

FENLAND HERITAGE NETWORK

SEPTEMBER 2021

NEWSLETTER

No. 1



What is the network ?

Aims.....

- To celebrate and promote the heritage of the region,
- To provide support to participating groups, and
- To provide a vehicle to promote and publicise heritage activities across the region.

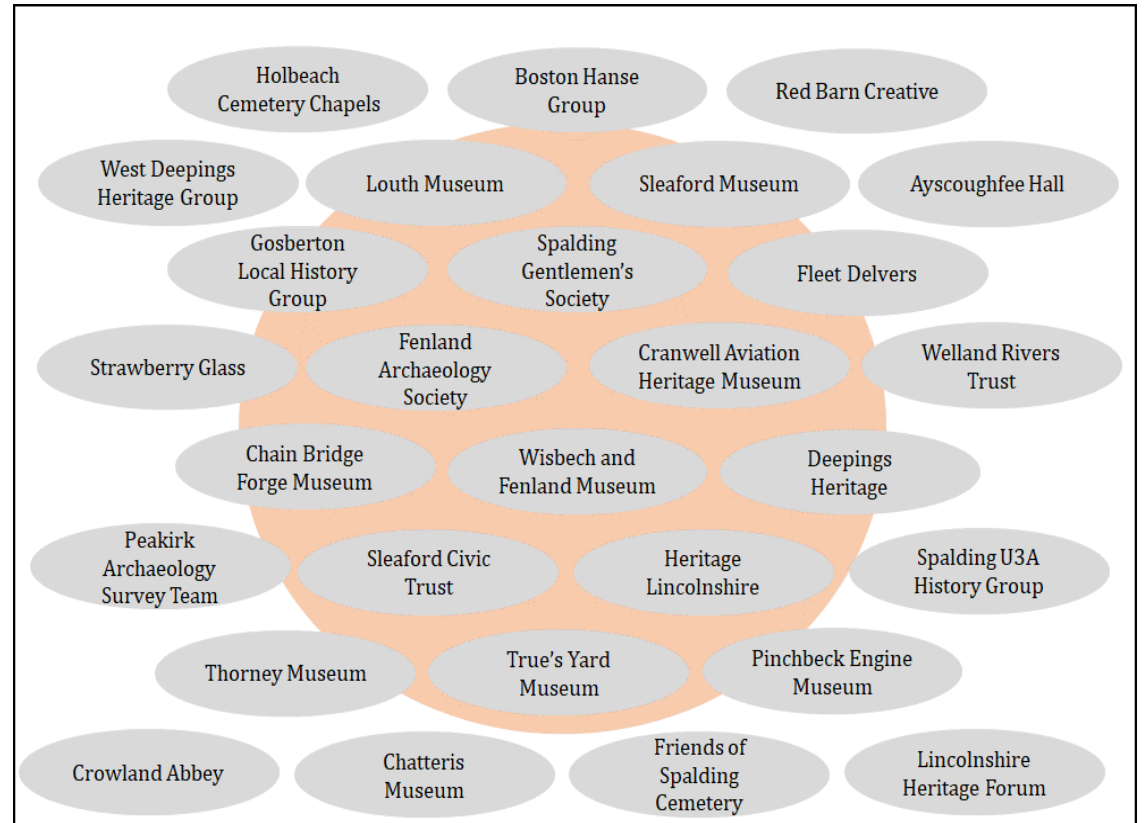
Membership.....

Fenland Heritage Network is an informal group of organisations with the common aim of promoting local heritage. The network is open to all organisations across the region including museums, libraries, local history groups and archaeology societies.

The network is open to all heritage groups.

Contributors

Group that have been and are currently involved in the network.



What's New ?

FHN Website.....

A lot has been happening since our last meeting back in June 2021. We have received a grant which has enabled us to se-up a website for Fenland Heritage Network. More details at our next meeting but you can visit the new website on www.fenlandheritagenetwork.co.uk. In the meantime please send though your logos and contact information for inclusion on the website.

FHN Facebook.....

In parallel with the website a Facebook page for the website has been established (thanks to the social media training). Please look it up and come along and join.



Social Media Workshops.....

The 'Introduction to Social Media' led by Lorena Hodgson of Red Barn Creative were held on 17th and 26th September 2021 with 12 people attending. A follow-up session is planned for 30th September 2021, detail to follow.

Features.....

In this first newsletter we are featuring three members;

- Fenland Archaeology Society,
- Friends of Spalding Cemetery, and
- Spalding U3A – History Group.

If you would like to feature in future editions of the Newsletter just send though a short piece on your group and what you are doing.



Feature

FenArch, as it is known, is in its 11th year having been set up following a community dig led by professional archaeologists in Wisbech. In that time, it has steadily grown and become more ambitious in the projects it undertakes across the Fens.

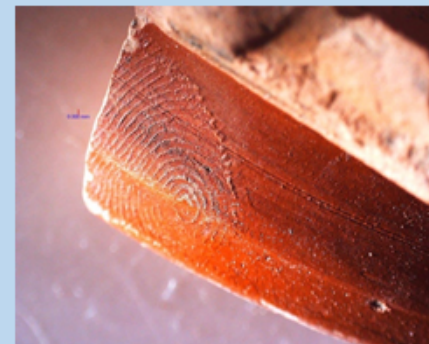
With around 40 members it has organised community digs at various sites and in the last 6 years has returned annually to some fields in Wisbech St Mary where a very friendly and knowledgeable farmer alerted us to a great deal of pottery that his plough had unearthed over the years. Most of that pottery is from the Roman era of British History and FenArch is slowly unearthing the story of the activity in that area during Roman times.

The main source of income for FenArch comes from members fees and profits made from the paying public who come to see various speakers during the Winter season. When it was first formed it also benefitted from some grants from the Lottery. This enabled FenArch to purchase some replica Roman equipment and start outreach work with local schools.

If asked, members would all have different memories of their best moments but for me it was when our President and founder member, Andy Ketley, discovered a fingerprint on a Roman pottery sherd we had unearthed at Wisbech St Mary.

Such discoveries do not happen that often and it has led to a whole discussion on what the fingerprint might be able to tell us. This has involved discussions with a contemporary potter and archaeologist in Orkney and research into modern forensic thinking around fingerprints. However, far more mundane discoveries bring joy, and I will long remember the excited look on the face of a new member, and someone new to archaeology, when we told her that what she had uncovered was a piece of pottery that had not seen the light of day in nearly 2000 years. It is moments like these that make FenArch membership so worthwhile.

Like many organisations we have suffered from the break caused by the pandemic, but we have managed to offer 3 free speaker sessions using Zoom and are planning a return to digging in July. Anyone interested in joining FenArch can contact me through this email address, bob@fenarch.org.uk



Feature

The Friends of Spalding Cemetery

The 'Friends' are a volunteer group formed in 2019 to protect, preserve and promote interest in this lovely old Victorian cemetery. We became active within the cemetery during 2020.

The group brings together people who want to support Spalding Cemetery, The Johnson Mausoleum and the 2 Chapels within its grounds.

One of Spalding's most important heritage assets; we must safeguard the Cemetery for future generations.

Our activities to date have included; clearing undergrowth to access headstones and grave sites; removing ivy from the Victorian boundary wall; grave plotting; headstone counting; cleaning the mausoleum; tidying and replanting flower beds; researching the stories of those buried within; researching the history of the mausoleum and preparing to apply for listed status for this building; maintaining/repainting some of the bench seats; working with SHDC to encourage investment in maintaining the cemetery; taking part in Lincolnshire Heritage days.

There is a website at www.friendsofspalding.co.uk run and maintained by Andrew Hill. A brief history of the cemetery can be found on the website together with much of the research that has been done and collated and a collection of many photographs.

There is also a Facebook page Friends of Spalding Cemetery.

The cemetery can be found at: -
96 Pinchbeck Road
Spalding
PE11 1RF

Visits are encouraged it is a great place to stroll around and enjoy.

New volunteers are always welcome to join us for any of our activities, updates of volunteer dates are usually posted on our Facebook page.





Feature

'I am NOT a historian' (pause), 'But I have always had an interest in the subject'. With these words I introduced myself to the Spalding and District U3A, the leadership of which I had been asked if I would be willing to take over, which I did two years ago.

We were a small, but very enthusiastic group of 15-20 members who met monthly in the Pinchbeck Community Hub. The format of meetings was a simple one: presentation on a subject of local/national historical interest followed by a general discussion and comment. It worked well and was regularly supported by a very loyal membership.

As the 'new boy' and not wishing to 'ruffle feathers' I felt it important that from the outset, I provided the members with what they wanted, emphasising the importance of the fact that it was *their* group. However, receiving little in return by way of hard information, I decided to adopt an approach based on the belief that if something appealed to *me*, there was a very good chance that it would also appeal to others. It's a policy which seems to have worked well. Our membership now stands at thirty-five and the feedback I receive from members has always been most complimentary, enthusiastic and encouraging. Words such as 'interesting', 'most interesting' and 'fascinating' are frequently used, all of which seems to support my belief that, 'If it appeals to me...

Subjects covered by myself and others have included the Quintinshill rail disaster of 1915 when, just north of the Scottish Border, a fast train carrying five hundred Gallipoli-bound troops collided with a stationary local slow train only for, minutes later, a London-bound express carrying several hundred passengers, to plough into the wreckage. It was such a devastating event – at a time when national morale was already at a low ebb – that the government immediately imposed a 'blanket' gagging order on the Press. Consequently, even today, more than a hundred years later, very few people have even *heard* of Quintinshill, let alone know anything about it, but it remains the worst rail disaster in British history.

We also looked at the history of 'The Factory,' at the time of the First World War the biggest factory in the world, extending ten miles from Eastriggs on the Solway Firth to Longtown in the east and, co-incidentally, only a few miles from Quintinshill. 'Manned' mostly by women, The Factory was built in only a few months. It produced much needed shells and explosives for the Western Front. But there was a terrible price to pay - working conditions were horrific and many of the women suffered life-changing injuries as a consequence of handling noxious substances such as 'The Devil's Porridge' (named by the writer Arthur Conan-Doyle who visited The Factory as a war correspondent) which was the cordite propellant used in the shells. When the War ended, the factory, it's job done, was dismantled although evidence of its existence still remains.



Feature

One of the consequences of employing a workforce of many thousands of men, such as that needed to build The Factory, was that they required a release for their energy and an outlet for their money. Each evening – and especially at week ends – trains would take the ‘navvies’ and they would take their thirst, the ten miles to the many hostelryes of Carlisle. One city bar – Bousefield’s – was literally a dozen steps from the station exit. Naturally it was the first port of call for many and it was said that ‘Sammy Bousefield’ would have two hundred ‘shots’ of whisky already poured and waiting on the bar.

Hung-over navvies and high explosives were never going to be a good mix so in an attempt to curb the excessive drinking, as an experiment, the government of the day (under David Lloyd George) introduced legislation to nationalise all the pubs and breweries in the city. At the same time a strict code of behaviour was introduced: one could buy a drink, but not ‘treat’ anyone else. There was no standing at the bar and drinking; once one had a drink one had to sit down. There was to be no singing. All of which perhaps sounds rather harsh to our ears. But there were compensations: the beer was cheap and of excellent quality; there were lots of facilities for games playing; women were welcome – though there were rooms set aside for ‘men only’ – food was served (the first pubs in the country to do so) many pubs in the suburbs had Bowling Greens and the licensing hours were strictly observed and enforced.

And, the master stroke, all managers were paid exactly the same (very generous) salary, so there was no question of competition. That experiment in ‘state control’ lasted until 1972! And for one very good reason – the Carlisle and District State Management Scheme was the only government enterprise ever to make a profit.

Other subjects we have talked about have included Armand Hammer, the American philanthropist and one-time friend of Lenin; a brief history of Scapa Flow throughout both wars; Orkney’s Italian Chapel; ‘The Year 1963; ‘The Year I was Born’; The history of woad production in England and France...and much, much more.

Two years ago, under the leadership of Michael Gilbert, a small group of us got together with a view to producing a book, which we subsequently published: it is called ‘A Medieval Guide to Spalding’. It went to two print runs and sold extremely well although rumour has it that, when necessary, the odd copy can still be found. The same group, with a few new members, are currently working on a book about ‘Early Modern Spalding’ and we are hoping that it will be available in time for Christmas. Watch this space!

David Lawson
Spalding U3A History Group

What's on -Highlights?

Fenland Heritage Network

- Online meeting of the network at 10:30 on Saturday 25th September 2021.
- Introduction to Social Media – online training and Q&A session to be held at 7pm on 30th September 2021.

Spalding Gentlemen's Society

- The Society's 2021/2 lecture programme starts again on 10th September 2021, details on the website.
- Heritage open day at the Broad Street Museum in Spalding on Sunday 19th September 2021.

Sleaford Museum

- The next talk on the Sleaford-Bourne Railway will take place at 7.30pm on Tuesday 28th September 2021.

Thorney Society

- Heritage Open Day tours to be held on 13th and 18th September 2021, details on the website.

Contacts

If you would like to know more about the network please contact.....

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or

fenland@sgsoc.org

Or visit the network's website

www.fenlandheritagenetwork.co.uk