to learn how Leicestershire people dealt with a "pandemic" in the nineteenth century. Many people in the town of Leicester, who traditionally held Liberal and Radical views, were particularly strong in their objection to compulsory vaccination against Smallpox, although one of the most contagious, deadly and disfiguring diseases of that time. The Leicester Anti-Vaccination League (AVL) was founded in 1869, with prominent citizen Mr J.T. Biggs as its Secretary. However, an Act of 1871 Act enforced even more stringent punishment on those who refused vaccination for their children. In Leicester, many parents flouted the Act and the number of prosecutions there rose from 2 in 1869 to 1,154 in 1881. They included 61 imprisonments, as in many cases parents deliberately chose gaol, rather than a fine, as a means of protest.

However, the Leicester Corporation Act of 1879 permitted an alternative measure to vaccination and this soon became known nationally as 'The Leicester Method'. It involved six principles - prompt notification of the disease; isolation and segregation

of cases in hospital; quarantine of those who had been in contact with the patient; vigilant supervision of all contacts during the incubation period of 14 days; cleansing and disinfection of clothes, bedding etc; and burning of clothes, when necessary. Does this all sound rather familiar to us in late 2020? We have seen it happening all around us and read in the newspaper that some of the rules are being slightly or at times flagrantly disobeyed. However, there was a good deal of evidence in the 1880s that 'The Leicester Method' was often successful so we must convince people of this now in 2020.

In 1885 a massive popular demonstration in Leicester attracted delegates from over fifty other nationwide Anti-Vaccination Leagues. They demonstrated by marching with flags and banners (sounds familiar!) and were then addressed by various speakers who developed the theme of the futility and injustice of vaccination. One of those who addressed the crowd maintained that "the system of vaccination was a mere delusion - a baseless superstition; that it afforded no protection from smallpox" (hello, Trump!). Several councillors realized the Anti-Vaccinators could make them lose their seats, so "moderated their language" and said they would support the repeal of the Compulsory Vaccination Acts (so what's new?!). Because of the



strenuous efforts of Leicester's AVL it forced the government to look anew at the issue. Although the law abolishing compulsion was only dropped after the National Health Service Act of 1948 the great opposition from Leicester did in 1889 secure an amendment in the law.

Dr Allen Warner, who lived at The Cottage in Desford, came to Leicester in 1901 as Resident Medical Officer of Leicester Isolation Hospital, and witnessed many Smallpox cases of those who had not been vaccinated. He believed that he must show the alternatives of pro-and con vaccination to the general public, so published a series of shocking photographs demonstrating this. He became Assistant Medical Officer of Health for the Borough of Leicester, Medical Officer for Leicester Education Committee, Medical Officer for the Mental Defectives Committee, and a Public Vaccinator. Mrs Warner was a great supporter of Desford Nursing Association and its Chairman for many years - but you will have to wait to read my forthcoming book *Desford Personalities of the Past* to learn more about that!

(The photograph of the two 14 year old boys, both with Smallpox but one vaccinated and the other not, can be found with others of the collection if you Google Dr Allen Warner smallpox - but trigger warning, they are not very nice!)

While we in 2020 eagerly await a Covid vaccination, I am sure you will agree that we should continue to embrace The Leicester Method, to save the lives of others and spare the NHS.

