



Chesterfield & District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER May/June 2018



The Brontes in Derbyshire

Marjorie Dunn

Tuesday 15th May 7:30pm. United Reformed Church. Rose Hill

The Treasures of Ashbourne

A talk by John Titterton

June 19th 2018

Chesterfield's Historic Churches and Chapels

A talk by Janet Murphy

July 17th 2018

Notes of a Barlow Well Dresser by Christine Thomason

There are three wells in Barlow, the Main Well, the 'Small Well' at the side of the Methodist Chapel, and Valley Rise Well in the centre of the village, near to The Tickled Trout. As one of the well dressers of the Barlow 'Pump' or Main Well I would like to share with you some photographs of the well which we have dressed over recent years. I personally began as a helper in 2009 when the subject was the *Origin of Life*.



This well is dressed and opened for public viewing on the Wednesday after the second Sunday in August. The well is situated opposite the Peacock Public House / Hotel as you enter Barlow from the Newbold direction. This well has been dressed for over 300 years.

In the weeks prior to the well dressing we have several meetings to decide the subject of the year's well dressing and how we are going to attain it. The ideas and pictures get chopped and changed until we arrive at a mutual consensus. We have a lot of laughs throughout this process although at the same time remembering the seriousness of our objective.



The tradition of this particular well is to use whole flower heads unlike other well dressings which use petals. We continue to use the limited scope of colours and plants which are locally sourced. We have to keep this in mind when the picture is being designed. Because the plants are locally sourced, more are readily available if needed. The brighter colours are left until last to make sure the vibrancy of the scheme will last for the whole week.

We can use different formats for our pictures for example one large picture at the back with two smaller side panels or we can put in curved corner panels to make one semi-circular picture. With this method, perspective has to be taken into consideration so that everything looks balanced when viewed from the front or side. The whole area to be covered in 16 ft x 4ft with an apex at the back.

To give you an idea of what is involved in getting the well ready here's what has to be done. FRIDAY –One and a half weeks prior to opening the clay is puddled; TUESDAY following – heather and sphagnum moss are gathered; WEDNESDAY moss and silver moss are gathered; THURSDAY and FRIDAY – the structure of the panels around the well is erected, the poles are dressed with heather and the clay is put into the panels; SATURDAY – the paper drawing of the picture is placed in situ and the outlines are 'barked out' and plants are gathered; SUNDAY, MONDAY, TUESDAY – The wells are dressed and finished with mossing the surrounds and edges.

To begin with we use larch bark to outline the main subject matter. This is a traditional method as larch bark is durable and long lasting. Certain of the dressers have their own bark which we all use. When the outline is complete the panels are designated to particular people, two to the left, two to the right and three or four to work on the centre panel.



The space is quite tight and, working in such close proximity, it's a good job we all have a good sense of humour as towards the end of each day we're all getting pretty worn out. Depending upon the complexity of the format we can be working twelve to fifteen hours a day, but we do try to keep this to a minimum as needless to say we can't all last that long.

A certain amount of creativity is involved but we have every faith in our illustrator and although sometimes certain things have to be tweaked when the overall effect comes into being we hope we have done a good job which the visitors will appreciate and enjoy.

Not only do we 'paint' a picture in flower heads, there are also the uprights on either side which include the date, the title board above and a shield with a representative motif for the particular year, which has to be attached from above.

Scaffolding is erected to reach the height needed. One member of our crew works on the name as he has worked as a dresser from being a child, as has his friend who works alongside us as a dresser.

When all this is complete, on the Wednesday morning either before or during the church service depending upon who is attending at 7:30 in the morning, the tarpaulin is removed which has been protecting us from the public gaze and the elements, the scaffolding taken down, the pump basin and two metal containers filled with water, and barriers are erected with collecting boxes attached. All donations go to local charities chosen by the trustees, and a board displaying these are on show at the well. Now we are ready for visitors.

The well is timed to be open to the public at 9 am on the Wednesday morning, after the church service at St Lawrence's across the road. There is a flower festival open in church during the week, a carnival on the Saturday and a fairground which opens after the blessing of the wells after a service on the Wednesday evening. The well dressing procession begins at the Main Well opposite the church and parades through Barlow accompanied by a brass band and local clergy along with the carnival queen and attendants. Visitors can join the parade and follow it through the village.

Leaflets about Barlow well dressings may be obtained along with photographs from earlier well dressings from the attendant at the Main Well. The well is not manned continually but we try to have someone in attendance until 9pm each night. For more information and photographs of earlier well dressings visit our website www.barlowwell.dressing.co.uk

This year's well dressings last from 15 – 22 August, with the carnival on the Saturday 18th and the parade at 2pm.

N.B. If you are reading this in black and white, you are reminded that the colour version is on the website.



Summer Meetings

The June meeting is the first of the summer meetings. After a further consultation it has been decided that the December meeting will continue (the attraction being the mince pies!) and there will be no meeting in January.

New Cestrefeld Journal

The latest issue of the society's journal will be available at the May meeting. It is free to members but for non-members the cost is £3.50. The price has increased since last year but there are an additional eight pages. The subjects include Archdeacon Clayton, Frederick Clench, the Jones sisters, the Slack family, the Whittington Tramway and Chesterfield Borough Police 1836-1892. Copies will also be available at the CADLHS stand at the

Chesterfield Family History, Local History, Heritage and Crafts Event

Proact Stadium on May 19th from 10am until 4pm.

Did you know that?

The Representation of the People Act of 1918 has been in the news recently because it gave the vote to women over the age of 30, but did you know that some seats were redistributed to industrial towns and all polls were to be held on the same day. It also removed the stipulation that the voters should have lived in the country for the previous 12 months, which would have deprived men who had been serving in the armed forces of the vote.