

Dereham Heritage Trust Annual Report 2024

Introduction

This has been a good year for Dereham Heritage Trust thanks to the hard work of the committee members and our band of volunteers. Visits to the Museum have increased, we have enjoyed stimulating monthly talks and our special exhibitions have been much appreciated. We returned to Beeston Ploughshare for an excellent meal together and we continue to work towards gaining a Heritage Centre for Dereham.

Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum

Our visitor numbers increased this year from 619 in 2023 to 942 in 2024. This number consisted of 797 adults, 90 children, 27 members and 28 others. The Museum closed on only one afternoon in the whole season which is a testament to the work of our volunteers. We had particularly successful Heritage Open Days with 489 visitors including 22 children. This year our display, assembled by Jane Heyburn, featured information on shops and businesses in the town in the nineteenth century; we do appreciate her efforts in creating fascinating Museum displays. Upstairs, the north room was arranged with household items as it may have looked when occupied by our last resident, Anne Coe. The mystery box of ten items in the reception room created much interest and led to interesting discussions. One young boy came back a second time! Our special exhibition *Picturing Peace* arranged by Katie Goodman was so moving. It was inspired by the artwork of John Craske and that too prompted thoughtful conversations. All those who filled in feedback forms enjoyed their visit 'a lot' apart from one whose form was incomplete. Our thanks to our willing volunteers and also to Catherine Hawkins who arranges the rota and patiently deals with emergencies re staffing.

2025 is the 80th anniversary of the ending of WWII so we will have a display relating to Dereham and VJ Day in the lower middle room. This is because the majority of Dereham men were enlisted into the Norfolk Regiment and they served in the Far East. It will also incorporate the centenary of Brian Aldiss who also served in the Far East. The larger lower end room will display the history of the Kings Arms from 1758 to its demolition in 1967 and re-birth as Woolworths and now Poundland. Accompanying this will be a display of the history of the Corn Hall and then the building's transition into a cinema and live music venue. All the displays will be supported by items from our archive, photographs and information from the Dereham and Fakenham Times. In addition a booklet outlining the history of the Corn Hall is underway and will 'match' the Assembly Rooms and Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum booklets. The handling box and the mouse trail and activity sheets will remain but will relate to the new displays. The remaining rooms will be as last year with perhaps some repositioning of objects and information.

Dating Bishop Bonner's Cottages

Tree-ring dating combined with a study of oxygen isotopes in the tree rings has enabled us to discover dates of the construction of the cottages. The rings on the mantle beam in the south cottage has given us a felling date of between 1575 and 1600 which is earlier than we expected. The roof truss in the north cottage was felled between 1680 and 1705. We now know that the cottages were built at different times and their preservation is particularly important.

The Archive Centre

The Dereham Archive Centre is completely full. We have bound volumes of the *Dereham and Fakenham Times* which we should love to share more freely with visitors. We are now renting an attic room in Church House by kind permission of Rev Paul Cubitt but we badly need storage for heavier items.

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Museum Acquisitions

We are delighted to have received a good number of items during the year. Space allows us to mention only a few here. These include the 1889 Corn Hall Programme; a WWII Civil Defence medal awarded to H Sampson of Dereham (to be used in 2025 museum display) and an early 20th century photograph by Herbert T Cave of a woman in his studio chair. In addition we have a wonderful fireman's helmet from the mid 20th century, digitalised films from the 1930s, a calendar of F and G Vincent of Swaffham Hill and a group of 20th century printed and photographic postcards. We are grateful for all these donations which have been mentioned in the newsletter: they are a treasure and are ably looked after by Robena Brown.

Assembly Rooms

This year we were able to open the Assembly Rooms in our Heritage Open Days. The ballroom looked so inviting with the display arranged by Jane and Katie. 264 people visited us including 22 children. Many were so glad to see the ballroom for the first time. We appreciate the fact that the Town Council opened this room for us.

Monthly talks

These events are an important part of our organisation. The numbers have steadily increased from 31 attending in January to 46 in September. We ended the year with a joyous Christmas celebration with Chanter's Jigge. The evening was greatly enjoyed by all. Our thanks to our secretary Sue Rockley for arranging these and to Catherine and Ken Hawkins for all their efforts on the evenings. We also appreciate Katie's advertising on Facebook.

Publications

In August we published *The Assembly Rooms, Dereham* by Susanna Wade Martins in time for Heritage Open Days.

Susanna is now working on the text for a booklet about the history of the Corn Hall, in collaboration with Gordon Olley. He will write about the history of the Dereham Cinema which celebrated 100 years in November. This publication is in the early stages but it is hoped the booklet will be ready by next May.

A Heritage Centre for Dereham and the surrounding villages

We feel that Dereham is far behind other market towns with regard to heritage provision. There is strong support for such a centre, as was clear at the meeting we had at the Golf Club in February. We also have a lengthy petition signed by residents of our area. However, we cannot do this without support. We hope to have the Town Council working with us as well as support by an initiative started by George Freeman and Rev Paul Cubitt. We shall continue our efforts as this centre is absolutely vital to preserving our heritage for today and for the future.

Community Engagement

During 2024, Dereham Heritage Trust has conducted a substantial programme of community engagement. Full details are included in the Appendix to this report, but include

- *John Craske: Picturing Peace* - a community art and wellbeing initiative, including an exhibition in the Museum, participation in Dereham Peace Day 2024, a craft and coffee morning at Flow Craft Café and a creative activities day with a coffee and cake sale
- turning Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum purple to support Dereham Cancer Care's *Turn Dereham Purple Day*

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- displaying the winning entries from the Aid Centre's *Poems for Peace* competition in the Museum - an event in the programme for Norfolk Creativity and Wellbeing Week
- taking part in the Dereham Does Pride rainbow trail
- holding a 'Craske Crafternoon' at Dereham Library, opening the door for further history-themed craft activities in 2025
- the arrival at the Museum of Bonnie the Mouse - the first ever children's mascot
- joining Dereham Community Crafters on Dencora's Medieval-themed Family Fun Day, running a charity bake sale raising over £80 for us
- hosting a showcase where local artist Clare Welfare exhibited her stop-motion animation film, *A Saintly Tale*, based on the story of Saint Withburga in Dereham
- joining twenty nine other groups to decorate a Christmas tree with the theme *Christmas Past in Dereham* for the first ever Christmas Tree Festival at St Nicholas' Church

Our sincere thanks go to Katie Goodman for her imaginative displays and workshops. We also appreciate the fact that she has raised the profile of Dereham Heritage Trust on Facebook.

Hilary Williams, Chair

Appendix: *Picturing Peace and Community Engagement*

- In February 2024, the Trust launched its first ever community art and wellbeing initiative, 'John Craske: Picturing Peace', inspired by the story of Dereham's famous fisherman-turned-artist. The project was opened to the local community, asking people of all ages (and all artistic abilities) to create a picture of the place or thing that brings them peace, in the same vein as John Craske and his seascapes. We received over 90 entries, all of which were exhibited in Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum last season, alongside three reproductions of John Craske's work from the Dereham Heritage Trust Collection.
- As part of 'Picturing Peace', the Trust embarked on a series of free community engagement events in the hope of encouraging new audiences to engage with Dereham's history and heritage, whilst also increasing interest in Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum:
 - o On Saturday 24 February, we were delighted to be able to take part in Dereham Peace Day 2024, an initiative of Dereham Aid Centre that encourages the local community to come together in the name of peace. Throughout the day we hosted an art table where people could come along and create a picture of the place that brings them peace. We had 27 people visit us and take part, with all the artworks created at Peace Day featuring in the 'Picturing Peace' museum exhibition.
 - o On Tuesday 19 March, we hosted a fully booked 'Picturing Peace' craft and coffee morning at Flow Craft Café in Dereham, which resulted in another 12 entries for 'Picturing Peace'.
 - o Saturday 6 April saw us put on our own 'Picturing Peace' event. Held in Church House, throughout the course of the day we were joined by 46 families who came to take part in 'Picturing Peace' themed creative activities. The day also featured a donations-only coffee and cake sale (which raised £35) and Beanie's local history book sale, which also proved a big hit.

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- By taking 'Picturing Peace' into the local community, the Trust was able to build valuable relationships with local businesses, charities and community groups, including Dereham Aid Centre, Dereham Cancer Care, and Dereham Does Pride.
 - o In March 2024, we turned Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum purple to show our support for Dereham Cancer Care's 'Turn Dereham Purple Day'.
 - o After being welcomed into the Aid Centre on Peace Day, we reciprocated by displaying the two winning entries from the Centre's 'Poems for Peace' competition in Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum last summer. The collaborative display was an event featured in the programme of events for Norfolk Creativity and Wellbeing Week 2024.
 - o In June 2024, we took part in the Dereham Does Pride rainbow trail and were proud to have a special pride pebble "hidden" in the one of the museum's windows.
- Beyond 'Picturing Peace', the Trust has been able to build a valuable working relationship with Dereham Library. In the 2024 summer holiday, we collaborated with the library on a 'Craske Crafternoon', where each art activity on offer was inspired by the story of Dereham's famous artist. We were joined by 43 children and 23 adults, which made for a wonderfully busy afternoon! The crafternoon was the library's best-attended children's event of 2024 and has opened the door to us hosting various history-themed craft activities at the library in 2025, starting with 'A Very Victorian Valentines' in the February half-term.
- The 2024 summer holiday also saw the arrival of Bishop Bonner's Cottages' newest resident, Bonnie the Mouse. Bonnie has become the museum's first ever children's mascot, with her fellow mice hiding throughout the cottages to make an interactive activity trail for our youngest visitors.
- On Saturday 31 August, we collaborated with the Dereham Community Crafters on Dencora's Medieval-themed Family Fun Day 2024, running a charity bake sale which raised over £80.00 for Dereham Heritage Trust.
- Last November we joined twenty nine other groups in the community to decorate a Christmas tree for the first ever Christmas Tree Festival at St Nicholas' Church. The theme for us was Christmas Past in Dereham. Three members of the committee plus a volunteer had a cold but rewarding morning dressing our tree. Katie Goodman prepared beautiful card decorations of our town in winter plus examples of Victorian Christmas cards in addition to festive decorations from the past. Our tree aroused much interest as visitors examined the cards. The tree did look attractive with candle shaped lights and brightened dark November days. Many thanks to Katie and the other volunteers for their efforts in contributing to the success of the festival.
- On Saturday 14 December the Trust hosted an artist showcase, where local artist Clare Welfare used the museum to exhibit her papercut stop-motion animation film, 'A Saintly Tale', based on the story of Saint Withburga in Dereham. The event was an overwhelming success, with a constant stream of visitors leaving generous donations to support the work of Dereham Heritage Trust. This was the first time the museum building had been used in such a way, but it is hoped similar events will be hosted in the near future.
- Online, awareness of the activities of Dereham Heritage Trust and Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum grew exponentially in 2024, with our Facebook page starting the year with 71 followers and finishing the year with 327!

Dereham Heritage Trust

Accounts 2024

note

Museum and Archive		
2023	Income	2024
778.21	Entrance	1170.57
141.23	Donations	166.21
74.65	Sales	117.75
1000.00	Grant	1700.00
1994.09		3154.53
	Expenditure	
571.00	Utilities and services	438.59
572.54	Maintenance	1706.29
997.00	Purchases and acquisitions	400.73
228.80	IT	19.84
272.00	Subscriptions	299.00
53.07	Publicity	271.83
204.49	Cost of sales	0.00
79.65	Volunteer support and training	70.00
0.00	Admin	0.00
99.31	Insurance	99.31
3077.86		3305.59
-1083.77	Surplus/Deficit	-151.06

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Trust		
2023	Income	2024
732.00	Subscriptions	985.00
460.00	Door takings	819.92
31.46	Sales	56.50
274.22	Donations	927.10
1497.68		2788.52
	Expenditure	
481.00	Hall hire	591.50
340.00	Speakers	713.10
9.00	Refreshments	88.52
186.16	Newsletter	184.73
0.00	Picturing Peace	700.81
1016.16		2278.66
481.52	Surplus/Deficit	509.86

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2023	Summary totals (surplus/deficit)	2024
-1083.77	Museum and Archive	-151.06
481.52	Trust	509.86
-602.25	Surplus/Deficit	358.80

Total funds available

17988.69	Account balance at 1 January	17386.44
-602.25	Plus surplus/less deficit for year	358.80
17386.44	Account balance at 31 December	17745.24

I have examined the above Accounts and the supporting documents provided to me and confirm that they fairly reflect the transactions of the Trust for the year and the position at 31 December 2024

Signed

*signed copy available
for inspection*
(Jim Stebbings)

Date

19 January 2025