

The Discoverer

Downham Market & District Heritage Society

Reg Charity No 1154267

Heritage Open Days 2018 Present: **Extraordinary Women**

To tie in with the National Trust organised Heritage Open Days, the theme for which in 2018 is “Extraordinary Women across the country past and present”, Discover Downham is looking to celebrate “Extraordinary Women” who live in our area at an event to be held in September.

If you know of someone who you feel is worthy or recognition because of their charitable work, their contribution to the community or perhaps because of the devotion and care they give to their relatives or for any other reason you feel is worthy please let us know at info@discoverdownham.org.uk and we will send you a nomination form.

The closing date for nominations is 31st May 2018

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Message From The Trustees

Happy New Year to all our Visitors, Members, Volunteers and Trustees.

Discover Downham opened in March 2016, thanks to the hard work and dedication of members who managed to secure the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Wren grants that enabled the transformation of the Old Fire Station into a contemporary centre which now offers history, artefacts, a warm welcome and a cup of tea!

The task the Trustees now have is to sustain Discover Downham and prepare it for a life of self-sufficiency. The HLF monitor the centres progress to ensure that their money is being spent on meeting the targets and requirements set out by them when they awarded the funds. Meeting these targets is no easy task, but with some fresh new

Trustees on board, the latest being Emily (Cissy) Lightfoot who has replaced Mike Pelling, and with the help of our members, we are confident that, whilst there are some targets that will never be met, we can achieve something that the HLF will be happy with..

Hitting the ground running, the Trustees are looking into many ways to sustain the centre, including:

Easing the storage problem in the Centre. Our Archive room has filled up fast and to hire additional space will be costly, so we are investigating solutions for that.

Changing the balance of the displays at Discover Downham so that a higher proportion of them are "interactive", thus making them much more interesting for our younger visitors.

Ensuring that Discover Downham continues to be a success well into the future. Including the continued use as a community hub.

Expanding our activities into other parts of the "Clackclose Hundred"

We still anticipate that self-sufficiency will be very difficult on an on-going basis and so we are preparing ourselves to re-enter the "grant market" once the HLF money runs out. In this respect we are advised that if we are "working towards accreditation as a museum" this will open many more funding opportunities so we are also exploring this opportunity.

Many Thanks

The Trustees.



Around the Web

Heritage and other news

A new campaign has been launched, imaginatively called “Love West Norfolk”! The article on the Council website (<https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk>) describes it as “A new campaign celebrating all that West Norfolk has to offer has launched. ‘Love West Norfolk’ aims to create pride and aspiration within the local area and give people a voice on what they believe makes the area so special.” So now you know. If you use Twitter, the #lovewestnorfolk is the place to go.

Also spotted was the announcement of the Local Hero Awards for West Norfolk. More details at www.discoverkingslynn.com

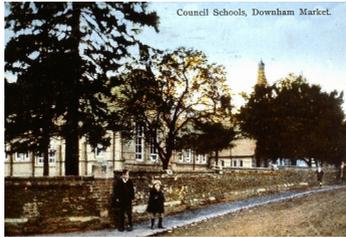
Quietly excited about the Museums and Heritage Show which will be held on 16th and 17th May 2018 at Olympia. The Trustees are looking at what’s at the show to see whether there will be any benefit to be gained by attending. More details on that to follow in the forthcoming Volunteer newsletter. More information at: show.museumsandheritage.com

Found on the West Norfolk & King’s Lynn Archaeological Society website are details of their Lectures in 2018. How about a bit of “The Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic of West Norfolk in context”? That lecture by Lawrence Billington is on Tuesday 20th February 2018. More details at <http://wnklas.greyhawk.org.uk>.

If you spot anything on the web, please email links to



Paradise Road



Council School, Paradise Road, Downham Market.

A Hidden Memorial

An out-of-the-way war memorial can be seen in the shape of a metal plaque fixed to the garden wall of the Lodge, 62, Paradise Road, which states that the grass verge and shrubs in front of the plaque were planted in memory of all POW's held in the Far east from 1942 to 1945, but particularly William 'Bill' Nelson (1911-1984). Bill Nelson married Daisy F Howell at Southwark, London in 1934 and joined the Norfolk Constabulary in October 1935. After initial training, he was posted to Downham Market, but was transferred to Grimston in May 1936.

In 1939, he was living at the Police House in Chedgrave, Loddon, but must have soon joined the Army as Corporal W Nelson was one of the NCO's of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment who was drafted into the 4th Battalion in October 1939 to assist with the training of this newly-mobilised Territorial Army formation

He landed at Singapore on 29th January 1942 but was only in action for just over a fortnight before being ordered to surrender on 15th February; by this time it had lost 92 men killed and 65 missing. According to military records, Bill Nelson, now a Company Sergeant Major, was held at Camp 40 in Thailand, and was not freed until 20th September 1945. After resuming his Police career, he retired in 1971 with the rank of Chief Inspector. The plaque in Paradise Road was dedicated by the Nelson family on 28th April 2002, with the support of the local branch of the Royal British Legion.



Paradise Road



Brewery in Paradise Road was Shearwoods Motorcycles

A Tragic Trio.

The attendance register of the Girl's School in Paradise Road for the period 1896 1919 contains a column headed "Reason for Leaving". Three pupils share the melancholy distinction of the entry against their name reading "Dead" or "Deceased" and the circumstances of their death is covered in the case of two of them in the local paper. Ruth Bennett (14) of Church Road died in August 1911 after catching a chill during a visit to Hunstanton which developed into pneumonia. Doris Booty (13) also of Church Road, died in October 1919 following an operation. The third death, that of Millie Batson, aged 11, proved harder to research, since there was no matching contemporary news report, and although her last day at school had been 21st January 1910, there was no record of her death that year. The relevant register gave the name of the parent or guardian, in this case Mrs Jackson of Railway road, but there seemed little point in checking the 1911 Census return for someone who had died in 1910. However on consulting the 1911 return for Railway Road, the entry showed that the household of postman William Jackson still included his niece, Mildred Batson, born in Hilgay Fen, together with the tell-tale information that she was consumptive. This would explain the fact that, although she did not die until April 1911, she had been withdrawn from school in January 1910.



Downham Detected

‘Dodman’ Another Local Name

The last surviving structure by the railway station in Downham Market that is connected with the Bennett family business was built in 1878 and was split-up into flats in modern times. A number of circular metal discs covering the bolts at the end of the iron tie-rods can be seen on the outside wall of the building and these are inscribed “A Dodman Lynn”. Alfred Dodman was born in 1832 and set up in a small way as an engineer and iron founder in King’s Lynn in around 1850. By 1881, he employed 56 men and boys. His premises moved three times, finally settling at what became the Highgate Iron Works in the 1870’s. Mr Dodman died at Swaffham in 1908, but his firm, a major employer in King’s Lynn, survived until 1974/5, when it closed.

An Echo of the Bells!

A news item appeared in the national press in December 2016 stating that the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, whose roots go back to 1570, was leaving the premises in the East End which it had occupied since 1738 and may be sold. This is the same company that acquired the Downham Market Bell Foundry in 1832 as part of a programme to buy up it’s provincial competitors and then close them down.



Heritage Humour

**An anonymous plea from a
genealogist in the USA.
(One for the family history
enthusiasts!)**

I went searching for an ancestor. I cannot find him still. He moved around from place to place and did not leave a will.

He married where a courthouse burned. He mended all his fences. He avoided any man who came to take the census.

He always kept his luggage packed, this man who had no fame. And every 20 years or so, this rascal changed his name.

His parents were from Europe; they could be on some list of passengers to the USA, but somehow they got missed.

No one else around the world is searching for this man so, I play geneasolitaire to find him if I can.

I'm told he's buried in a plot, with gravestone he was blessed; but weather took the inscription, and vandals took the rest.

He died before the county clerks decided to keep records, no family Bible has emerged in spite of all my efforts.

To top it off, this ancestor, who's caused me many groans; just to give me one more pain, betrothed a girl named Jones!

(Extracted from a copy of the 'Fenland Family History Society' magazine – Thanks) www.fenlandfhs.org.uk

The Volunteers at Discover Downham. By Colin Bulley

How did we become members, and subsequently volunteers? Press ganged by the one and only Nigel Brunn. My wife and I became members without knowing. We came into the old centre as visitors, and left as members. What a membership secretary he was. Membership must have increased tenfold during his tenure.

I turned up at the Tuesday morning Work Party, as suggested by Nigel, and I've been attending almost continuously since. I was introduced to Chairman Mao... sorry, Dave 'The Voice' Flower, Jess, his long suffering wife, Heinz, our answer to the paparazzi with his box brownie camera, John Hobbs with his jokes and wife Leslie. There's Kathleen 'Have you got a job' Wiseman. Kathleen tried her best to keep us gainfully employed, and we soon learned to look busy, and carry pieces of paper every time we moved, mumbling, "I gotta a job." I have the feeling that if we didn't do

our work, she would give us lines to write out!

I soon realised that as a group we seemed to have a weird sense of humour, despite Chairman Mao...Dave, bursting into song or whistling every five minutes. We all wished that Jess would stop feeding him bird seed. Thinking about it, it was a good job we did have a good sense of humour!

After a huge amount of work by the Chairman and his Committee, Lottery financing was secured, and we moved to the Old Fire Station. A very good sense of humour was required at first. I was wisely absent for a great deal of time during the transition from derelict Fire Station to the present fantastic building. The volunteers worked tirelessly in the old building which was devoid of heating. I suggested cuddling together to generate heat but was quickly vetoed by all. It was a hard time, with fund raising the most important function.

Because of the hard work, led by Chairman Mao...Dave, Kathleen, Christine Austin and the committee, it was shown that Discover Downham was a worthwhile cause, and Lottery funding was granted.

In the new building, the volunteers soon got back into their stride, and accessions were dealt with expertly and diligently. Christine Leader was now the acknowledged expert at all things coming into the centre. Alas, storage space was limited, and items had to be carefully considered before acceptance. Many old items that were not relevant to Downham and District had to be discarded or returned to owners. I was returned to my wife twice!! The volunteer group has grown, to include Marian the Laptop. Lin, Kathleen's lady in waiting. Vicky, Christine Leader's sidekick. Bob, assistant to Heinz the Box Brownie operator. Les, Christine Brunn's apprentice.

Volunteers at Discover Downham continued...

Margaret the artefacts putter awayer. Jean an ace washer upper - we've shared many a delightfully soapy basin. On coffee mornings that is! Then there is Roger, news paper cutter upper, under training from Jess. Christine Brunn ace computer operator and great cake maker.. Nigel the man who can do anything, and arranges the speakers for the monthly talks. Colin, that's me, a general dogs' body and accessionistso. I have found that no matter how many times I set up a table to work on, someone takes it! Even the chair goes missing. I end up in a corner using an old school desk away from the other workers. I am now convinced that they are trying to tell me something. This is despite my wife Sylvie making me shower every birthday.

As a team, you cannot get better. We laugh a fair amount, and at coffee time we sit in a circle, hold hands,

and try to contact the living, and new volunteers.

We have created a happy and pleasant working environment where the necessary work is completed, at least to our satisfaction. Everyone is helpful, and when complicated and tiresome paperwork finds its way to be accessed, it is always greeted with a smile and universally slated by us all! The normal question is "Who accepted this load of rubbish?" Alas it still has to be written up on the accession form and register.

We are a mixture of personalities, from the angelic to the not so angelic. If we were all the same, the working party would be a nightmare. As it is, we thoroughly enjoy our working party mornings. We have even been known to acknowledge the existence of the odd Trustee. (And they are odd!)

There is always room for more volunteers, so if you are of an unsound mind, like to laugh, and have a few hours

to spare, the Discover Downham work party is the place to be. You will have to supply your own straight jacket. All of ours are in use.

I cannot leave out the coffee morning volunteers. This is a small band of members who help Jess and Christine B. It is table service, with the waitresses, including my wife Sylvie, wearing white aprons. I am sure they are meant to wear some clothes as well suspender belts! I think they are exhibitionists. But who cares...it's all to boost funds. Gerry Ryan, our treasurer, Jean and I share the washing up. We are so good that we have been offered Uni places to read comics. If you have never attended a coffee morning, you should give it a try. The homemade cakes are a speciality of the house.

You don't have to be mad to be a volunteer, but it certainly helps.

Colin Bulley. Oxford.
Reading Comics.



Can You Help?

A NEW regular feature, offering space for those who have come across a stumbling block in their research, and want to reach out to our readers for assistance. Please email your requests to cissy@sewengland.co.uk (keeping them brief and concise please)

In the meantime, here's a request from our own Dave Flower:

'Ravens Row' a second request!

Discover Downham is situated in a building that has previously been a Fire station; Yes, I am aware that you all know that but, did you know that before that it was a row of cottages called 'Ravens Row'? In order to complete some research I am seeking any photographs that may be available of the cottages before they were converted in to a Fire Station. *(c1936!)* If anyone has or knows where I can access any pictures of the cottages please let me know. I am happy to copy same and return any original. Thanks:- Dave Flower 01366 388887.



Website: www.discoverdownham.org.uk

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Telephone: 01366 384428

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Find us on Facebook: Discover Downham Heritage and
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Education Officer: Meg Barclay

Trustees: Alan Pickering, Gerry Ryan,
Andrew Stevenson, Jackie Westrop, Anne Guymer,
Emily Lightfoot (Cissy)



Heritage Monthly Talks

**Talks start at 7.30pm (doors open 7.15pm)
Refreshments served, tickets on the door £4
non members & £3 for members of DMDHS**

Coffee Mornings

10am – 12pm

23 February
2018

30 March 2018

27 April 2018

25 May 2018

29 June 2018

27 July 2018

31 August 2018

28 September
2018

26 October 2018

30 November
2018

14 December
2018

21 February 2018 Country Bumpkins by
Peter Thorpe

21 March 2018 Vanishing Cambridgeshire by
Mike Petty

18 April 2018 Edith Cavell by Eric Somerville

16 May 2018 Life as a Royal Vicar by
David Fleming

20 June 2018 Rural Victorian Women by
Charlotte Paton

18 July 2018 Shepherding at Ryston by
Phillip Shipp

15 August 2018 Visit to Ely Museum at 2pm with
Ellie Hughes

19 September 2018 Pathfinders Part 2 by
Tim Dutton

17 October 2018 "He took a little custard" by
Mary Mackie

21 November 2018 Working Horses in Norfolk by
Steve Pope

12 December 2018 Well Creek by William Smith