

Desford and District Local History Society Newsletter Autumn 2019



Since the last newsletter came out there has been quite a lot of activity both talks and visits. For those who were unable to attend either the talks or the visits, here is a brief resume of those events.

Trip to Marlow 26th June

As usual with Colin & Margaret the trip was a master/mistress piece of organisation. Every eventuality was covered with loads of information about the places we were to visit. Despite the 8.00 am start the coach was full, though one or two of us looked a little bleary eyed. A very pleasant coffee stop at Bicester Avenue Garden Centre revived any flagging spirits. We were met at Marlow by two guides who gave us conducted tours of the town. Marlow, in the county of Buckinghamshire, is situated on the River Thames between Henley and Windsor and has been



designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is a lovely mix of old narrow streets, many listed buildings and of course the magnificent Thames. Famous former residents include Sir Steve Redgrave, Thomas



Love Peacock, Jerome K Jerome, TS Eliot, Percy Bysshe Shelley & his wife Mary who wrote the novel Frankenstein while living there!

The tours were very thorough and informative.

A quick bite to eat at one of many excellent cafes in the town and then back on the coach to visit Greys Court, which is a National



Trust property in Oxfordshire. It is a charming old family home and garden. The façade of the house is Elizabethan, but inside, over many years, it has been extensively modernised.



The gardens were beautiful and some of the group went on a guided tour around them. It would be good to return and spend more time in both the house and garden!

On the way home we stopped off at The George & Dragon for a convivial meal and drinks. We arrived back in Desford having had a great event packed day out.

Apparently, this will be Colin & Margaret's annual excursion swan song. I am sure I speak on behalf of all History Society Members when I say that I think we owe them a huge debt of gratitude for organising such well organised and memorable trips. They will be a very hard act to follow. Volunteers?

David Marcus

The meeting on July 16th in St Martin's Church:

Groby Old Hall, a talk by Peter Liddle

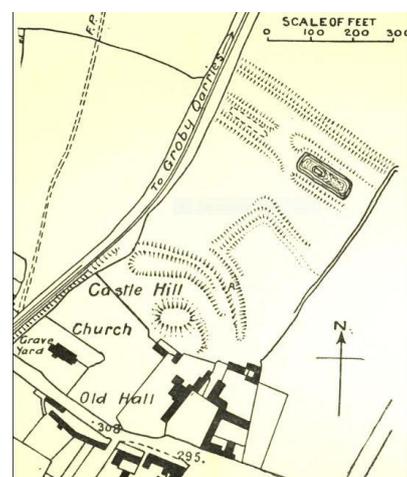
As we have come to expect, the talk by Peter Liddle in July was both informative and interesting.

Groby Old Hall is a partly 15th century, grade II listed, brick-built



manor house, near to the site of Groby Castle, (destroyed circa 1175).

The grand hall of the original building was probably built by the Ferrers family, Barons of Groby, but passed to the Greys after Sir Edward Grey married Elizabeth Ferrers, granddaughter and heir to the 5th Baron Ferrers, around 1432. One of the most notable members of the Grey family was Elizabeth Woodville, (wife of John Grey, the son of Sir



Edward). She became the wife of Edward IV, on John's death.

The red brick gatehouse in the picture above, is one of England's earliest brick buildings. The house probably incorporates much earlier remains, and blackened roof timbers indicated a great hall. The house decayed and fell into disrepair over a long period until it was purchased in 2009. This led to an historical survey being undertaken and part of the medieval wall at the rear of the hall indicated that there may be more below ground.

The rebuilding of a collapsed churchyard wall meant the below ground potential became clear and led Peter Liddle to contact the Time Team and suggest the site be the subject of a Time Team excavation, which happened in 2010 and led to further understanding of the history of the last 600 years of Groby Old Hall.



Angela Thomas

Desford Personalities of the past (from Caroline Wessel)

CECIL J.W. LANE (1890-1937)

The name 'Lane' may not be familiar to many people in Desford; but the Desford Industrial School (est. 1881, closed 1978), the reform institution for 'naughty boys' up on the hill near Botcheston, certainly is. Cecil Lane was its Headmaster from 1916 till 1937 and is noted for his success in changing the very harsh (and even cruel by today's standards) regime to a softer, more caring one. He came from a family of farmers near Melton and served in the Royal Garrison Artillery during WW1, then became a teacher in Leicester.



In Mr Lane's time at the Industrial School, Mr Sydney Gimson was its Chairman of Governors and the two men formed a close friendship. Sydney Gimson and his brother were prime movers in the Leicester Secular Society and Sydney's country cottage, Stoneywell in Charnwood Forest, is now a National Trust property open to the public.

The above photographs show *Cecil Lane*.

The boys at the Industrial School were mainly from the inner cities and had become involved in petty crime in order to survive - victims of society, rather than wicked. At Desford all the boys were taught a trade or craft, such as tailor, shoemaker, or baker, and worked on the School Farm, which would fit them to earn a decent living in adult life. Cecil Lane changed the name to Desford Boys' School, he introduced a prefectorial system, privilege walks, allotments for boys, summer camps away, and a house system with housemasters acting as 'fathers'. He raised the School's sports and athletics to a high standard and his obituary stated that 'under Mr Lane's headmastership Desford School achieved marked success in the special work for which the school was designed. The School is run generally on what might be called public school lines. The boys, given some measure of responsibility and trained to cultivate and rely on esprit de corps in securing the happiest forms of discipline, responded readily to these standards. Thus, Mr Lane commanded both the respect and confidence of the boys, and the results of the Desford training have been shown in the subsequent careers of the scholars.'



Desford Boys School in 2010

Cecil's wife, Dora, died in 1936 from septicaemia, leaving a small daughter, Jo. But Cecil remarried the following year when twenty-three boys from the Boys School sang in the choir. His bride was Sydney Gimson's cousin, Norah, who had been acting as his housekeeper and companion. However, on Cecil and Norah's honeymoon in Scotland he was taken suddenly ill in Glasgow and died there – only eleven days after the marriage. Norah and Cecil's little daughter were looked after by the Gimson family.

The School greatly mourned the loss of a much loved and respected headmaster. Thanks to Mrs Janet Charles for family details. She lived in Desford in the 1950s and is the granddaughter of Cecil Lane. *Sydney Gimson*



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

Common Land

A poem that refers to the 18th and 19th century Enclosure Acts, which took away from the poorest members of the community and distributed amongst the wealthiest.

*'Prison awaits the man or woman
Who steals the Goose from off the Common?
But leaves the greater Felon loose
Who steals the Common from the Goose?'*

Cottages on Main Street, Desford

Where the War Memorial now stands used to house cottages. It is said that they belonged to the Chamberlains, whose large residence stood almost opposite, and that they housed their old servants in them. Bessie Bott and Jack Bent lived there at one time. The Relieving Officer used Bessie Bott's cottage as his headquarters, distributing loaves and two shilling pieces to the poor.

Cottages opposite Manor Farm, High Street, Desford

These were timber-framed and thatched and were demolished sometime after 1929. They belonged to the family of John Moss, who had a carpenter's business. His workshop was in one of the cottages, where he also made wooden coffins. In one cottage a dear old soul called Mrs Greenman lived - she always had a tortoiseshell cat!

Important Reminders

- . Tuesday September 17th, 2019: A tale of wealth, separation, murder and a hanging. The story of Staunton Harold Hall.
- . Tuesday November 19th 2019: The work of the Leicester Victorian Society by Peter Ellis