

Dereham Antiquarian Society: Chairman's annual report for 2018

This has been an extremely busy year for your committee, and we have tried to keep you informed of events through the pages of our Newsletter produced quarterly by Ken Hawkins, our most efficient Editor. To give you some idea how busy we have been, committee members have been keeping logs of the number of hours devoted to the Society. For 2018 that came to 2,221.5 hours, although I am advised that is probably an underestimate.

Archive Centre The relocation in 2018 of the society's collections from Rashes Green to the new Dereham Archive Centre upstairs in the Assembly Rooms was a monumental task which was achieved thanks to the hard work of many volunteers over many years. Rationalisation of the collection was completed in 2017, when a total of 497 objects were removed either because they were duplicates or because they did not meet the criteria set by our Collections Development Policy. Wherever possible those items were transferred to other museums. Our work on the Archive has been greatly supported by Megan Dennis, our museums mentor, and the rationalisation process followed the strict guidelines set by Arts Council, England. (*A full report by Natalie Small on the relocation is attached.*)

The final operation of condensing the collections and preparing them for the move was brilliantly masterminded by Natalie, while *Sue and Julian Walker White* were both particularly helpful in the lead up to the move. When all was ready the great move was performed in one day on 26th February without a hitch by Hadley and Ottaway Ltd, the removals specialists. It was astonishing that with military precision every box fitted exactly where it was meant to go in its new location! On top of that we took in 50+ extra bound volumes of the Dereham and Fakenham Times.

We are still short of somewhere to house the old wooden Dereham Town Sign, so as an emergency measure it has been safely stored in my farm shed in the hope that a more permanent home can be found. Similarly, the Hobbies Collection trailer now stands in my garage. We clearly need more storage space.

To assist with the move Breckland Council generously provided a grant of £5,000. While most of this has been spent on the archive moving costs, the remaining £1,000 has been ring-fenced for any remaining archive expenses.

We now have in place a Three-year Forward Plan for the Archive which will ensure continuous improvement in the management of the collections and in the development of the skills of our volunteers. It is good to report that we were able to assist several local groups and individuals with research for their WW1 armistice exhibitions.

The museum When Bishop Bonner's Cottages closed for the winter our museum team stripped out the displays to allow the town council's contractors to carry out repairs to the plasterwork and to re-open the north chimney which we hope will alleviate some of the damp problems. At the time of writing we are waiting for the work to be completed so that almost entirely fresh displays can be assembled for the reopening in May. Pride of place in the first room will be a new display of a part of our large collection of Metamec clocks. Other themes will be Dereham shops and businesses, domestic life in Dereham in the twentieth century, the history of the cottages and a continuation of the very popular Hobbies exhibition originally assembled by Sue Walker White.

I am pleased to say that the museum re-opening ceremony will be performed on 4th May at 1.30pm by the Mayor, Hilary Bushell. You are all welcome to attend.

Discussions about creating a Heritage Centre We are having very preliminary discussions with the Town Council and with the Parochial Church Council about the possibility of a new Heritage Centre on the site of the landscaped area of paving on the end of Bishop Bonner's

Cottages. But it is important to emphasise that this is all very preliminary, and as a first step we would need an architect's feasibility study for which funds still have to be raised.

World War One Centenary Exhibition in Dereham windmill For the autumn some members mounted a pictorial exhibition in Dereham windmill to commemorate the armistice. The exhibition included many photos taken at the time by Herbert Cave who had his photographic studios at the time in Church Street.

Meetings of the society During 2018 we have had our regular monthly meetings of the society with a variety of excellent talks arranged by Natalie Small. The programme for the coming year has been kindly organised by Stef Spooner. If members do have suggestions for subjects for the 2020 season, please have a word with Stef.

Committee changes It is sad to announce that our hard-working Secretary, *Amanda Lovejoy*, has decided that she has to stand down. We wish her well, and she leaves with the committee expressing enormous thanks for all she has done over the past couple of years. For a while we had the benefit of *Stef Spooner* as a co-opted committee member, but she has had to stand down for family reasons. Nevertheless, she has continued to organise our monthly programme of talks, which have been excellent. With *Ken Hawkins* taking on the role of Treasurer, *Catherine Hawkins* has kindly agreed to be Volunteer Co-ordinator for the coming season. Very recently our committee has been boosted by the co-option of *Trevor Ogden*, a retired scientist, who has already brought wisdom to our discussions. We would like to acknowledge *Amanda Lovejoy*, *Stef Spooner*, *Dinah Reed*, *Susan Proudfoot*, *Pat Boatwright* and *Trevor Ogden* for their dedication to creating exciting new displays for the 2019 season.

We are always looking out for more volunteers to spread the load, and we hope some of you may feel able to come forward if you have a skill you would like to contribute.

AGM PROPOSALS

At the AGM there are two constitutional proposals before you:

A change of name A key proposal is a change of name from the "Dereham Antiquarian Society" to the "Dereham Heritage Trust". An organisation's name is the label by which it is recognised, and we want to be identified and recognised as an active forward-looking body promoting our heritage in a modern and expanding Dereham. This proposal has the unanimous and enthusiastic support of the committee, and we hope you will all give it your full approval.

Changes to the constitution Linked to that, we are proposing some minor changes to the constitution which are intended to tidy and clarify current arrangements without making any significant difference to the way we operate. The new paragraph 8 on copyright might create some interest. This is to ensure that when text is written for the Society, such as for museum labels or for short articles for newsletters, those labels or newsletters can remain under the control of the Society. Where more substantial articles or booklets are contemplated, separate copyright arrangements would anyway need to be agreed in advance.

Increased subscriptions These proposals are very necessary to ensure that the Society does not run at a loss each year, as it has recently.

Peter Wade-Martins, Chair
15 January 2019