



# Dereham Walkers are Welcome

30 July 2018

## A Glimpse of Dereham's History



*The original Heritage  
Town Trail leaflet  
- Ken Hawkins*

Some years ago, the Dereham Antiquarian Society ran guided walks to various sites of interest around Dereham. They also produced a fine illustrated leaflet. Times change; the walks ceased; the leaflet went out of print. All this seems very sad, as it meant that there is a generation of people living in and visiting the town who are perhaps unaware of its extensive historical interest.

On Sunday, Dereham Walkers are Welcome took a first step towards reversing that. A town walk was organised, led by long time resident Dorothy Sneesby. It was especially pleasing that the group included a visitor from France - Maité Viton. Crammed into the 2½ hour event were visits to St Nicholas Church tower, Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum, the Memorial Hall and Dereham Railway Station (where the walk ended with refreshments and a talk about the railway).



*The group at St Withburga well - Ken Hawkins*



*Dorothy Sneesby shows the gravestone of Jean de Narde - Ken Hawkins*



*Ringing the tenor bell - Ken Hawkins*



*The bells - Maité Viton*

Starting in the churchyard, the group visited St Withburga Well and the nearby gravestone for Jean de Narde. Jean was a French soldier who was captured and imprisoned in the Bell Tower, but then escaped and hid in a tree. He was found, and subsequently killed, probably because he didn't understand the orders (in English) of his captors. The memorial was erected 50 years later by Rev Armstrong (vicar from 1850 to 1888), who has his own memorial at the top of the churchyard.

Time was taken to visit the Bell Tower. On the first floor, Chris Stebbings explained how it all worked, and his son Jayden demonstrated how to ring the tenor bell (the largest). After this, a smaller energetic subgroup climbed to the top, from where they could look down on the bells.



*Peter Wade-Martins (at right)  
at Bishop Bonner's Cottage  
Museum - Ken Hawkins*



*Inside the museum - Maité Viton*



*Hill House - Maité Viton*



*Dereham Memorial Hall  
- Ken Hawkins*

It was then just a short walk to Bishop Bonner's Cottage Museum, where the Dereham Antiquarian Society Chairman Dr Peter Wade-Martins gave a brief talk about the history of the three cottages making up the present building, and allowed everyone to have a quick look round inside.

From there, the walk took in Church House, the Manor House, the Romany Rye, the town sign, the Corn Hall, the Cowper Church (Cowper Memorial Evangelical Congregational Church to give it its full title), the Assembly Rooms and Hill House, before moving on to Dereham Memorial Hall.

Here, after Dorothy explained the history of the building, Tim Birt gave us a detailed account of the restoration work undertaken a few years ago before showing us

around the building. This included reference to the little known fact that the swimming pool which was used there at one time, still exists under the main hall floor - and a few of the group climbed down under the stage to see it.



*The Railway Station: Martin Sneesby ensuring no one gets left out - Maïté Viton*

The final destination was the Railway Station. The group received refreshments from the station café, and then Charlie Robinson (Mid-Norfolk Railway Chairman) gave an illustrated talk outlining the history of the current line, plus much more on its current operation and future plans.

The event was oversubscribed and we were sorry to have to turn some people away. Based on the success of the afternoon, we will be considering repeating it, and would invite anyone interested to let us know so we can judge the demand. In the longer term, we will discuss with the Dereham Antiquarian Society the possibility of arranging a similar event on a regular basis, and perhaps get a new leaflet prepared so people can look round our town for themselves.

Dereham Walkers are Welcome itself is now taking bookings for our next walk. This walk will explore all of the routes which have been claimed by Dereham Town Council as new public rights of way; all of them are being recognised as Restricted Byways, open to all use except motorised vehicles. (We will also use one additional route which is to be dedicated as a bridleway, and we will take the opportunity - postponed from a very wet Easter - to call in briefly at Badley Moor Common.) The

walk is about 6½ miles long, taking about 2¾ hours. Any walker is welcome;

booking is advised - further details are available from Ken Hawkins at

[dtc.fpwarden@talktalk.net](mailto:dtc.fpwarden@talktalk.net) or on 07505 426750.

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## NOTES

Walkers are Welcome ([www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk/](http://www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk/)) aims to encourage and support towns and villages to

- be attractive destinations for walkers with top quality information on local walks;
- offer local people and visitors excellent walking opportunities within their areas;
- ensure that footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained, improved and well signposted;
- contribute to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies;
- promote the health benefits of walking and increase participation; and
- encourage the use of public transport.

WaW as an organisation celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, and conducted a survey of its members, which indicated

- over 1,000 walks have been developed and published, culminating in over 6,000 miles of routes;
- it had helped to maintain thousands of miles of walking routes;
- its walking festivals represented over 100 days per annum, totalling over 500 walks and involving over 7,000 people each year;
- it had created twenty-two different types of walks;
- there were over 1,000 Walkers are Welcome HERE stickers displayed in retail and non-retail outlets across the country;
- it had made extensive use of social media to help promote walks and other related activities;
- over 70% of WaW towns and villages had their own websites;
- the use of public transport had been actively promoted, and made good use of both bus and rail; and
- local economies had earned substantial sums from local walkers and visitors who use WaW routes and attended walking festivals.