



NEWSLETTER

No. 77

WINTER 2014

www.dacorumheritage.org.uk

'SAVING THE 70s' EXHIBITION



We were delighted to have staged our first major exhibition in a shop unit in The Marlowes Shopping Centre, Hemel Hempstead during October. Over the 13 days we had an amazing 4,746 visitors, far more than we ever expected. The project was led by the Association for Suffolk Museums; DHT partnered ten other museums across Suffolk and Hertfordshire. With the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we have staged an exhibition and community events. This project prompted a lot of good memories and proved the 70s wasn't just space hoppers, demonstrations, decimal coins and platform shoes!

We recorded interviews and gathered local memories from this exciting and influential decade. We used these quotes as captions in the display cases and on our display panels. Our exhibition featured images from the Gazette collection, objects and dresses from the 'disco decade' and a living room set up.



"What struck many volunteers who manned the exhibition was the sheer delight taken by the surprising number of visitors who recognised themselves or family members in the Gazette archive photographs."

Through 'Saving the 70s' we forged partnerships with The Marlowes Shopping Centre and Berkhamsted Arts & Crafts (BAC), who were enthusiastic about supporting the project. Together Dacorum Heritage Trust and BAC developed a full day workshop and an after school club, using the 1970s as inspiration. The resulting canvases were colourful and looked brilliant on display at the exhibition.

"I felt so honoured to be asked by Nina to be part of the "Saving the 70s" event. We ran a very successful workshop creating 55 canvases (collage, paint and 3D sculptures) influenced by Nina and her artefacts. Fun was had by all and some amazing artwork was created, as proved by the happy students having the opportunity to be part of such an exciting project/exhibition in Hemel Hempstead. I would be very excited at the idea of working with Nina and the DHT team again and very much look forward to a next time. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be part of something so fun, inspiring and educational." Jo, Berkhamsted Arts & Crafts.

"The exceptionally positive feedback received from the many visitors is a tribute to the hard work and planning put in by Nina."

The shop unit proved that location is everything, over 80% of visitors said that they saw the exhibition as they were passing. The most asked question was - when are we doing the next exhibition in Marlowes - (staffing and funding permitting) watch this space!

Photo: Top – Ribbon cutting by Cllr. Allan Lawson, the Mayor of Dacorum, also pictured Lady Mayoress, Mrs. Wendy Lawson and Nina Glencross (Collections Manager). R Top – Visitors view panel. Centre – Post-it note memories. Bottom – Our 70s lounge.



THE DACORUM HERITAGE TRUST LTD.

Registered Office: **The Museum Store, Clarence Road, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3YL.**

Tel. No. **01442 879525** (answer phone). Or email collectionsmanager@dacorumheritage.org.uk

Company Registered in England No. 2851313. Registered Charity No. 1026161. Accredited Museum No. 1594.

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE 1914

A century on, the Christmas truce of 1914 remains one of the most symbolic events of the Great War: a bright spark of humanity in one of the darkest conflicts of mankind's history.

The following first-hand accounts are extracts of letters from the front, which appeared in the Hertfordshire Mercury and the Gazette from late December 1914 to mid January 1915.

Rifleman C H Brazier, Queen's Westminister's. "We spent our Christmas in the trenches after all and that Christmas Day was a very happy one. On Christmas Eve the Germans entrenched opposite us began calling out to us 'Cigarettes', 'Pudding', 'A Happy Christmas' and 'English – means good', so two of our fellows climbed over the parapet of the trench and went towards the German trenches. Half-way they were met by four Germans, who said they would not shoot on Christmas Day if we did not. They gave our fellows cigars and a bottle of wine and were given a cake and cigarettes. When they came back I went out with some more of our fellows and we were met by about 30 Germans, who seemed to be very nice fellows. I got one of them to write his name and address on a postcard as a souvenir.

All through the night we sang carols to them and they sang to us and one played 'God Save the King' on a mouth organ. On Christmas Day we all got out of the trenches and walked about with the Germans, who, when asked if they were fed up with the war said 'Yes, rather'. They all believed that London had been captured, and that German sentries were outside Buckingham Palace. They are evidently told a lot of rot. We gave them some of our newspapers to convince them. Some of them could speak English fairly well.

Between the trenches there were a lot of dead Germans whom we helped to bury. In one place where the trenches are only 25 yards apart we could see dead Germans half-buried, their legs and gloved hands sticking out of the ground. The trenches in this position are so close that they are called 'The Death Trap', as hundreds have been killed there. A hundred yards or so in the rear of our trenches there were houses that had been shelled. These were explored with some of the regulars and we found old bicycles, top-hats, straw hats, umbrellas etc. We dressed ourselves up in these and went over to the Germans. It seemed so comical to see fellows walking about in top-hats and with umbrellas up. Some rode the bicycles backwards. We had some fine sport and made the Germans laugh. No firing took place on Christmas night and at four the next morning we were relieved by regulars."

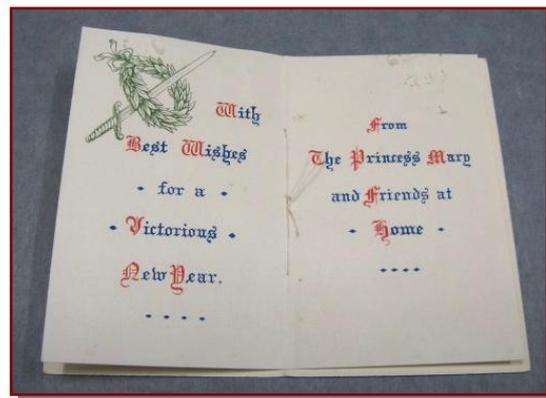
Pte P Kingham, "B" Company, 1st Hertfordshire Regiment, and reporter from the Herts Advertiser. "A few days before Christmas, our regiment was moved up into a fresh region of the firing-line and strangely enough, on Christmas Eve, we moved into the trenches. Compared with the trenches we had previously occupied, these were much more comfortable and on a more elaborate scale. Just about the time when Christmas Eve was merging into Christmas morn, the sound of voices singing was heard, apparently coming from the German trenches opposite, some 400 yards away. Christmas Day passed off very quietly round us, few shots being fired on either side. The artillery was also quiet. The last few days the weather has changed from healthy, keen frosts to frequent rain and strong winds. The trenches became very muddy and slushy, and our appearance now, bespattered in mud from head to foot, has an element of comedy about it."

Pte R Rolph, "B" Company, 1st Herts Regiment addressed to Mr A Gray of St. Albans. "I expect you would like to know how we spent Christmas. It wasn't a very happy one for us, I can tell you, but still we made the best of it. We went into the trenches about 6 o'clock on Christmas morning (two sections went in on Christmas Eve to relieve the Gurkhas) but I missed that as I was in No. 3 Section. For breakfast on Christmas Day we had a little bit of bacon and a little loaf between two of us and a drop of tea. For dinner, we got a tin of beef and vegetable rations and a bit of the 'Daily News and Leader' plum pudding. It was cold but it went down all right. Well we went through the week all right; the Germans didn't worry us much but they did make an attack on our right about ten minutes to twelve on New Year's Eve so we saw the New Year welcomed in, in the trenches."



Private V Batchelor (of Hudnall), "F" Company, 1st Herts Battalion. "We are up to our knees in mud and water, so you may know we look like 'mud-larks'. Well, what sort of a Christmas did you have, better than we did, I hope? I was busy looking through loop holes, watching for Germans to come up. They were busy singing at midnight and playing some sort of whistle; of course, our lot were singing as well. We were only 15 yards away from the Germans in one place, and between 200 - 300 yards away in others. So you see we are not very far from the enemy, and last night we dug a trench a little bit nearer to their lines, so we are getting on. We don't get much rest."

Photos: Top – Inside Christmas greetings card. Lower – Tin inscribed 'Christmas 1914' with an image of Princess Mary, the tin would have contained cigarettes and the card. From Kings Langley Local History & Museum Society collection cared for by DHT.



BLEAK HOUSE AND ABBOTS HILL

It has been thought for many years that novelist Charles Dickens based his novel 'Bleak House' home of Mr Jarndyce upon Abbot's Hill, the house local paper magnate John Dickinson designed and built for himself and his family in 1836. The magnificent house lying upon the hill overlooking his former home Nash Mills House in the valley below on the site of his former home Nash House, the site of his successful paper mill at Nash Mills and which still stands to this day. Various physical features of the house and its location, link closely with the Dickens novel. The famous three gables on Dickinson's house, the fact the house stood on a hill, was near St. Albans, approached up a long sweeping drive and its proximity to Leverstock Green and Adeyfield brick fields.

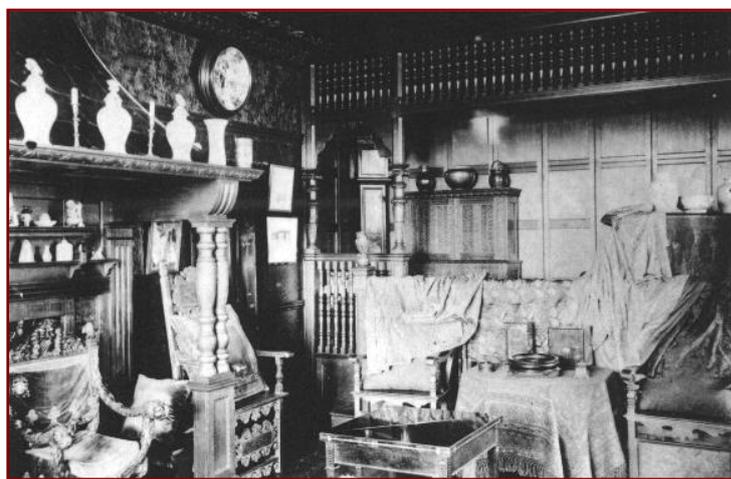


Abbot's Hill is now a notable private girl's school and, whilst employed as Bursar there, I was able to delve further into the supporting evidence for this claim; particularly during the writing of the School's Centenary book and in assisting in the BBC School Report broadcast both in 2012. This coincided with the bicentenary of Dickens' birth and Abbot's Hill School's centenary. This is a link to the BBC radio interview (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/17366936>) with Professor John Drew. In it he mentions that Charles Dickens also tried to set his eldest son Charlie in the paper business, an industry in which John Dickinson was a leading, if not the leading entrepreneur of his age

In 1979 a local paper reported a planning application close to Tile Kiln cottages in Wood Lane End. It was stated these cottages were those mentioned in 'Bleak House'. Two eminent Dickens scholars (Prof. John Drew and Dr. Ruth Richardson) both visited me at the School where I was able to show them the first hand evidence. Both now believe there is considerable credence to the claim based on artefacts and other evidence which both were unaware of until their respective visits.

The School is still in possession of the boxed parchment containing Queen Victoria's seal, which appoints Henry Fielding Dickens, (Dickens' eighth child) as Queen's Counsel in 1892. It is understood this unique document has remained in the strong room at the Abbot's Hill since days of the Dickinson's ownership. How could such an important family document still reside there if the two men and families were not acquainted?

John Dickinson and Charles Dickens had an important mutual acquaintance, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton Bart. who presided over the opening of the Booksellers Provident Retreat, in Kings Langley in July 1846. The Illustrated London News reported that Dickinson (who gave three and a half acres and largely funded the building of the new 'Dickinson House') was also present. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, an author of repute who penned the immortal opening line "*It was a dark and stormy night*" for his novel 'Paul Clifford' was held in such high esteem by Dickens that he named his youngest son, Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens (1852 – 1902) in honour of his friend. Dickens is known to have participated in private



theatrical performances at Bulwer-Lytton's home at Knebworth House. The Guild of Literature and Art was hatched during such a visit; Dickens dedicated 'Bleak House' "*as friendly union to my companions in the Guild of Literature and Art*". Yet another coincidence?

The fact Dickinson moved in literary circles can be evidenced on p.101 'Endless Web' by Joan Evans, which states: In February 1859, John Evans writes '*On Wednesday I went up to dine in Brook Street (John Dickinson's London home) with a literary party... There were twelve of us – Thackeray, Mulready, Leech, Marochetti, Bell, Pye the Engraver, Van Voorst, Dr. Percy Laurence, John and I besides the uncle.*' Footnote 2 on the same page states: "*On 21 December 1863 Thackeray again dined with John Dickinson; three days later he was found dead in bed*". One hopes, not as a result of anything he ate or drank on the occasion.

It is believed that Dickinson and Dickens could easily have known each other through John Leech, the caricaturist, who illustrated 'A Christmas Carol'.

Well are you convinced? Too much of a coincidence? Personally I think not, a fact supported by two eminent Dickens' scholars. However, any more information on the subject would be appreciated by DHT or myself. It is known Dickens travelled by train to Birmingham, from which one still gets a wonderful view of the old house perched atop 'Bleak Hill'.

Mark Stephens, Dacorum Heritage Trust Volunteer



Photos: Left Top – Exterior of Abbot's Hill. Right – John Dickinson's study, now used as a staff room. Left Bottom – Parchment relating to Henry Fielding Dickens QC, dated 1892.

ERIC JOHN HOLLAND 1928 - 2014

Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society (BLH&MS) and Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society lost another stalwart of Berkhamsted's heritage scene when Eric Holland passed away on 21st August at Watford General Hospital. Eric was a Londoner who came to Berkhamsted as an evacuee, with his classmates from Hampstead. He lived with a family in Castle Street. Berkhamsted became his home, he joined St. Peter's Church choir and was apprenticed as a compositor at Clunbury Press.



Eric was a modest man with a dry sense of humour, which his daughter tells me he kept almost to the end. His contribution to Berkhamsted's historical and archaeological scene was immense. He was instrumental in choosing topics and photographs for a number of exhibitions. When the BLH&MS was successful in setting up the Castle Visitor Room, Eric provided guided tours and took accompanying photographs, for the Castle booklet. Eric was also prominent in contributing to the Old Buildings Sub-Committee in the 1970s and the Historic Gardens Group in the 1990s. It was appropriate that he was the Society's President in 2010, the society's 60th anniversary.

Over the years Eric had done an enormous amount of work including: photographing monuments, brasses and inscriptions at St. Peter' Church and Rectory Lane Cemetery. He also recorded his evacuee memories, carried out a great deal of research, compiled photographic records of the area, copied older images, made reports on many local buildings, produced a town history walk and transcribed important documents. Added to all that are the reports relating to Eric's love of archaeology.

In the 1970s when the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society was founded, Eric was one of the first to join and he played a prominent part in many excavations including Cow Roast Roman Villa and the Iron Age settlement at Bridgewater School.

Although in recent years he was no longer an active member of either society, his legacy remains in the archives of both societies' collections.

Jenny Sherwood, Chair of Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society

Eric was one of the Trust's original volunteers, who helped to set up The Museum Store, more than twenty years ago. He will be greatly missed and fondly remembered by everyone at Dacorum Heritage Trust.

Photos: Eric working at The Museum Store c. 2003.

CURATOR'S CORNER



'Saving the 70s' 2015 Calendar. As part of our exhibition we produced a 70s themed calendar with lots of local images – you may be in one of them!

We have a few left after our exhibition, they would make lovely Christmas gifts at a reduced price of £5.50 each or two for £10.00 (+P&P £1.50).

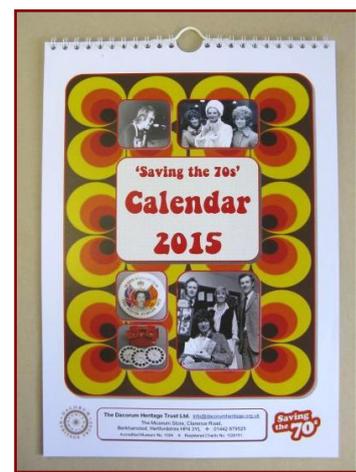
Available from The Museum Store; cheques payable to

The Dacorum Heritage Trust Ltd.

We wish you a very Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year

The Museum Store is open by appointment only. For information or enquiries please contact Nina Glencross (Collections Manager) info@dacorumheritage.org.uk

Contact the editor to join our newsletter emailing list; inline with the Data Protection Act your details will remain confidential.



EDITOR: Pam Gasking
office@dacorumheritage.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter @DacorumHeritage

The accuracy of the content is the responsibility of the author.

Deadline: for next issue is 9th February.



Funded by
**DACORUM
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**