



Chesterfield & District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER July 2023

August 21st

**Tread a Walk along the River
Hipper**

Richard Dillon

An Illustrated walk tracing the course of the River Hipper from its source on Beeley Moor to its confluence with the Rother in Spital.

September 18th

**Spireites from Saltergate to Sheffield
Road, a Chesterfield FC Chronicle**

Phil Tooley

Meetings are held at the St Thomas' Centre, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield S40 3AW
starting at 7:30pm Members free, Visitors £3

Chesterfield Medieval Market 25th July 2023 10am – 4pm

Visit our stall in the Market Place where you will be able to see and purchase our publications and purchase second hand books. For further information about what else is happening see <https://www.chesterfield.co.uk/events/chesterfield-medieval-fun-day/>.

Cestrefeld Journal Issue number 8 2023 and number 9 2024

The Journal will be available at the Medieval Market. The price is £3 for members and £7 for non-members. Also it is time for you to be thinking about articles for next year's Journal

Brian Smith

We were sorry to hear of the death of Brian Smith at the age of 81. Brian joined the Society in the early days when it met upstairs in the Library. In January 1992 a large exhibition was held in the Winding Wheel. Brian was one of the main organisers and very helpful when getting the displays and stands ready before opening to the public. The event drew a large crowd and many new members. Although he always quiet he was a help at meetings. He would often provide new information especially industrial history of Chesterfield and

the wider area. He produced History Paper 21 on the Calow Iron works as well as History Paper 17 about Motor Omnibuses In Chesterfield & District 1912-1950. Brian attended Society meetings regularly until last year.

The Donkey Racecourse Part 1

Do you remember the Donkey Racecourse? Where was it, how did it get its name and is it still in existence?

Recently someone asked me where the Donkey Racecourse was. A lady overhearing our conversation volunteered the information that it was near the Olde House on Loundsley Green Road and it went towards Holmebrook Valley Park in the west and in the other direction south easterly to Ashgate Road.

A friend sent me an item from a Newbold Church magazine in 2003.



In the late summer local people would go blackberrying, usually on Donkey Racecourse, which stretched from a point just through a stile at the side of the Nags Head at the top of Newbold Village, over towards Ashgate in the South easterly direction and Cutthorpe to the North West. The official title of the race meetings was the Barlow Hunt Point-to-Point Races, but the knowledgeable folk in the district, who had been weaned on the first class horses that ran in the Chesterfield Races, the horses that ran in the Point-to-Point races were little better than donkeys, hence the derogatory term Donkey Racecourse. Sadly the Racecourse no longer exists, for it has been obliterated by a modern housing estate, but in those days it was a rustic haven, where you could ramble for mile upon mile. (Photograph courtesy Chesterfield Local Studies Library)

Until the 1960s this was a farming area and the explanation for the name sounds feasible as horses ridden in point-to-point races are more likely to be working horses rather than the sprinters taking part in the Chesterfield Races. The Point-to-Point races were held between 1923 and 1939, apart from 1924 when they were abandoned because of a foot and mouth outbreak. However the name is older than that. A report in the *Derbyshire Times* 10 May 1893 reported a court case involving gambling on the Donkey Racecourse on Sunday afternoons.

Does the site still exist? The area was subjected to opencast coal mining so there is no trace of the racecourse. The Holmebrook Valley Park was established and opened in 1985. However the Holmebrook Valley Trail may follow the line of the racecourse alongside the Holme Brook.

Chesterfield Settlement Part 2

The period between the wars was possibly the most successful for the Settlement. In 1922 a report on the work of the Settlement was produced covering the three years after the end of the war. Miss Pattinson and Miss Richardson left the Settlement in 1919. The new warden was Miss Willoughby. There was close cooperation with the work of the Workers' Educational Association (whose headquarters were at the Settlement) and classes for unemployed women and girls were begun. A school for handicapped children was organised under the leadership of Greta Walker and by 1924 more than 200 children had received training there. There were Girl Guides and Brownies, boy and girl clubs, a married women's club, Saturday play hours for tiny children were run, and the average weekly attendance at clubs and classes during the previous winter was 350.



Photograph courtesy Chesterfield Museum

A big change came in 1925 when men, who had previously only come to the Settlement on special occasions, were admitted as members of a Married Club. The club became very involved in the Settlement building at Darley Dale. The building was the property of Miss Markham but the land on which it stood and adjacent portion were offered for sale and in May 1931 it was decided to purchase the land for £60. The hut had its own committee and members arranged concerts and weekly whist drives to raise money to purchase the site as well as being responsible for the administration of the activities of the site. Curtains, cushion covers and quilts were made by the girls from the Crippled and Delicate Children's School and the boys repaired and repainted furniture, re-caned chairs and tended the flower garden, the children loved their holidays at the Hut and shared all the domestic duties, even the cooking.

In 1926 the *Derbyshire Times* reported on the remarkable record of useful work done at the well-managed institution, Chesterfield Settlement, under the direction of Dr Miss G. Willoughby, M.A. (Tutor), and Miss E. M. Turquand (Warden). Residents were Miss L. M. Harford, Miss Margaret Turquand. Together with the assistance of a large number of volunteer helpers, they ran a Cripple School; Senior Girls' Club; Guides; Brownies; Young Mothers' Club; Mixed Club; Women's Club; Junior Girls' Club; Mens' Club; Boys' Club; Play

Centre; Dancing Classes; Birdholme Women's Club and Transport. The membership had increased by 20 since the previous year and now stood at 300. The report contained a. brief summary of the lectures, debates and play readings which were arranged. The Travel Club organised trips abroad, one to Paris and the other to St. Malo. There were entertainments and fund raising activities were organised.

1930 brought changes with the departure of Miss Willoughby. Before she left she suggested that a Settlement Guild should be formed in order to bring together all the members of the Clubs. The minimum subscription constituting membership was set at 6d annually and membership of the Guild in succeeding years varied between 400 and 500. Mr Coxall kindly undertaken the duties of Treasurer.

It was agreed that each Club should pay a rental fee per night which would be used to pay for the upkeep of the building.

Elsewhere a Women's Club and playcentre were started at S. Augustines, a playcentre at Stonegravels and the better known Everybody's Club at Brampton.

Gymnastic clubs were started for men and boys. The success of the various clubs depended very much upon volunteers

A new venture was the formation an Old Scholars' Club for the boys who had left the Special Classes attached to various schools in the town. This met with success; even a visit to the Hut was arranged. Unfortunately the leader Horace Ball, a Rover Scout and an old member of the Gymnastic Club left the town, no one could be found to succeed him and Club, to the disappointment of all, came to an end. For lack of leaders and an Old Scholars' Club for girls was never started.

On the other hand in December 1932 Mrs Francis Jackson expressed her willingness to co-operate with others in helping to establish a Dramatic Club. The Club survived as the Settlement Players and took part in several Drama Festivals locally. In the Autumn Session of 1933 it was decided to rehearse a concert version of Gilbert and Sullivan's Trial by Jury. The Mikado, produced by Miss Turquand, was performed on the stage of Everybody's Club. It was followed by the Yeomen of the Guard at Bradbury Hall in February 1935.

The years 1935-36 saw the rejuvenation of the Club Room. The floor was in a very bad condition; it was decided to replace it. The Executive Committee made a grant of £10 towards the cost of the timber. Mr Urton gave the nails and other materials; Messrs Henson, Shuker and Worrell gave the labour and members of the house provided refreshments and much supervision. This of course led to the redecoration of the room for which Miss Markham undertook the responsibility, and, finally, to the purchase of new chairs and whist tables.

In December 1937 the Crippled and Delicate Children's School, which had been renamed a Special Class by the Education Authority, came to an end and with, as the valuable work they had done at the Hut came to an end. Mrs Northrop who had run the school became the warden of the Settlement.

In May 1939 a meeting was held at the Settlement to discuss the proposed Community Centre. It was felt that the old building was inadequate for the work to be done. Plans were drawn up, a site chosen and cost of the building discussed.

And then came the War but once again, in spite of disappointments, the work of the Settlement continued.