

Spring Newsletter 2017

Volume 13-1



Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum,
Dereham Antiquarian Society
& Town Archive

From the Outgoing Chairwoman *Sue Walker White*

Following our AGM in February, your new Committee is tackling the mass of work that needs to be done. All of this is reported below in more detail, but here I simply wanted to thank you for your membership, and for bearing with us through the last few months when we had insufficient Committee members to do the things we all wanted to do. In particular, we are very much aware that we have not been able to produce a Newsletter for some time, leaving you ignorant of what has been happening. I hope that this issue will mark a change, and that you will be pleased to find that we have been very busy behind the scenes, even though unable to communicate that activity previously.

It was very pleasing to hand over the role of the DAS Chair to Dr Peter Wade-Martins at the AGM. I am now volunteering as DAS Secretary for the coming year. I look forward to seeing you at one of our meetings, at the Museum, or perhaps as another Committee member?

Message from the New Chairman *Peter Wade-Martins*

Any message from a newly-elected chairman is almost bound to start by the chairman saying how much of a privilege it is to take on this important role, but it *is* a privilege, and I *am* really looking forward to working with the new committee when we have some major issues to tackle. The main one is the move of the Society's archives from the Rash's Green Industrial Estate into a room we have been offered in the Town Hall. I just hope it all fits in! Once this move is complete, we will have much better conditions in which to study the collections. They will then be accessible, by arrangement, to researchers in the way they certainly are not at the moment.

I have inherited a splendid series of lectures and meetings to chair and for our members to enjoy, and I hope on these occasions to meet many of you. I would certainly welcome comments and suggestions from members, and I want you all to feel that it is *your* society.

Dereham Antiquarian Society New Committee for 2017-18

16 members attended our AGM, plus Philip Duigan, our representative from Dereham Town Council (and also our Mayor until May this year). The formalities were duly dealt with, with the Society being in fairly good shape, but with lots to do to keep it that way. The Committee formed currently consists of

Hon President	Rev Jonathan Boston
Chairman	Dr Peter Wade-Martins
Vice Chairman	Bob Davies
Secretary/Museum Curator	Sue Walker White
Treasurer/Membership	Julian Walker
Volunteer Co-ordinator	Ken Hawkins
Archive	Robena Brown

Our Town Council Representative, Phillip Duigan, is also invited to all Committee meetings and we are very pleased that he plays an active and supportive role. Our museum mentor, Megan Dennis, is also invited to all our meetings; she plays a vital role of keeping us on track and advising us on all aspects of good museum practice.

Plans for the archive

Most members will know that the current location of the archive is not ideal, and it has been possible for some time that we might be asked to vacate it at quite short notice. Discussions have been in hand with Dereham Town Council for quite a while, to relocate the archive into a room at the Town Council offices. This would have many advantages:

- the archive would be in better environmental conditions than at present;
- it would be more accessible both to us and members of the public wishing to view items and conduct research;
- there would be increased facility to exchange materials between the archive and the museum (Bishop Bonner's Cottage) to make displays; and
- items would be housed alongside the Town Council, which seems very fitting.

Discussions have taken a firm step forward in recent weeks, with agreement in principle having been reached between the Society and the Council. There are details to be settled still, but we are confident that later this year, we will be able to plan the move itself. Megan Dennis, Curator at Gressenhall Museum of Country Life is assisting us with accreditation (see below) and she has commented that moving an archive even from room to room, never mind across the town, is a major task, so we are pleased that things are now moving on the right track. This will be the culmination of a lot of effort by a lot of people, to all of whom the Society is indebted. We will keep you informed of progress and let you know when the archive has been moved and can be opened to view.



“A man of pleasingly strong intolerances”

A full house of 32 members (we had to put out more chairs!) was entertained on 8 March by Chris Armstrong, who gave a talk about his great grandfather, the Reverend Benjamin Armstrong, Vicar of Dereham from 1850 to 1888. It is impossible to convey the wealth of information which Chris crammed into his 45 minute presentation. He started from Benjamin's early days, went on to his entry into the church (he was the first in the family, after which every generation but the latest has followed suit) and then concentrated on his time in Dereham. Throughout his life he kept diaries - an unbroken sequence of 11 neatly handwritten volumes forming an almost daily record. These recorded his often uncompromising comments on his experiences, which included visiting the Great Exhibition, attending Victoria's coronation and Wellington's funeral, but mostly details of his life in Dereham, including his continuing battle as a high churchman against the low church at Norwich - a major issue of the time (as also recorded in the *Barchester Chronicles* by Anthony Trollope, whom he met).

After his death, the diaries passed to Chris's grandfather, who didn't look at them, then to his father, who had to break the locks to get into them. A first selection was published in 1949 as *A Norfolk Diary*, followed by a second selection in 1963, *Armstrong's Norfolk Diary*; neither of these is now in print, but Chris edited the third volume - *Under the Parson's Nose* - in 2012. (This is still on sale: Amazon has copies at £11.50, or contact the publisher The Larks Press at

<http://www.booksatlarkspress.co.uk/norfolk-books/> or on 01328 829207 - though Chris was selling them on the night at a discount.) Chris noted that the two earlier editions had been somewhat sanitised to avoid upsetting people - unsurprisingly given the description given to him by Sir Diarmaid MacCulloch which heads this short piece. Happily, the passage of time has enabled Chris to feel free of this constraint.

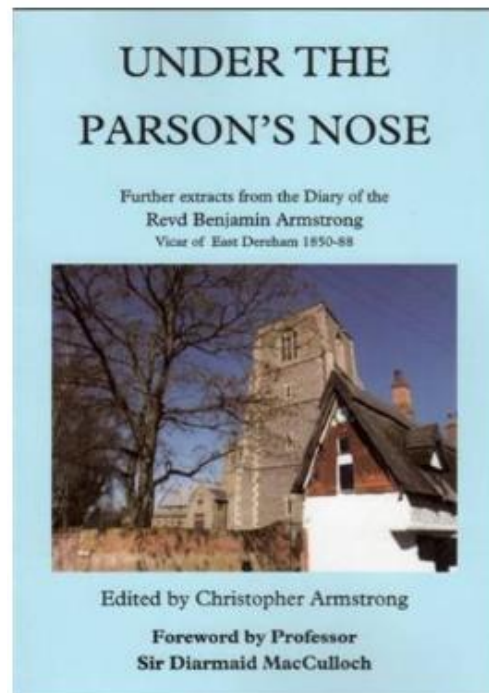
Entertaining as Benjamin's acerbic comments are, Chris was clear that these should not obscure the fact that he was also kind and full of goodwill, genuine and compassionate: he concerned himself with all of his flock, including the poorest members of the community. Evidence of his popularity can be seen from an illuminated address given to him in 1866, with 'a purse of 100 guineas' by the people of Dereham "in recognition of the gratuitous establishment of a Third Sunday Service ...".

After the presentation, there was opportunity to talk with Chris (and each other) over tea/coffee and biscuits, rounding off a most enjoyable evening. If you missed it, do come and try another one.

The fisherman who painted in wool

The April talk was given by Christine Humphries, and was about Laura Eke, who married John Craske - the fisherman who painted in wool. Christine gave us an account of the lives of both Laura and John, both before they met and married, and subsequently. She explained that Eke was a Dereham name, and it was locally that Laura was born to a father who lived by the bible. It was therefore no surprise that she came to love to sing hymns. After leaving school at 14, she went to work in London as a children's nurse, but returned to Dereham once a month. And it was there that she became attracted to a man who sang in the market place for the Salvation Army.

This was John Craske, who came from a seafaring family from Sheringham. They were married in 1908, and lived in Dereham, then Swanton Morley and then North Elmham. When war broke out, he tried to join the army, but was twice refused. He managed on the third attempt, but within a month had influenza and hospitalised in Croydon. He came back to Norfolk via 6 different hospitals, the last in Norwich. From this time, it became Laura's task to nurse him for the rest of his life. He wanted to be at sea, and this was tried in various ways, though he was again in Dereham in 1920 when he once more became ill. He said that he wanted to paint, and Laura found whatever materials she could to enable him to do so: he painted on any surface available - doors, chairs, plates - and most often painted the sea. To ameliorate his illness, his doctor recommended he be by the sea, and they went to Hemsby, where he painted and made small boats for sale to visitors to the area. Valentine Ackland stopped to buy one, and saw his paintings, so bought one of those as well. She



showed it to a friend who ran an art gallery - and was immediately asked to get some more. By this time, the Crasques were back in Dereham, but Valentine tracked them down. It is said that they thought she had come to ask for her money back from the previous purchase, but she left with many paintings, which were subsequently put on exhibition and sold. John had also started to 'paint' in needlework, including large tapestries, including one of the North Norfolk coast and another of the evacuation at Dunkirk.

His work can now be seen at the Red House Aldeburgh (one time home of Benjamin Britten), the Shell Museum at Glandford and Sheringham Museum. The Dunkirk tapestry is at Norwich Castle Museum, but not on display. Our own Society has two watercolours and one tapestry in the archive.



Christine brought with her an extensive display of photographs and records. She also had two books about John and his work. She recommended *John Craske: Fisherman painter in wools*, by Lesley Laugher and John Hillier, available from Sheringham Museum at £5.99. A much longer book was also on display - *Threads: The Delicate Life of John Craske*, by Julia Blackburn; Jonathan Cape, £25.

Museum Accreditation

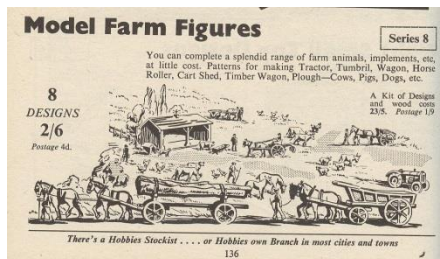
The Museum is currently accredited with the Arts Council, and this enables us to apply for some grants that would not otherwise be open to us. It also provides a recognised structure for managing all Museum related affairs, and is very useful on that account alone. But ... we have to demonstrate every three years that we have all the necessary systems in place (and are following them!). This process was commenced last year, when renewal was due, but was interrupted when we lost several Committee members. Megan Dennis is our mentor for this process, and is providing us with much good advice. In the short term, we are reviewing the aims and objectives set out in the Forward Plan (itself a requirement of accreditation), and this will require considerable work by the Committee to ensure we are on track. Again, we will let you know how this develops.

Museum opening arrangements

Our main need for volunteers is in staffing the Museum. As last year, we have committed to opening Bishop Bonner's Cottage for three days a week - 1.30pm to 4pm on every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 6 May to 30 September. Our thanks go to all those who have kept the Museum open in past years - we are in the process of inviting their help once again. We also need more volunteers (who do not have to be members of the Society) - if we can get enough, we could even perhaps extend the opening times once more. If you have not been invited, but would like to volunteer (or know of someone else who will), please contact our new Volunteer Co-ordinator Ken Hawkins via ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk or 07561 813243.

2017 Display

Work is well advanced on preparing the displays for the coming year. A major feature will be a display to celebrate the gift to the museum of a large part of the Alan Cambridge Collection of original Hobbies' fretsaws and other tools and documents, from Mrs Margery Cambridge, Alan's widow. On loan for the summer exhibition, also from Mrs Cambridge, is the display pictured here. The old boy is called 'Old Joe': he and the working fretsaw at the back of the picture were both designed and built by Alan. The display will also include the two one third working models for which he won silver medals at the International Model Engineer Exhibition. As can clearly be seen, Alan was a very gifted craftsman and engineer; he lived at Old Beetley near Dereham. The illustrations below are from the 1962 Hobbies Annual.



The Joy Lodey Collection

The museum is very honoured to have been donated a collection of the late Joy Lodey's detailed research on Etling Green and Dereham history. The donation by Joy's family also includes a 1950s pen and ink sketch of Etling Green by Eric Puddy (one of the founding members of the Dereham Antiquarian Society) and a portable microfiche reader. The collection will be open to the public once it has been catalogued and added to the museum archive.

Membership Subscriptions due

For those who have already subscribed for 2017, thank you. For those who have yet to do so, we will be delighted if you will renew (at the same rates as last year) as soon as convenient - subscriptions were due from 1 March. And of course, if you know of anyone else who might like to join, we are always pleased to have new members. If you have any questions about this, please contact Julian Walker on 01362 695652 or email him at 4jcwalker@gmail.com.

Membership Fees 2017:

Individual - £10

Couple at the same address - £17

Family at the same address - £23

Please make cheques payable to 'Dereham Antiquarian Society' and post to:
Julian Walker, 4 Hornes Cottages, Off Dereham Road, Scarning, Dereham NR19 2BQ

Programme of events 2017-18

Our current programme is on our website, and has also been printed into our 'Talks Programme' cards which everyone renewing should by now have received. For those of you who have already had our programme card, **please note that the 2018 AGM date has changed to Thursday 15 February 2018.** In case you haven't got the card, here is the list.

Wednesday May 10th 2017
The Story of the Norwich Boot & Shoe Trade
Speaker: Frances Holmes

Wednesday June 14th 2017
An Evening with Lucilla Reeve
Speaker: Georgette Vale

Wednesday July 12th 2017
The Pre-History of Dereham
Speaker: Claire Bradshaw

No talk in August.

Wednesday September 13th 2017
National Trust – Blickling Beauties
Speaker: Kate Barnes

Wednesday October 11th 2017
Dereham Antiquarian Society Dinner

Wednesday November 8th 2017
How does your Garden Grow? The garden collections at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse
Speaker: Bridget Yates

Wednesday December 13th 2017
Dereham Christmas History Quiz

Wednesday January 10th 2018
A Norfolk Family Life in 1900s
Speaker: Christine Humphries

Thursday February 15th 2018
Dereham Antiquarian Society AGM

Admission to talks is £1 for members of Dereham Antiquarian Society and £3 for non-members. Visitors are always welcome, with the fee payable on the door, refreshments included.

In between Newsletters on the Web

We know it has been a long time since the last Newsletter, and hope that it won't be nearly as long before the next one. In between Newsletters, our website www.derehamhistory.com is updated regularly so please have a look now and again. We also post updates on local history and national heritage news on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/DerehamHistory> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/BonnorsMuseum> both of which have several hundred followers.

And finally

We hope you find this Newsletter interesting and informative. If you have material for the next newsletter, please send it, by the end of May, to Ken at ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk or Sue at sue@suewhite.demon.co.uk. And please don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you have any other comments of any sort.

Most of our members voted to receive communications by email at the 2016 AGM, which saves us a lot of money. If you did not get your Newsletter that way, but would be willing to, please let Sue have your email address (sue@suewhite.demon.co.uk): we won't pass it on to anyone else without your permission, and we won't use it for anything but Dereham Antiquarian Society business. We are able to offer a coloured newsletter to those of you who want to receive it by email as a PDF file; unfortunately, it is not possible for us to supply printed copies in colour as it is just too expensive to produce.