

Dereham TC Heritage and Open Spaces Committee

Dereham Heritage Trust, 2020-21

This summarises our current activity in the service of the town, and highlights an urgent need to identify more storage space for the Archive, which contains records of Dereham's past. This can be cool storage rather than office standard, provided it meets the standards required by our Arts Council accreditation.

The Heritage Trust aims to contribute to people's experience of living and working in Dereham or visiting it, by investigating and presenting the history and archaeology of the town and its surroundings. Breckland DC has an aim "to ensure that our residents have access to a high quality leisure, arts and cultural offering" so that its market towns are "great places in which to live, work, visit and invest."¹ We want to contribute to this so that people living or in business in Dereham, or moving here, feel that Dereham is a good place to be.

What we do

As facilities for the town, we run the Museum in Bishop Bonner's Cottage, and maintain an Archive in the Assembly Rooms, which we make available to enquirers. We normally run monthly talks through the year, for members and others, and issue a Newsletter. We answer enquiries and contribute expertise to other projects. The Museum is accredited under a scheme backed by Arts Council England, which means that we have to meet strict standards for collection care. We are advised in this and other matters by Megan Dennis, Curator at Gressenhall, and other Norfolk Museums staff. The Town Council is represented on the Trust by Phillip Duigan, who receives all DHT Committee papers and is invited to participate in all discussions. In pre-Covid times, he has also regularly attended our talks.

2020

Our membership has increased during lockdown, and is now 66, including 6 honorary life members. This increase is possibly because we moved our monthly talks online. Our speakers have worked with us to record their talks, which we have put on our YouTube channel, accessible through our website <http://www.derehamhistory.com/>, and we have live Zoom discussions with the speakers. Online views of the talks have significantly exceeded the normal attendance at monthly meetings, and the online discussions have been livelier and lasted longer. In order to give our members the best service we could in the absence of our normal meetings, we increased our Newsletter frequency from 4 a year to 7 (see Appendix 1), and this has been well received.

We have contributed a lot to the content of the Wayfinding panels, and information for the Ellenor Fenn Park.

It was not possible to open the Museum, which normally happens May to September, and the Archive has been closed with the Assembly Rooms since the first lockdown. We have continued to receive donated items, which if accepted are at the moment in committee members' houses.

¹ Breckland Corporate Plan 2019-2023. . https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/3266/Corporate-Plan/pdf/BRC_Corporate_Plan_2019_Online.pdf?m=636928360048730000

Plans for 2021

The success of online talks means that when we resume monthly meetings we plan to record these so that the talks are available through the website. This is likely to be more important for all the new population who will fill all the housing planned in coming years. However, some people value the social element of our meetings, and some do not have internet access, so we have no plans to go online only.

In the Museum, we have to wait for the end of the building work, and there will then be cleaning and organisation of the displays, but we hope to open in the first week of June. Clearly this depends on the end of Covid, and confidence of our volunteers that they are not at risk - many of them are over 70. As well as our present displays, we are planning new displays on John and Ellenor Fenn, and their life and work in Hill House. John's work included publication of the Paston Letters, which are of international importance on medieval life, and we are planning the new displays in association with the Paston Footprints project, based at UEA and financed by National Lottery Heritage Fund. Our angle will be life in 18th century Dereham, but it will link with Paston displays elsewhere in Norfolk. Similarly displays on the innovative and neglected work of Ellenor Fenn will link with the new Ellenor Fenn Park.

We need to resume the important updating of the Archive catalogue, which has been delayed by 12 months, and has been made more urgent by recent donations. As well as containing records relevant to the town, the Archive includes Museum items not currently on display. However, the future of the Archive depends on the next item.

Storage space – an urgent need.

We are very grateful for the use of a room in the Assembly Rooms, which provides secure accommodation, convenient for enquirers. The collection was rationalised to fit into the space in 2018, particularly by offering a lot of material not very relevant to Dereham to other museums, but serious problems remain. We need space which is dry, but does not need to be as warm as the Assembly Rooms, provided it meets the standards of care necessary for us to maintain accreditation. Details of this are given in Appendix 2. In summary we need:

- (1) space for two large items : the original of the Town Sign 1.7 m long, 1.5 m high, and the Hobbies display trailer 2.5m long, 1.2 m wide
- (2) at least 11.5 m length of shelf space, deep and wide, totalling 3.5 m³ volume. We would move suitable items into this to release space in the Assembly Rooms.

Following a suggestion made to us a couple of years ago, we had hoped to use one of the chapels in the Cemetery, but we understand that this is likely to remain in use for the foreseeable future.

Finance

For the last few years, we have split our accounts to reflect our three main activities - the Museum, the Archive and other membership services and talks.

In the last two years the costs of our monthly meetings and Newsletters, totalling £866 in 2019 and £716 in 2020, have been covered to within £20 or so by our income from subscriptions and door takings.

The annual grant of £1000 from the Town Council, for which we are very grateful, goes towards the running costs of the Museum and Archive, without which these facilities could not run. In 2019 we

additionally received £975 in Museum entrance fees, sales, and donations. Income from the Archive is negligible. After expenditure, the Museum and Archive together would have sustained a £804 loss, were it not for the Council's £1000 grant. In 2020, our income from these in addition to the grant was only about £45 in donations, and although Museum running costs were down too, we made a £288 loss, after taking into account the £1000 grant. The main sources of expenditure in the Museum and Archive are subscriptions (mainly for the cataloguing system), utilities, and maintenance.

Our turnover in a normal year is about £2700, and our reserves about £3000. We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and regulated according to Charity Commission rules.

We were operating on the basis that our finances were too closely balanced to allow acquisitions, but in 2019 a rare camera made by Dereham camera-maker JH Skinner (also one of the founders of Hobbies) was put up for auction on ebay. After taking expert advice about the camera and the likely cost, we felt that this should be bought for Dereham. The outcome was that we bought it, covering the cost by donations and from our reserves. This highlighted to the trustees that we should have the flexibility to judiciously use some of our reserves to make such purchases where it looked as if this would add to our collection to the benefit of the town. In 2019 we spent £340 and in 2020 £176 in this way.

In 2020, as a result of lockdown, we were pleased to receive £10,000 small business grant from the government. In the short term, we may well need to draw some of this down - the Museum is a major source of income, and if it continues to be closed (and we are already aware that we may because of the delayed repair work be unable to open it on the usual May Day), we will need to use some of it.

In the longer term, the grant gives us flexibility to invest which we did not have before, and the ability to prepare for the future, possible examples being improving Museum displays and buying equipment if necessary to put our meetings online. We need to think what will be the attitudes of people moving into new housing planned for Dereham, probably younger than most of our members. Will they still want to come out on a winter night to hear a talk in a church hall? What is the best way of meeting our aims in future? For the moment, however, the sum stays in our bank account.

Appendix 1. Some items in 2020 Newsletters

If any Committee member would like to receive the Newsletter regularly, please contact Ken Hawkins ken-hawkins@tiscali.co.uk

Bishop Bonner's Palace

The Skinner Camera

The Metamec works

Lighting up your Christmas Tree in 1895

Betty's Wartime Diary

William Wollaston's Mineral (Wollastonite)

Dereham's Vicar and World War 1

North Elmham's Cathedral Meadows

The hard life of agriculture shown in North Elmham skeletons

Shipdham's wandering font

The Tautmila Incident (grounding of a Latvian steamer in WW2)

Photos of lockdown in Dereham

Aerial photos of Dereham

The theft of St Withburga

Bishop Edmund Bonner

Bishop Bonner's bones

St Withburga in the Book of Ely

Evacuating Lyng in WW1

The Black Lady of North Elmham

Accessing Norfolk Archaeology

Maps, Walks, and Pubs in Dereham

Memories of Etling Green

Mystery Objects from the Science Museum

Hobbies kits

East Dereham Brick, Tile, and Pottery Works

More on Etling Green

Bawdeswell and *The Canterbury Tales*

The Wayfinding project

Sniffing out the tanneries

Shipdham in the Great War

The fires of 1921

Christmas in WW1

St Andrew's East Lexham on the Christmas stamp

Treats and troubles in Gressenhall School 1875-1902

Appendix 2.

Need for storage space for the Archive

Space is needed for the following.

- (1) Large items still needing accommodation elsewhere:
 - Original of the Town Sign* 1.7 m long, 1.5 m high
 - Hobbies display trailer 2.5m long, 1.2 m wideThese have been in Peter Wade-Martins' garage and outhouse for 18 months, but this cannot be a permanent arrangement. The trailer is in an open garage, and the canopy is showing signs of mould.
- (2) A steady stream of new material which should be preserved for people researching Dereham. The following are examples from the last 12 months:
 - (a) The former joint MD of Hobbies has given us the first eleven bound volumes of Hobbies Weekly, and other unpublished significant records of the companies;
 - (b) Mid-Norfolk Family History Soc have given us for permanent storage their transcriptions of graveyard monuments from the Dereham area.
 - (c) We already have a lot of volumes of Dereham and Fakenham Times back into the 19th century, on long-term loan from Archant. Archant are clearing their building in the middle of Norwich and would like us to have 30 more volumes, covering 15 years.
 - (d) The Paston Footprints Project has offered us some rare documents of Sir John Fenn, who lived in Hill House 1766-1794. He was prominent in local and county life, and while in Hill House edited the Medieval Paston Letters. The Norfolk Record Office has evaluated these and offered us storage boxes.
 - (e) We have recently been offered some old copies of Dereham High School for Girls magazines
 - (f) Mid-Norfolk Railway found in one of their buildings some old Hobbies kits and. Most are duplicates or in bad condition, but we plan to keep a representative sample

Towards a solution. The material under (2) could be accommodated if we move the following items from the Assembly Rooms to other secure, dry accommodation. This would have to meet Arts Council standards for storing material of this sort, but need not be as warm as the Assembly Rooms. The following is the order of choice for moving out.

- (a) Empty storage boxes, which are needed for material which is at the moment in the displays in the Museum. About 3 m of shelf space, 1.2 m³ volume
 - (b) Durable items like old workmen's tools. About 4.5 m shelf space, 1.1 m³ volume;
 - (c) Durable archaeology items such as flint tools and pottery from the Spong Hill Anglo-Saxon cemetery. About 4 m shelf space, 1.2 m³ volume.
- Total about 11.5 m of shelf space and 3.5 m³ volume.

***Why keep the old Town Sign?**

The Town Sign has been replaced by a fibreglass copy. However, the wooden original has been kept as the largest example of the work of Harry Carter, who carved at least 8 of the village signs in this part of Norfolk. He was an effective and inspiring Arts and Handicrafts teacher at Hammond's Grammar School at Swaffham, where many Dereham boys went, and where we understand that our town sign was made. Some local boys who worked with him will probably remember doing it. We would like to store the original, in case a suitable indoor place emerges to display it, in which case we would try to raise funds to restore it.