

# Summer Newsletter 2020

## Volume 16-3



Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum  
& Archive Centre -  
Dereham Heritage Trust

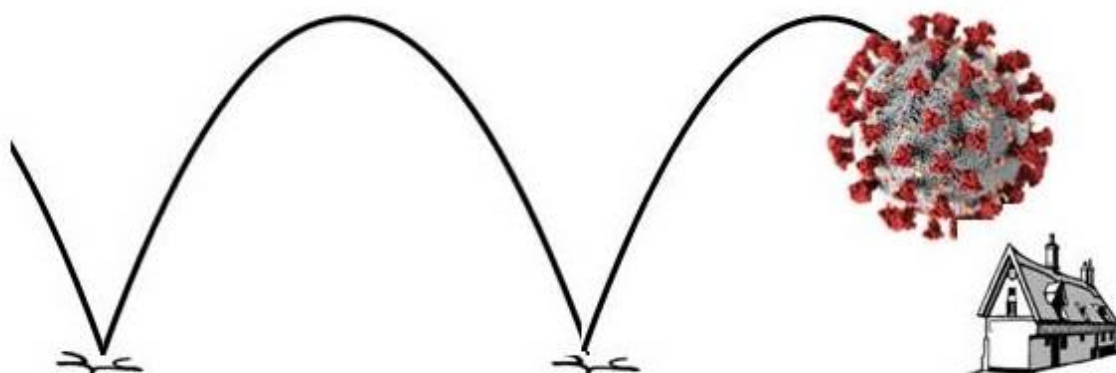
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### Letter from the Chair *Trevor Ogden*

"I hope you are well" used to be just a conventional greeting, but at the moment we say it to one another with more than usual feeling. It is a pity that we cannot yet say it face-to-face, but we all look forward to the day when that is possible. We have not heard of any members who have been seriously ill, and hope that there aren't any.

Even though there are many things that we cannot do, there seems to be plenty to report.

**Museum closed**, but...



Most will know that we usually open Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum some days each week between May and September, but the committee have reluctantly decided that in 2020 it will not be practicable to open at all. This year, the Town Council had to do some building work before we could open, but that work was delayed by the lock-down. It may now start in July, so our pre-opening cleaning and renewal of displays would have to follow that. Also, most of our volunteers are over 70, so would need particular care when visitors come, and some are shielding and would be unable to help at all. The layout of the cottage means that social distancing could only be maintained by having one household in the building at a time, which would be restrictive and would need us to arrange a booking system. These factors have led us to the decision that opening this year will be impracticable. We look forward to a new start in May 2021. Following comments last year, and the pandemic, we have equipped ourselves to take card payments, contactless or chip and pin.

We are very grateful to all those who volunteered to help this year, and hope that you will still be available and willing next year. Catherine Hawkins has written to everyone, and we are grateful for the encouraging replies. Meanwhile, we will be looking for opportunities to have temporary displays in the library (and elsewhere) when it opens, so the public will still be able to see some of our material.

### Monthly talks

We are all missing our monthly get-togethers. We can't see when these will restart, so we are exploring with speakers whether they would be willing to record a video file, so that members could view the talk on-line, and then join an on-line discussion with the speaker. Experience during lockdown has shown that very many people can adapt to this sort of thing, and that age is no barrier. But this all depends on the speakers being comfortable with it, so we are exploring how they feel about the idea. We're sorry that this does not

help people without a computer and an internet connection, but until we can resume face-to-face meetings it may be the best we can do, and may turn out to be a long term benefit in attracting new people.

### Newsletters

You will probably have noticed that newsletters are coming more frequently than normal, to provide some contact in the absence of meetings. This has mainly been through the effort of Ken Hawkins, but more frequent newsletters require more material, especially while there are no monthly talks to summarise. If you have an interest in a Norfolk historical topic, which might also interest others, please consider writing a short article about it, and contact [ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk). If at all possible, illustrations are a big help.

### Finance

We expected that due to the pandemic we would make a modest loss this year, and applied to Breckland Council for a Small Business Grant (from the government's COVID-19 Business Grant scheme), and received £10,000. We will be considering how to use this money to invest in our various activities, to improve what we provide, to help make Dereham a more attractive place to live in and visit, and to grow our membership.

### Covid photos

We have been collecting photos and other items to record how Dereham has responded to the lockdown. We are sharing these with Gressenhall Museum, who are making their own collection. The lockdown should be easing by the time you read this, but if you have any interesting items or photographs, please pass them to Sue Walker, [suegww@icloud.com](mailto:suegww@icloud.com).



### Wayfinding

You may have read in the local papers about this project, led by aboutDereham with the support of the local councils. This is a plan to put attractive display panels in various parts of the town, to highlight to visitors and residents what is there, and how the town developed. DHT has special responsibility for the panels near Bishop Bonner's cottages, and we are having a big input on the historical aspects of the other displays. Several of us have been involved in drafting, and Sue Walker's design skills are being very important in the appearance and impact of the whole project.

### Mike Page's photos

Mike Page has been taking aerial photos of Norfolk and Suffolk since the 1960s, and has produced many fine books from the results. The many photos on his website include over 200 of Dereham, taken in the last 25 years (<http://www.mike-page.co.uk/>). These are an interesting contrast to earlier views.

At the beginning of this year he offered high resolution copies to local societies, and of course we took this up, and were allowed to download the ones of Dereham and one or two nearby villages. Here for example is one of the area of St Nicholas church, including Bishop Bonner's cottages. We plan to use this, with Mike's permission, on the wayfinding panel planned for the pavement at the end of the cottages (see Letter from the Chair).



### **The theft of St Withburga** Trevor Ogden

One of the familiar stories about early Dereham is that in 974 AD, the Abbot of Ely visited with his monks and feasted the townsfolk. While they were sleeping it off, the visitors broke into St Withburga's coffin and whisked away the body, so they could divert the lucrative pilgrim trade to Ely. The indignant people of Dereham gave pursuit, but the Ely party made it to Brandon, where they put the body on a boat and escaped downriver to Ely. Unfortunately the body disappeared when the monasteries were dissolved in the 1530s. In the 20th century, the Dean of Ely, successor to the Abbot, came and preached one St Withburga's Day (8 July) and apologised to Dereham. This was gracious of him, although the wording on St Withburga's Well in the churchyard still sounds rather unforgiving.

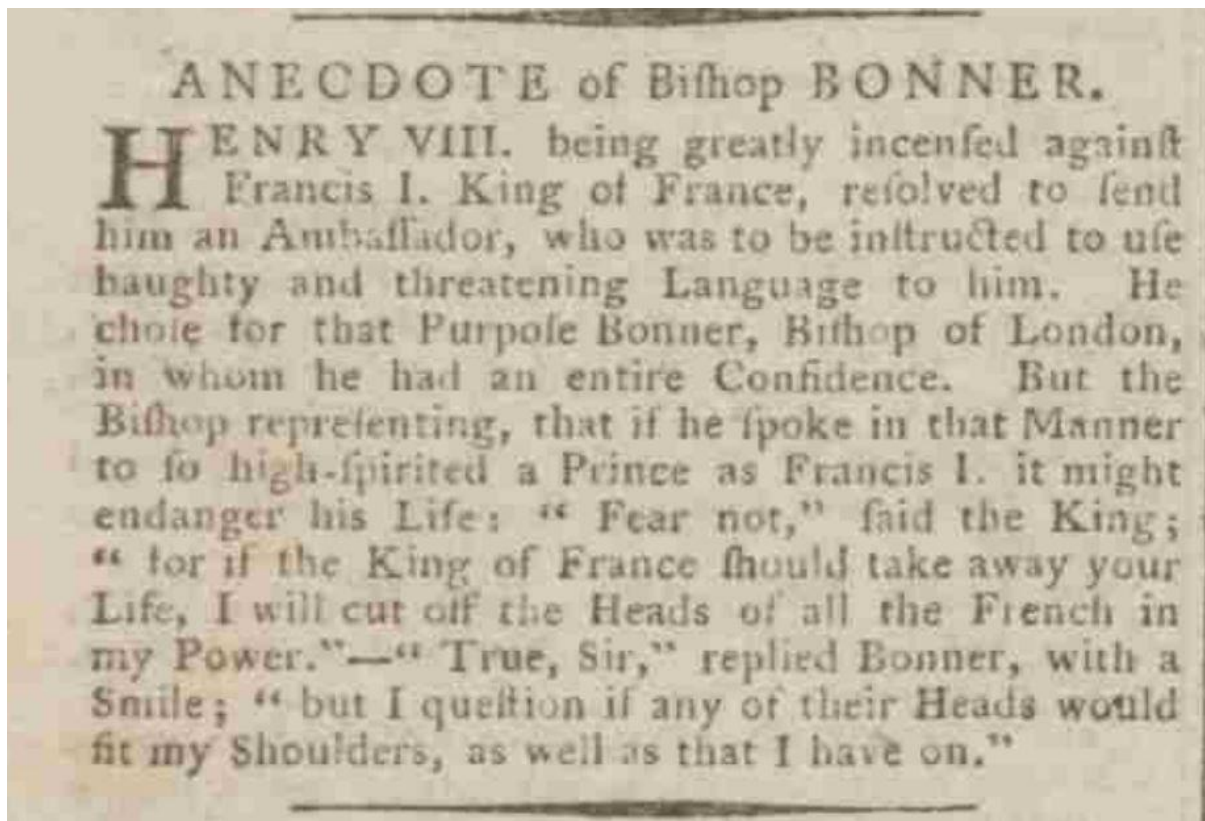
The incident was illustrated by Eric Puddy in *Dereham - the Biography of a Country Town*, by our Trust's two founders, Noel Boston and Eric Puddy. Belinda Eddy, Dr Puddy's surviving daughter, recently gave us permission to reuse her father's drawing for the Wayfinding project (see the Letter from the Chair in this issue).



## Bishop Edmund Bonner (1500-1569) *Robena Brown*

We know that Bishop Bonner's reputation was that of a cruel persecutor of those he regarded as heretics or who opposed or threatened his power during the reign of Mary Tudor.

While sifting through online newspaper reports about 'our' Bishop it was refreshing to find this amusing article in the 1786 Northampton Mercury which suggested that he may have had a sense of humour and was quick-thinking in attempting to preserve his own life. (*He also seemed to have made a possibly brave judgement about risk taking! - ed*)



Of course, we have no means of corroborating this report but it has survived through time and is worth an airing if only to give us a smile while considering that a tale loses nothing in the telling.

## Bishop Bonner's bones *Robena Brown*

It is an interesting co-incidence that neither of the two most well-known historical figures associated with Dereham were allowed to remain in their original resting place.

We know that Saint Withburga's remains were removed from her tomb in Dereham in 974 AD and taken to Ely. It may not be so well known that the remains of Bishop Edmund Bonner, who died in 1569, were removed from his sixteenth century grave, but not until 1914.

Edmund Bonner was the immensely powerful Bishop of London during the reigns of Henry VIII and Mary I though he was committed to London's Marshalsea prison under Edward VI and Elizabeth I when he and his practise of cruel persecution for heresy fell out of favour.

On 20 April 1560 Edmund Bonner was sent to Marshalsea prison in Southwark for a second period of incarceration where he remained until his death on 5 September 1569. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* tells us: '*Although no one had seen Bonner for over ten years, his memory was so fresh and he was so hated by the people that he was buried at midnight to avoid a riot.*'

Alongside many others who died in the prison, Bishop Bonner was buried in 1569 in the church of George the Martyr in Borough High Street, London. This church was immortalised by Charles Dickens as that in which Little Dorrit was married. Dicken's father John had spent much time in the same prison from 1824 as a debtor so Dickens was very familiar with it. In 1899 the church crypt was cleared of 1,484 coffins which were removed to Brookwood cemetery where the site is marked by an obelisk. Bishop Bonner, however, remained in St George's until 1914 when the Western Daily Press of 29 December 1914 reported that the graveyard of the church was being cleared for erection of a coroner's court on the site.



Engraving of the Marshalsea Prison by J Lewis published in 1812

Bishop Bonner's body had originally been buried under the east window of the church and, along with others in 1914, was also moved and reburied at Brookwood where he remains today.

## St Withburga - Historia Eliensis *Sue Walker*



*Corpus Christi College and the Stanford University Libraries, Parker Library on the Web*

I have been researching Withburga for quite a long while and have just found they have digitised the pages of MS 393: Historia Eliensis from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. It contains the hagiographical texts relating to the life of Withburga written c1130. I have had no hint, in any references to it that I had read, that the text included an illustrated initial with her image, I was so excited to find this the earliest illustration of her that I have found so far.

<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/canvas-b448c66a7850dcdb0e4b21749acbc74e>

## Evacuating Lyng in the First World War *Peter Wade-Martins*

On 12 February 1915, a Parish Emergency Committee was set up in Lyng under the chairmanship of my maternal grandfather, Rev David Frazer Allan, with the village Parish Constable, Robert Howard, and eight special constables; its purpose was to prepare for evacuating civilians in the event of a German invasion. The committee met fortnightly and discussed trench digging and destroying all parish livestock. On 15 April it was decided to prepare cards for each family setting out the evacuation arrangements.

There was to be a parish convoy of wagons for the evacuation, and the headman of the convoy was appointed. Seventeen wagon owners and drivers were identified to make up the convoy. Other parishioners were appointed to be responsible for horses and food for the convoy. No meetings are recorded for the next three years, but after German successes in France in 1918 the committee met again on 15 April and again on 17 May, and a team to dig defensive trenches was also appointed.



1915.

**Aylsham District Emergency Committee.**

PARISH Lyng

*In the event of a German Invasion*

. Mr. Purnell & Family

*will leave the Parish in Waggon No. 7*

*driven by Mr. N. Wilks*

*who will come to the house.*

Parishioners were given the cards with wagon numbers and the name of each driver, and civilians were to be moved to King's Lynn and Wisbech. Surplus usable horses were to be taken to a collection point at East Lexham Park, and all other stock, food and tools were to be destroyed. The cards were printed in 1915 by the Aylsham District Emergency Committee,

and they provided the named family with the details of their numbered wagon and the named driver "who will come to your house".

The village was certainly preparing very thoroughly to burn its bridges, but it is not at all clear what they were supposed to do when they reached King's Lynn and Wisbech. There is a county list which shows that the people of Dereham were to head to Swaffham and Downham Market, but then what? For Norfolk this seems like a half-baked plan with no logical outcome.

These details are in a booklet published by the Lyng History Group in 1993, and there are further details in *Norfolk in the First World War* by Frank Meeres (2004). Frank quotes from the minutes of the Lyng Emergency Committee which are held in the Norfolk Record Office (ref 374/83), but of course during the lockdown they are not available.

The question is: was it a normal procedure for Norfolk villages to prepare for evacuation and were these county preparations part of an overall national plan? Do we know if other villages in the Dereham area made similar arrangements and do any details survive? I wonder if other examples of village evacuation plans are known? Could any old Dereham family still hold its evacuation card?

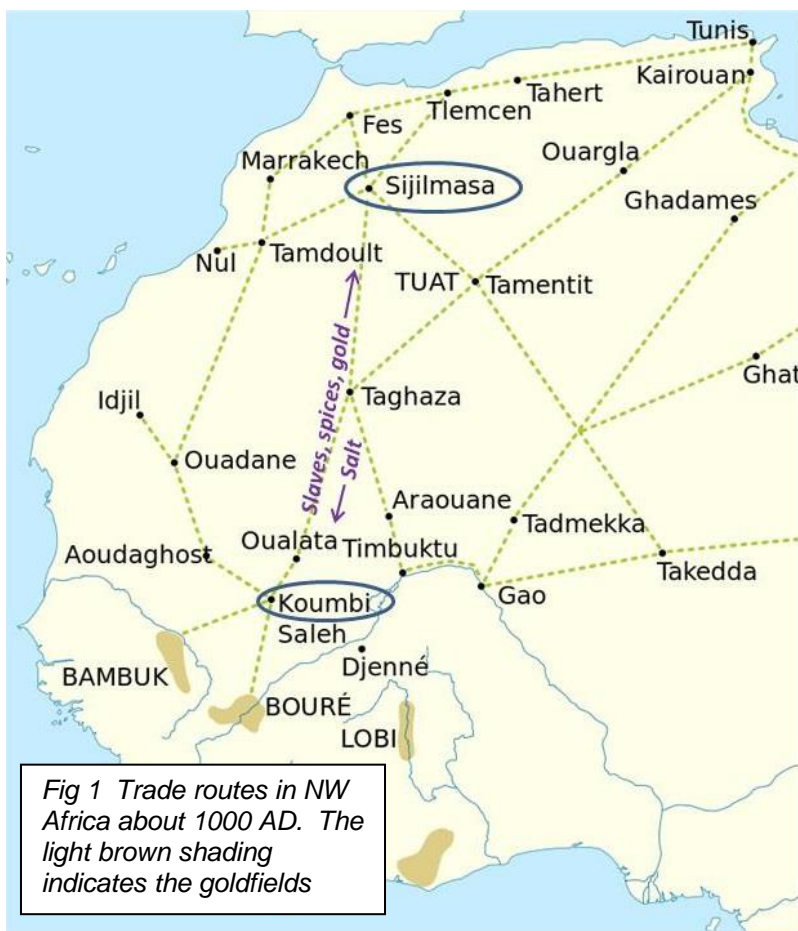
## The Black Lady of North Elmham *Trevor Ogden*

There has been talk in recent weeks about Black History and its alleged neglect in British schools, but does it have much to do with mid-Norfolk? In Dereham I have got to know seven or eight people with African or Caribbean backgrounds at church, and another couple less well at the gym, but the Afro-Caribbean community is less prominent than, say, the Portuguese speaking community.

Black people must have been even rarer here in the past, so it was a surprise that a black African was found amongst the 194 skeletons the 10th-century cemetery of the cathedral at North Elmham in the early 1970s. The excavation was led by our recent chairman Peter Wade-Martins, but the analysis of the bones was by a well-known expert, Calvin Wells. In his report in *East Anglian Archaeology*, Calvin describes the skeletons, and notes their similarity to other Anglo-Saxon graves, but then turns to the “special problem” set by Inhumation 5. The skull’s characteristics “leave little doubt that it comes from a negress or a

woman with predominantly negro genes”. Who was the black lady of North Elmham?

It is well known that there were Africans in the Roman army, and some of them were probably stationed in Britain, though we don’t know if any of them came from south of the Sahara. From Tudor times onwards there was developing trade with West Africa, sometimes through Portuguese or Spanish intermediaries. But Calvin Wells says of the tenth century, “Probably at no time in the past two millennia had England been so isolated from the ebb and flow of Europe and beyond”. However, we all know that Norfolk was always involved in North Sea trade, and it seems that somehow through this, willingly or by compulsion, someone from black Africa settled here.



Calvin quotes from Helen Clayton about the big market at Koumbi, whose ruins are now in the extreme south of Mauritania (Figs 1 and 2). There, local and Arab merchants would be selling luxury goods from the Muslim world and the Byzantine Empire, and especially salt. This was essential for life, and was lacking in the Sahel, but was mined at Taghaza in the Sahara, and further north and west. In return the traders bought slaves at Koumbi, captured on raids on tribes further south, and spices, and gold from the goldfields which would make the area wealthy for hundreds of years. It seems incredible, but the slaves were then transported, presumably on foot, across the desert north to Sijilmasa and the coast, and then into Spain and onward to northern Europe. White slaves, chiefly Slavs from the east, were traded in the other direction, to North Africa. There were also Viking raids on the Atlantic

coast of Morocco, including one in 858, when they occupied one coastal city for eight days, and took a “great host” of slaves back to their base in Ireland.

So perhaps our black lady, or her parents or grandparents, originated in a village in what is now south Mali or Guinea. We can imagine them captured in a raid, and driven north and sold in Koumbi, and then taken on that terrible journey across the Sahara, and on into Spain. Perhaps a merchant bought her (or her parents) in Cordoba, and eventually she got into the hands of an English merchant who brought her home to North Elmham, a chilly place after Cordoba, let alone West Africa. Or perhaps it was more complicated and she was captured somewhere by Vikings and came to Norfolk in the hands of a Scandinavian settler. It sounds a string of horrific experiences, but we must hope that in North Elmham she had a kind master or mistress, who when she died saw her buried in the cathedral cemetery.



There is a postscript. In 1979, in preparation for redevelopment, a site on the right at the top of Rose Lane in Norwich was excavated, and this found a church and part of its graveyard, which had been destroyed for the building of the castle in the 1070s. One of the bones was a female skull with “some striking, possibly Negroid, characteristics. ... It

would seem in the Norwich case that the woman concerned may not have been a pure negress, but rather an admixture ...” (Ann Stirland, EAA 28). Survival of such bones, and their excavation, are very uncertain, so this is a big coincidence. Did the trading of a black slave to Norfolk happen twice? Or, just possibly, could the black lady of Norwich have had a mother or grandmother in North Elmham? Probably a foolish idea, but you never know.

*Acknowledgements* I am very grateful to Peter Wade-Martins for telling me about these reports. The skeleton reports of the North Elmham cathedral cemetery excavations are in East Anglian Archaeology (EAA) No 9, part 2, <http://eaareports.org.uk/publication/report9/>. The Norwich castle excavations are reported in EAA 28, <http://eaareports.org.uk/publication/report28/>.

*Note* Many people now consider the terms “negress” and “negro” offensive, though this was not the case when these reports were written.

Fig 1 is based on Wikipedia, Public Domain.

Fig 2 is based on <https://stockhead.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/West-Africa-map.jpg>.

## Membership matters

Our membership year runs annually from 1 March to the end of February, and our thanks go to those who have renewed their membership for this year. We would remind everyone else that subscriptions (£12 single, £20 two people at the same address) were due from 1 March. We know that most people paid when coming to a meeting, and that door is currently closed. There are now two ways open for payment. The first is to send a cheque, payable to Dereham Heritage Trust, to Ken Hawkins, DHT, 26 Hillfields, Dereham NR19 1UE. We can also accept bank transfers for those who have telephone or internet banking: our account is Dereham Heritage Trust, sort code 20-28-20, account 10179752 - but if you use this please make sure you quote as a reference ‘DHT’ and your surname so that we can recognise the payment as coming from you. It would help if you could also email or phone (01362 691455) to advise us when you did this.



## Museum news *Ken Hawkins*



We have been concerned for some time about vehicles exceeding the 6' 6" width limit (and therefore likely to be heavy vehicles) going past Bishop Bonner's Cottages. A warning notice on Church Street is hidden in a tree, while the sign actually indicating the limit is part way down St Withburga Lane - which is one way at this point - so by the time drivers see the sign, they are unable to go back anyway! We had planned some

informal representations, although these have been interrupted by the impact of COVID-19 on the business of all local authorities. The problem we have in mind was exemplified by a recent incident. And it is possible that such actions result in the sort of damage we are seeing to the plaster work of the building.



## Norfolk Archaeology

*Norfolk Archaeology* has been scanned and the archive has been made free on line, from its beginning in 1846 up to 2005.

[http://www.nnas.info/NABackIssues.html?fbclid=IwAR0LnrB\\_2AYV5SWvatXC9tIsGMar65kafmGr8anqXYxU-Utpmwm63T08rvk](http://www.nnas.info/NABackIssues.html?fbclid=IwAR0LnrB_2AYV5SWvatXC9tIsGMar65kafmGr8anqXYxU-Utpmwm63T08rvk)

### *Norfolk Archaeology* 1-44 - Back Issues of the Society's journal

*Norfolk Archaeology* is one of Britain's longest established journals of archaeology and local history. It has been published every year since 1846. The Society has recently had every volume of the journal between 1846 and 2005 scanned, and these are now available online at the Archaeology Data Service.

We are grateful to the [Marc Fitch Fund](#) for providing financial support for this project.

Contents lists are available on the ADS website pages. Click on the link below to visit the ADS website and browse our varied and interesting content:

### Journal

Back issues - hard copy  
Please contact the Hon. Secretary for information about the availability of back issues of *Norfolk Archaeology*.

## Programme of events 2020-21

Our programme remains uncertain. We hope to resume meetings when government guidelines allow and are reviewing this on a regular basis. Until then, **the dates below must be provisional** - if in doubt, please call Ken Hawkins on 01362 691455 to check. Full details are available on our website, which will also carry any necessary last minute changes ([www.derehamhistory.com/talks.html](http://www.derehamhistory.com/talks.html)).

8 July - *postponed, date to be confirmed*  
**Links with the past: a look around Rev Boston's historic possessions**

12 August - *postponed, date to be confirmed*  
**Narborough Bone Mill**  
Speaker: Graeme Brown

9 September  
**19th century industrial activity in Norfolk and its market towns**  
Speaker: Adrian O'dell

14 October - *postponed from 10 June 2020*  
**Norwich Castle Keep Project**  
Speaker: Robin Hanley

11 November  
**Armstrong's Dereham**  
Speaker: Susanna Wade Martins

9 December  
to be arranged

13 January 2021  
**Maud's Story – the life of a Norfolk Trading Wherry**  
Speaker: Linda Pargeter

10 February 2021  
**Annual General Meeting**

10 March 2021 - *postponed from 8 April 2020*  
**25 years of archaeological research at Sedgeford**  
Speaker: Gary Rossin

14 April 2021 - *postponed from 13 May 2020*  
**Making tracks through Mid-Norfolk**  
Speaker: Paddy Anstey

Unless otherwise indicated, all meetings are at Trinity Methodist Church, 31 Trinity Close, Dereham NR19 2EP (off Theatre Street), and start at 1930. Admission to talks is £1 for members of Dereham Heritage Trust and £3 for non-members. Visitors are always welcome, with the fee payable on the door, refreshments included.

## Next issue

We plan to produce a Newsletter every quarter, in January, April, July and October. The press date for the next 'ordinary' issue is **15 September**: if you have material for this issue, please send it in to Ken Hawkins. And please don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you have any other comments of any sort.

In between Newsletters, our website [www.derehamhistory.com](http://www.derehamhistory.com) is updated regularly so please have a look now and again.

**Can you save us some money?** If you did not receive this Newsletter via email, but would be willing to do so, please let us have your email address: we won't pass it on to anyone else without your permission, and we won't use it for anything but Dereham Heritage Trust business.