

## Inside this issue

Whitwick's  
Big Dig 2

Our first  
paperback  
book 3

Buckminster 4  
and  
Sewstern in  
the Middle  
Ages

Out and 5  
About with  
the VCH

600 million 5  
years in the  
making

Landscape 6  
detectives

Wikipedia 7  
Edit-o-thon

Hear more 7  
about our  
Research

How you can 8  
help

## In Search of the Poor



*Archival research for the Charnwood Roots project continues. Dr Joe Harley, Archival Research Intern, writes about the social history research he has undertaken with a team of volunteers ...*

Poverty was a common and enduring part of many people's lives. Over the past few months, volunteers have been assessing historical records which allow us to understand how people made ends meet in Charnwood. There were a number of organisations which helped people over the centuries.

Our research has uncovered evidence of over 450 charities in Charnwood during the past 500 years. No two charities were the same. Some were set up to

give bread to individuals or provide almshouse accommodation for the elderly. Others aimed to end the cycle of poverty by

offering education and apprenticeships for the young.

Most focussed their help on people they thought were of 'decent' character, and some actively encouraged 'decency' by giving Bibles.

Alongside this research, volunteers have also been studying archival sources, such as workhouse admission registers and poor relief account books, to understand how poor relief was administered in Charnwood, and how each parish used financial assistance and relief in kind to help parishioners.

The research has identified some colourful examples of the poor

relief provided. Paupers from Markfield, Stanton, Bardon and Ratby, for instance, who were made to go to the workhouse in Market Bosworth during the nineteenth century, could be given brandy as medicine. In Rothley in 1795, most people received poor relief for illnesses or payments for food and accommodation, but John Brown obtained help from local officials after somebody shot him whilst he was visiting Barrow. In the same parish a few months later, pauper Mary Woolerton was given medicine after a 'Mad Dog' bit her!

In case you were wondering, both John Brown and Mary Woolerton appear to have made a full recovery.

*Images: Keith Foster and Kay Christison researching poverty and charity records*



# Whitwick's Big Dig



*Whitwick Scouts 'relaxing' in their test-pit*

*For three consecutive summers, our Charnwood Roots project has organised a community archaeological dig in one of Charnwood's villages. Finds from the 2016 dig in the village of Rothley were still being analysed as we went to print. Here Project Manager Dr Julie Attard writes about the 2015 dig, in Whitwick ..*

When I first mooted the idea of a community archaeological dig with local residents in Whitwick, responses ranged from the effusive: "How exciting! Will it be like Time Team?" to the gloomy: "You won't find 'owt 'ere! Coal mebbe!"

Armed with maps showing previous archaeological finds in the parish, I talked to everyone I met in the streets, clubs, pubs and schools of the former mining village to try to persuade them that it would be worth their while to sacrifice a small one-metre square patch of the their garden in the name of

historical research. My job was made significantly easier thanks to the help and support of members of the Whitwick Historical Group who, I am sure, twisted a few arms on my behalf.

Fortunately, twenty-five homeowners, St John the Baptist Primary School and Whitwick Parish Council agreed to participate. After months of planning, on Saturday 25th July 2015 a group of 150 volunteers of all ages gathered at the Hermitage Leisure Centre to be briefed on how to excavate a test-pit.

The volunteers dug under the close supervision of a team of archaeologists from the University of Leicester.

Glorious sunshine on the Saturday got the Big Dig off to a good start but we awoke on Sunday to driving rain which did not abate all day.

Our heroic volunteers braved the appalling conditions and collectively shifted 20 tonnes of soil and uncovered more than 1,350 datable artefacts.

There were some beautiful finds including a clay pipe adorned with a hare (below), a 18th-century shoe buckle, locally-made bottles and a prehistoric flint blade and prehistoric piercer. We also found a plastic pig and the remains of a pond ...

The weekend finished with a barbeque at the Hare and Hounds pub. We may not have uncovered everything that we hoped we would find, but we certainly found more than just coal!

*Two short films showing highlights from Whitwick's Big Dig can be seen on YouTube:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COHwWsAeqvo>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_na5JJil100](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_na5JJil100)



*An unusual clay pipe*

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# Our First Paperback Book

We are delighted to announce that our first paperback book, a history of Castle Donington, will be available to buy from March 2017.

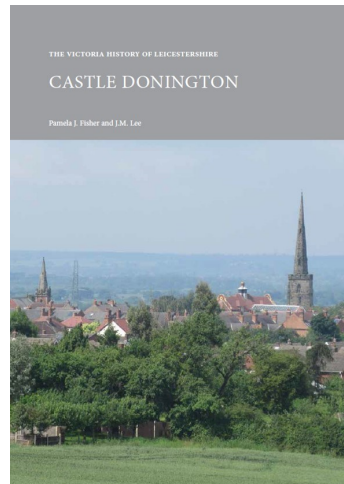
If you are familiar with Leicestershire, you will know that Castle Donington is on the north-western border of the county, alongside the river Trent. It is home to East Midlands Airport, which runs across the south of the parish, and also Donington Park, better known today for motor-racing and rock festivals than as a former medieval hunting park.

Detailed research has revealed new insights into the history of this former medieval market town. And what a fascinating place it has proved to be.

The manor of Castle Donington was held by a series of non-resident lords whose interests lay in national politics. Their attention to affairs of state resulted in weak local lordship, and fostered a spirit of independence among residents.

This often found expression through religious organisations: a guild was established in c.1300, Lollard views (rejecting priestly authority) were openly expressed in the 15th century, many chapels and meeting houses opened from the 17th century and two nonconformist day schools flourished in the 19th century.

Although the medieval market and fair faded



## *The forthcoming book*

away, the mills, river trades and small-scale industrialisation provided an income for many residents. In the 18th century, Castle Donington was prospering.

Unfortunately, the good times came to an end with the collapse of the mechanised lace-making industry in the early 19th century. Depression and outward migration followed. Largely as a result, there was little new building, and an earlier rich architectural heritage remains. The 77 domestic buildings listed by Historic England include fine 18th-century town houses and a small number of homes with cores dating back to the 15th century.

The 20th century saw a positive reversal of fortunes, beginning with the opening of the power station in 1958 — then the largest in Europe. The M1 motorway and East Midlands Airport, which both opened in 1965, have attracted logistics, manufacturing and service

businesses to the parish, which is now flourishing.

This new book, written by Pamela Fisher and Michael Lee, is the first in the VCH Leicestershire series since 1964. It draws together information from a wide range of sources, including archaeology, documents, photographs, surviving architecture and oral history.

It includes the history of the two subsidiary settlements by the Trent at King's Mills and Cavendish Bridge, the medieval town, Donington Park and Hall, local industries and the modern commercial estates. It will be of interest to local and family historians as well as those with specialist interests in topics such as medieval towns and markets, the evolution of settlements, the growth of nonconformity and the changing fortunes of local industries.

The book will be available from Leicestershire VCH Trust at £9.99, and from selected local outlets. For further details, and to take advantage of a special introductory offer, please contact us at the address on the final page of this Newsletter, or complete and return the enclosed flyer.

*The gallery to the right features the village sign, the river Trent, the remains of the watermills, Dalbie House, the entrance porch at Donington Hall and the Wesleyan Methodist Church of 1905.*



# Buckminster and Sewstern in the Middle Ages

The cartulary includes details of 125 land transactions in Buckminster and Sewstern

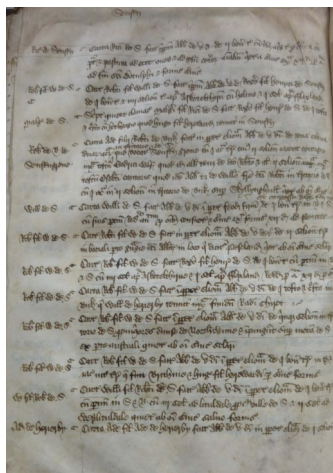
Many of the previous owners lived elsewhere, including parishes as far away as Long Clawson (Leics.) and Pinchbeck (Lincs.)

Much of the land in Buckminster and Sewstern (NE Leics.) was owned by monastic houses in the Middle Ages, especially the Cistercian abbey of *Valle Dei* in Lincolnshire, otherwise known as Vaudey (15 miles SE of Grantham) and Kirby Bellars priory, near Melton Mowbray.

Many monastic records were lost when the abbeys and priories were dissolved in the 1530s, but a cartulary has survived from Kirby Bellars priory, which includes transactions in favour of Vaudey, which leased its land in the parish to the priory in 1323.

The cartulary contains details of 125 land transactions in Buckminster and Sewstern. Five were in favour of Kirby Bellars priory, 56 were to Vaudey abbey (at least 33 of which were gifts, totalling in excess of 840 acres), and the rest were in favour of earlier owners of the land.

This was not an isolated community. Many of the transfers were by owners who lived elsewhere, including Long Clawson, Somerby and



An extract from the cartulary recording land transfers in Sewstern. Each marginal note indicates the start of a new entry.

Wymondham (Leics.), Billingborough, Colsterworth, Harlaxton (a 'merchant'), Pinchbeck, Stainby and Stroxton (Lincs.).

Six deeds record payment of rent on St Botolph's day (17 June). Could this be an earlier dedication for Buckminster church? St Botolph was the patron saint of travellers, and the parish stands on the ancient Sewstern Lane. The dedication since the later medieval period has been to St John the Baptist, but might this date from a major rebuilding in the late 13th century, when the Knights Hospitallers of St

John of Jerusalem held the advowson?

The grants also provide some topographical information. There was a green and a west green in Sewstern, a little dale, a moor and 'lez waterforowes', the latter perhaps indicating clay soil which did not drain. Several of the furlong names quoted survived as names of closes on the 1840 tithe map, enabling the approximate location of Sewstern's three medieval open fields to be identified.

Peaseland and Flaxland tell us of two crops that were grown, and we catch a glimpse of the livestock within gifts of pasture for three hundred sheep by the long hundred (360) and for 400 sheep 'and the use of other animals'.

Truly a remarkable and very informative survival.



Perhaps this church was once dedicated to St Botolph

## Out and About with the VCH

Research continues in a small number of parishes outside Charnwood, and we continue to employ a variety of methods and media to raise awareness.

Dr Pam Fisher has given talks in Lutterworth, Nether Broughton and Evington. Our talk on 'Little-known records for parish history' is personalised for the parish concerned, and has been very well received. If you are involved with a local history group who would like such a talk, please get in touch (our contact details are on page 8).

Pam also attended a Cold War History event at Buckminster in April, where our display of

research findings attracted much interest.

In July, volunteer Carol Cambers, who has researched and written a parish history of Leire for us, led a walk round the village, Pam Fisher led two tours of St Edward's church in Castle Donington, and both Pam and Carol joined an archaeology day at Lutterworth museum, where we displayed the results of our research on the history of Lutterworth.

We regularly post pictures and comments about the county's history on Twitter (@Leicsvcht). Snippets from our research are also posted on our Facebook page,

which is managed for us by post-graduate students (Liz Round in 2015/16, and currently Diane Strange). If you use either Facebook or Twitter, please 'like' or 'follow' us and help to spread the word about our research.



Our Lutterworth display before the doors opened to the public

## 600 Million Years in the Making

Could you distinguish between a breccia and a tuff, an inclusion and a deformation? Geology volunteer Alan Briggs can and he has been steadily researching the geological histories of each of the Charnwood Roots parishes on our behalf. In May, some eighteen months after he first started, Alan completed his final parish. This is a tremendous achievement and we are extremely grateful to him for his work and dedication.

It is important research because Charnwood's underlying geology has shaped the landscape that we know today. It has influenced everything from habitats and agriculture to the local economy and vernacular buildings.

To celebrate the completion of his research and to share what he had learnt with other volunteers, Alan led three guided geo-walks around Bradgate Park.

The area that we know as Charnwood Forest has, in its 600 million year history, resembled the volcanic island of Montserrat, the deserts of Saudi Arabia and the mountainous landscape of Yosemite National Park, in the United States.

The remnants of each of these phases of Charnwood's geological

past are still clearly visible, if you know where to look.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the walks and agreed that they would never look at Charnwood in quite the same way again.



Viewing the 'Swiss roll' at the Sliding Stone slump breccia

## Landscape Detectives

*"The landscape is a record of our roots and the growth of civilization. Each individual historic wood, heath etc. is uniquely different from every other, and each has something to tell us."*  
*Oliver Rackham, The History of the Countryside (1986)*

The death of ecologist and landscape historian Oliver Rackham prompted me to reread his wonderful *History of the Countryside*, a book which opens the reader's eyes to the many traces left behind by those who previously lived and worked the English landscape.

As an important economic resource, woodland has been carefully managed for centuries and the remnants

of these management practices can be found in the form of banks and ditches, now concealed in the undergrowth.

It has been a joy to observe some of the early patterns of woodland management, illustrated by Rackham, during our recent fieldwork in Martinshaw Wood.

Between April and June, a small but dedicated group of landscape survey volunteers met each week to locate and record archaeological features uncovered during our earlier LiDAR survey.

Over the weeks they became adept at navigating to each of the features, seeking out subtle earthworks by approaching them from different angles and at different points along their length.

Triumphant cries would be heard from the undergrowth as some well-hidden earthwork was suddenly revealed!

Slowly we began to distinguish the different types of earthwork, to relate features to one another, and to 'read' the landscape.

The ground verification process adds considerable detail to the results provided by the LiDAR survey, as well as ensuring that no false positives, such as fallen trees or bracken covered fences, are added mistakenly to the archaeological record.

The team has now verified all of the one hundred features in the wood.

Julie Attard



*Robin recording earthworks in Martinshaw Wood*

## Wikipedia Edit-o-thon

On 21 November we held our first ever Wikipedia Edit-o-thon, as part of the nationwide Being Human Festival, which aims to show how the humanities can inspire and enrich everyday life. A similar event was held concurrently by our VCH colleagues in London, who helped with arrangements for our day.

Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia where entries can be edited by anyone, and is one of the most visited websites in the world. An edit-a-thon is an event where people get together to write or improve articles on a specific theme.

Our two Wikipedia trainers, Doug Taylor and Roger Bamkin, spent



the morning patiently teaching our group of nine volunteers, mostly complete beginners, how to edit pages, and how to find and add online images with no copyright restrictions.

The theme of our day was the local history of Leicestershire. Most

villages have a Wikipedia page, but some include very little information about the place, and nothing about its history. Wikipedia encourages editors to cite reliable and accessible materials to give authority to its encyclopedia entries.

The group choose parishes in south-east Leicestershire, and added information and links to

the online version of Leicestershire VCH volume V, available at British History Online. All our participants found the day enjoyable, and went away having learned more about some Leicestershire villages, and helped to make Leicestershire's history, and the value of VCH volumes, more widely known.

## Thanking our Friends and Supporters

Leicestershire VCH began a programme of research in March 2010, and was delighted to receive a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable our Charnwood Roots programme to begin in summer 2013.

None of this research would have been possible without the ongoing support of our Friends and the members of our 200 Club, to whom we are very grateful.

We can only share a small part of our findings through this Newsletter. Come and join us on the afternoon of Saturday 19

November, to hear more about our recent research and meet some of the people involved.

There will be a poster display of some of our research from 2pm. The formal proceedings will commence at 2.30 pm and will comprise five short talks, each of 15-20 minutes by VCH staff and volunteers. These will focus on our findings from the various parishes we have been researching across the county.

The topics for our talks will be:

-Poverty and Charity in Charnwood parishes

-Castle Donington Town Book  
-Findings from our Community Archaeological Dig in Rothley  
-The creation of a model village: Buckminster 1793-1935  
-Charnwood in the Middle Ages

The afternoon will conclude with tea and cakes.

The event will take place on the main University of Leicester campus (see enclosed flyer for details), and is free. Numbers are required by 15 November for catering purposes (email leicsvch@le.ac.uk or tel. 0116 252 5722).

# How YOU can help

**Leicestershire VCH Trust receives no ongoing funding, and is dependant upon the donations of individual supporters, and on winning grants for specific projects.**

We have made steady progress to date, but could achieve far more with a wider base of supporters and donors.

Every pound really does help. Without the support of our **Friends** (min. £20 p.a.) we would not have been able to obtain our grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for our Charnwood Roots project, or complete our Castle Donington book. We are able to claim Gift Aid on eligible donations through this scheme, so your

£20 would give us £25 to put towards the cost of volunteer training, research and travel to distant archive offices.

We would welcome more members to our **200 Club** (£50 p.a.). This is a lottery scheme which gives donors a chance to win a cash prize in our quarterly draws.

**Application forms for either of these schemes can be downloaded** from [www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire/](http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire/), or write to us at the address below.

If you are thinking of updating your will, your gift could make a big difference to our work and provide a lasting **legacy** of your generosity. Ask for a copy of our

legacy leaflet to find out more.

We would also welcome **practical assistance** in a number of areas.

If you would be interested in volunteering for our Charnwood Roots project, please contact us at [charnwoodroots@le.ac.uk](mailto:charnwoodroots@le.ac.uk). Our volunteering opportunities on this project include tasks which can be done remotely.

We would also welcome volunteers with particular skills or experience. We would especially welcome interest from people with experience in **Public Relations, Marketing, Fundraising or IT**. If that would interest you, then please get in touch with us at the address below.



**Leicestershire Victoria  
County History Trust**  
**Marc Fitch Historical  
Institute**  
**5 Salisbury Road**  
**Leicester**  
**LE1 7QR**

Leicestershire Victoria County History Trust was launched in May 2009 to support and promote the Victoria County History project in Leicestershire. The Trust works with volunteers across the county to research and publish the history of Leicestershire towns and villages. Training and support is provided free of charge

The Trust relies on charitable donations to support this work. Please consider joining our 200 Club, becoming a Friend of the Trust or making a donation to support ongoing work in Leicestershire. More information is available on our website, at [www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire](http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire), or you can contact us at the address shown in the panel to the left.

**Leicestershire Victoria County History Trust is a registered charity (No. 1128575) and a registered company (No. 6683052).**

