

## Deddington Society

I live in Duns Tew not much more than a stone's throw from the corners of Deddington, Duns Tew and North Aston. Our house is closer to Deddington than to the other two villages. Over many years we're basically very frequent visitors to Deddington from across the border – visitors who are constantly benefiting from all that is good, educational, inspirational, life supportable and 'befrienable' in that great village. I call Deddington.

How could I have remained completely ignorant of this charitable society founded in 1972? I was totally ignorant of its committee which worked overtime to get the village into the dancing mood, restore some old customs, and develop sporting facilities. A committee member of the now long wound-up Deddington Society has given me a box full of the most interesting documents. As soon as I read the contents, I realised that back in the 1970s I had actually quite often enjoyed various entertainments laid on for the village by the Society.

My only excuse for not knowing who did the hard work behind the scene could be my slight remove from the hub of Deddington parish matters! I live in Duns Tew not much more than a stone's throw from the corners of Deddington, Duns Tew and North Aston. Our house is closer to Deddington than to the other two villages. Over many years we're basically very frequent visitors to Deddington from across the border – visitors who are constantly benefiting from all that is good, educational, inspirational, life supportable and 'befrienable' in that great village. I call Deddington my home village with apologies to its genuine subjects!

I plan to bring to life that bit of Deddington history spanning the time of the Deddington Society's heydays, its aims and achievements. My information comes solely from those documents entrusted to me, which consist of letters to Charity Commissioners, Inspector of Taxes and local authorities, as well as pages and pages of the Deddington Society's Constitution and its objects. The objects are set out in a nutshell in an official looking note which reads: 'Objects: To promote the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Deddington without distinction of sex or of political religious or other opinions by associating the local authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to advance education and to provide facilities in the interest of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving conditions of life for said inhabitants.'

Quite a mouthfull, and there is not a comma to be seen in this long sentence. Most interesting though, for my purpose, is a Minutes book, hand written. Sadly the Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting on 29th Sept 1972 are missing and are only mentioned in the Chairman's report at the first AGM on 23rd October 1973 at which there were approx. 50 persons present, including the officers and members of the Council. What a year of achievements it had been for the newly formed Society!

\* \* \* \* \*

Why did a number of public-spirited villagers use some of their leisure time to form a steering committee, clearing the way through a maze of officialdom to give life to the Society? I can only surmise that by the 1970s neither traditional Lords of the Manor nor great village preachers and headmasters were expected to keep village life in order or organise particular village activities.

The Parish Council had taken over the serious business of governing and relied on the various voluntary organisations to provide leisure activities. Plans for a new village hall were the talk of the town. The old premises of the Windmill School lay empty and fast decaying. Maybe the planned village hall was the catalyst to set the steering committee thinking, and one thing led to another. I believe the Society's inaugural meeting on 29th September 1972 had elected 12 members to form the committee.

Their first newsletter was circulated six weeks later stating its aims as follows: 'To keep the village informed by occasional newsletters of the progress being made towards getting a community hall and of events which have been arranged, not only by the Society but by other bodies, if these are open to anyone.'

This first newsletter informs us that a Tennis Club had been formed to plan and organise activities for the next season on the Windmill School courts. Two very successful disco dances had been held. It was hoped to hold a regular 'old tyme' dance provided that arrangements can be made with the Windmill School (i.e. the Education Authorities still in charge of the vacated buildings). The possibility, of erecting a Christmas tree in the Market Place, around which carols would be sung and hot drinks served, was being considered. Street lighting: in view of a petition (signed by over 300 people) presented to the Parish Council, the Society asked whether residents still wished to press the Parish Council to arrange a meeting with the authorities about lighting throughout the parish.

It was hoped to carry out a programme of tree planting in the parish during 'National Tree Planting Year 1973'. And finally under 'Litter', villagers were informed that the Parish Council had asked the Society to help keep Deddington a tidier place!

\* \* \* \* \*

Having dwelled on items from the Society's newsletter dated November 1972 I quickly jump to news about their Festival in September 1973. Cuttings from the *Oxford Times* show an impressive photograph of two duelling knights clad in what looks like chain mail undergarments. If any bets were taken as to the outcome I would certainly not have put my money on the head of one of the combatants covered with a massive bucket with small slits at eye level. (How could he possibly see?)

There follows the report from the *Oxford Times* under the heading 'Chivalry Lives On. 'The ring of steel against steel at Deddington Festival on Saturday, as two good knights of Warwick Castle fought it out on the village green. They are Sir John Pagnell (Graham Holland) and the Count de Neville (Barry Griffin). Over 1000 people visited the Festival, the first for more than 40 years, which finished at the weekend. The success of the week-long programme of exhibitions and entertainment means that it could become a regular event. Says the chairman of the Society: 'We had to prove to ourselves that we could put on a festival. We have certainly done that. Proceeds from the Festival will help to pay for the take-over of part of the old Windmill School as a village hall.'

The highlight for gourmets at the Festival was the sale of Deddington pudden pies specially made from a centuries-old recipe by the local baker. The pies, which were made in saucers and sold at the annual Deddington Fair many years ago, have a sweet filling of nuts, ground rice, chopped fruit and eggs and are served with cream. The baker, Mr B Wallin, figured in the Festival and

a bread book used by his forefathers in the baking trade was displayed in the history exhibition at the parish church.

2007

\* \* \* \* \*



Present day festivals, festivals organised by the Deddington Society in the 1970s, Deddington village festivals of 40, 70 or more years ago all have and had one wonderful aim: to set alight from time to time the glowing spark of community spirit. The Deddington Society has left us programmes of Festival 1973, Festival 1974 and plans for Festival 1975, as well as a consensus of opinion at a Nov '75 Committee meeting that that year's Festival had been a success. I well remember a most unusual carpet of living flowers in the Parish Church created by Betty Francis. Betty told me she had the early visions of this magical work, lying sleepless in bed at night, planning, in her mind's eye on the ceiling above, the glorious colour scheme for her floral carpet. Being a true artist she then set to work recreating her dream with blooms gathered throughout the village.

A picture of her magic carpet used to hang in Church but like other little treasures was either lost, or had faded to insignificance. I also remember Mrs Ware's Georgian Tea Party at the weekend of Festival 1975. Village ladies and gentlemen wandered round the Market Place gorgeously costumed in period dress out of Mrs Ware's treasure trove dressing-up chest.



Sadly the collection of Deddington Society news, minutes, letters and programmes dries up rather abruptly by the end of 1975. I cannot imagine that the Committee simply threw in the towel after a more or less successful run of three years. It is more likely that the contents of the red box handed to me are not complete. Be this as it may, Deddington Society worked relentlessly to keep open a 'Community Hall' on the site of the old Windmill School for social and educational activities until the building of the new Windmill Centre could begin.

They jollied along the Parish Council on matters of street lighting, bus services and the nuisance of heavy traffic thundering through the village. They reinstated Festivals, after what was thought to be a 40-year absence. They organised carol singing in the Market Place, supplied the Christmas tree and lights and distributed a regular Newsletter. If the Society folded up rather abruptly, it must have left the taste for reinvention. Maybe our present *Deddington News* is an offshoot, as well as our great once-a-year Festivals of the 21st century.

2007

## Pictures from the 1973 Deddington Society Festival



*The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)*