
The Newsletter of the Sleaford and District Civic Trust



Editor's comments

Welcome to the Spring issue of Civic Matters. It's the time of year when we can hopefully shake off those dreary wet Winter days and look forward to the warmth that Spring brings. It's also the time of year when we can enjoy longer days and witness that explosion of colour that nature does so well.

We're starting the year with a bumper issue including an important update on the Sleaford Castle Project as Phase I is virtually complete and the Sleaford Castle Heritage Group make plans for Phase II. We have news on a survey being conducted for NKDC with an article from Matt Bentley (NKDC Conservation Officer) and all the latest news from the Museum.

I'm a volunteer at the Museum and that role provides me with access to the wonderful treasure trove of Sleaford history so carefully maintained by the team. I recently discovered the delights of the 'Morton's Lincolnshire Almanack' editions and their voluminous content. In the 1924 Sleaford Almanack, I discovered an article on Sharpe's Seeds which provides a fascinating perspective of the company. I've reproduced the article in this newsletter so you can enjoy reading of the pioneering days of a famous Sleaford based global business.

You'll be pleased to hear that we have our regular 'Secretary's Ponderings' article, this time with a Blue Plaques update and the 'Blast from the past' returns with a Sharpe's Seeds theme.

Finally, don't forget to put the AGM date of May 18th in your diary.

Enjoy the read.

Editor: Paul Hart

Chair's update

Sleaford Castle - For Phase 1, the pathway has been completed along with seven display boards and the main welcoming board. The Council has installed two picnic tables and whilst the overall effect is just as envisaged, the final snagging has highlighted some areas to be improved. We have no information as to when the work to tidy up the entrance area is to be carried out. The SCHG Advisory Group have presented to the Council (the owners) the work that needs to be done in Phase 2 which covers: Further archaeology in the Keep Area, Work on the remaining above ground Castle wall corner and a Site Maintenance Plan for the future. Garry will say more later in the newsletter.

The Blue Plaque Project - The final Blue Plaque for 2025 was put up in Carre Street. Please read Faith's update on the project.

The Bristol Water Fountain - The Water Fountain is now working again, but the damage to the back plate has been very crudely repaired. The Fountain shows signs of neglect only 7 years after it was restored by the Civic Trust. We understand that NKDC, as the owners, are working to sort this out.

Sleaford's Listed Buildings - You may be surprised to know that the Sleaford Town area has 181 listed buildings. Some are virtually unknown, some are in very good condition and others are in need of some care and attention. NKDC is engaged on a project covering the town and all local villages to list all these buildings and record their condition. The Civic Trust has been asked to assist with the survey work. Our team has been formed from mostly members of the Trust committee. Our target area is around the town centre and survey work is already under way.

Civic Trust Banking - Our accounts continue look healthy with our long-term investments giving good returns. Long term savings accounts have been re-invested.

The Almshouses - The Eastgate and Northgate Almshouses may be described as amongst the most attractive historic buildings in the Town, looked after by the Sleaford Hospital Trust Charity. To maintain the buildings and to keep up with modern requirements all the windows have been renewed to their original appearance by a local contractor. The next step will be to survey and improve the roofs.

The Mansion House - The Civic Trust has great concern that the front of the Mansion House, which was Kirk's old home, is looking very neglected and shames this splendid building. We are liaising with NKDC to persuade the owners to take some action.

Future Civic Trust events for 2026 – The Civic Trust is looking at separating the formal AGM from the usual accompanying social occasion and talk. The formal AGM will be held on Monday, May 18th, and separately, a Special Event is being organised for a well-known Celebrity Auctioneer to come to town and give a talk and provide valuations on any "treasures" we bring along. More details on this event will be given in the June Newsletter, along with invitations to our members.

Please make a special note of the AGM date - Monday, May 18th. The formal AGM notification follows on the next page.

David Marriage, Chair

Special Notice: Sleaford & District Civic Trust - 53rd AGM Notification

**The Trust's 53rd AGM.
will be held
on Monday 18th May 2026 at 14.00
in the Barge & Bottle, Carre Street, Sleaford.
(Venue to be confirmed)**

**A Copy of the Minutes from the 52nd AGM
and a copy of the Accounts as at 31 December 2025
will be available for viewing on our Website at www.sleafordcivictrust.co.uk**

**Any AGM questions and queries from Civic Trust Members must be
received by the Secretary in writing by
Monday 11 May 2026 at the latest.
Address: The Town Hall, Quayside House, Navigation Yard
Sleaford. NG34 7TW**

A change to our Constitution

An Annual General Meeting of any organisation is legally necessary, and has to be run by formal rules. It is at this meeting that the officers of the organisation are elected.

Sometimes these meetings can appear lengthy and tedious, often being avoided by many members. A low turnout endangers the need to have sufficient attendees, currently 14 to make the meeting quorate.

With so much information being available "on line", the attendance at meetings is lower. To counter this, the Civic Trust proposes making a slight change to our constitution to make 10 attendees as the quorate number. This will be formally proposed at the May AGM.

David Marriage, Chair

Secretary's ponderings ...and blue plaques!

The Christmas and New Year celebrations are well behind us now and it seems that the weather has lived up to the old saying of 'February Fill Dyke'!!! In fact, I guess it could be described as 'February overfill Dyke'!! Let's hope that Spring warmth isn't far away now though.

The first two months of 2026 have been a good time to 'ponder' on what we would like to achieve and what is achievable in the coming year. I had a look at the meaning of pondering and part of the description says that pondering is vital as it not only gives us an opportunity to reflect on our successes but it also helps us to decide on our future direction.

The Blue Plaques Working Group made a good start by meeting up in January to decide which Plaques we aim to produce and install this year.

We have decided on three Plaques and we are now going through the process of getting the first two produced. The North Kesteven District Council Conservation Officer has already given his approval of the wording and siting locations for the two Plaques. The owners of the relevant buildings have been consulted and have given their permission for us to install the Plaques on their premises and the go ahead has now been given for the Plaques to be produced.

The third Plaque will require us to seek Listed Building Consent which is a whole new sphere for us and will entail the inevitable form filling - always a tedious task! Hopefully, the consent will be granted and we can move on to achieve our goal of three new Blue Plaques in town for 2026. This will take us to a total of 10. It will then be our aim to produce a small leaflet giving details and locations of these first ten Plaques.

Look out for further information about the 2026 Blue Plaques in the June and September Newsletters.

Faith, Civic Trust Secretary

Sleaford Heritage at Risk Survey

Across North Kesteven, over 1,000 buildings are listed on the National Heritage List for England, recognising their special architectural and historical value. This year, North Kesteven District Council is carrying out a district-wide 'Heritage at Risk' survey of its listed buildings and partnering with the Sleaford Civic Trust to carry out building surveys on over 100 listed buildings across Sleaford town centre.

The survey aims to assess every listed building in the district, identifying those at risk from neglect, decay, and unsympathetic development. Each year, a national 'Heritage at Risk Register' is published by Historic England for Grade I and II* buildings (and Grade II listed places of worship). However, Grade II buildings, which make up around 91% of all listed properties and structures nationally, are not eligible for inclusion. By conducting a district-wide survey, NKDC can assess listed buildings of all grades, identify areas for improvement and investment, and work collaboratively to establish plans for repair works and restorations of historic buildings.

Once complete, a full survey will provide a comprehensive picture of the condition of all North Kesteven's listed buildings enabling us to develop an increasingly proactive approach towards the maintenance and restoration of our historic buildings. The information gathered from the survey will also help to maintain detailed records of heritage assets to better track changes and trends in the condition of buildings now and in the future.

Matt Bentley, NKDC Conservation Officer

N.B. Our Civic Trust teams will be assessing each building on the register using a standard reporting format provided by NKDC. For each building the current use, condition and occupancy status will be noted, along with an overall risk assessment. Each building will also be photographed.

Anyone interested in helping us with this important survey should contact David Marriage or Faith Hopkins at sleafordct@gmail.com

Ed.

The Sleaford Castle Project - Phase II beckons

The 'we really ought to do something with the Sleaford Castle site' project is, surprisingly, in its 8th year (or 11th year if one includes the initial report and proposals). What is not surprising though, is that rather than just being a gleam in the eye of a washed-up old sailor, desperately trying to find something to do in retirement, the Sleaford Castle Project is now firmly established in the town and is fast approaching the completion of its first phase. This is due in the largest measure to the devotion and enthusiasm of the many dedicated, like-minded volunteers from a variety of local Trusts, Councils and Groups. The core of the support has been through the Civic Trust and Sleaford Museum and I am pleased that it remains a principal Civic Trust project with much of the work conducted through the Sleaford Castle Heritage Group with its specialised working group and supported by the Town Council when sitting as a council advisory committee.

We always anticipated that the objectives originally set for Sleaford's castle would take time to achieve – about ten years was the original estimation. However, although the first phase has taken just about all of that, we can be pleased that there is now at last something to see for our efforts on Castlefield. The path is complete and the initial tranche of seven interpretation boards installed. In the last Castle report it was noted that the large A0 sized 'Welcome Board' had still to be installed but this was finally put in place in late February along with two picnic tables. Sadly, the board appears to have already received some minor damage but we hope that it is accidental rather than malicious.



Newly installed picnic bench and Welcome Board

The hoggin path is well-established (in spite of the moles' best efforts) and is being used increasingly by dog walkers. I even managed to 'borrow' a granddaughter to see if it was navigable with wheeled transport. I can report that it is and can tell you that it brought big smiles to a nine-month-old's face. Admittedly, there was a comment from my son about his daughter being used as a Crash Test Dummy but there has been no complaint from young Annie who probably thinks that this was her first visit to a theme park! We can also report that the two picnic benches installed by the Town Council are being well used.

As to other aspects of this first phase: the reduced castle exhibition along with the scale model is still in place in the Museum, tailored designs for a pedestrian bridge from Nags Head Passage are on file (awaiting necessary funding), the excellent castle booklet remains on sale and outreach with the schools and associated talks continue. The remaining element of the first phase: i.e. improvements and signage at the entrance of the site, has been agreed with STC and will be implemented in the near future.

Now we can look to the future and have proposed the development of plans for a Phase II that will contain the following:

1. An archaeological and structural survey of the remaining part (NE corner wall) of the castle above ground. Surprisingly this has never been attempted before and could provide us with a unique knowledge of the castle, its foundations and above all, its history. It is hoped that a major part of the survey would be 3D scanning of the stone remnants, followed by a digital re-building of those parts to form an image of the original wall before it collapsed many years ago. This objective would likely appeal to the younger generations.
2. There can be no doubt that the condition of the stone remnant has suffered even during the period the SCHG has been in place. Individual stones have become loose and fallen out. There is evidence of scarring, almost certainly from bottles thrown against it. There have been occasional bouts of graffiti over the years. Also, there are invasive shrubs and ivy that may be weakening the structure. Once we have the results of the surveys, we need to devise a plan to preserve the remaining structure so that it is fit to last for another 900 years of Sleaford's history. Interestingly, it is believed that there were iron railings in place in the past to protect the monument and we will investigate whether it is feasible to replace them. We are also likely to recommend that appropriate signage is in place to explain the importance of protecting a Scheduled Monument.
3. We already have some bio-diversity data following the work on various bridge designs and STC will also be conducting a separate bio-diversity survey for its sites. Using this information and with the help of examples from other historic sites, and with the knowledge and experience of members of the SCHG, we plan to produce a tailored Heritage Management Plan for Sleaford Castle. Such a plan will provide a blueprint for the continued conservation of the site so that it may be enjoyed for years to come.

Working closely with Sleaford Town Council, I am sure we can provide an attractive and interesting part of Sleaford's history that will appeal to residents and visitors alike. The Sleaford Castle Project remains a key Civic Trust project and I continue to be amazed by the close collaboration and enthusiasm displayed by the volunteers on the project. May I take this opportunity to thank them again for their efforts - everyone can be proud of the work that has been achieved.

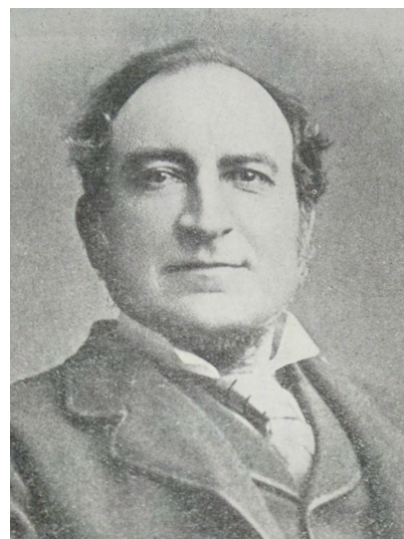
Garry Titmus, Chair, Sleaford Castle Heritage Group

Seeds for the world - Sleaford firm's rise and progress

The following article is a reproduction of a supplement in the 1924 Mortons' Lincolnshire Almanack (price 6d!) held by Sleaford Museum - Ed.

We do not think we can do better, in presenting our Almanac for 1924, than in giving a short account of the rise to its present pre-eminent position of the huge business undertaking which has been so long associated with Sleaford, and is locally known as "Sharpe's", but whose proper designation is "Charles Sharpe & Co (1920) Limited".

To discover the origin of the firm, which now enjoys a world-wide reputation, one has to go back over a long period of years, for it was very early in the last century that it first came into being.



Mr Charles Sharpe

Originally it was a small nursery business started by Mr. Charles Sharpe's father, who eventually owned and worked a plot of land on the Boston Road, on which the present offices now stand. After his death, the business was carried on by his sons John and Charles. A dissolution of partnership was in the course of time decided upon, and the elder brother left Sleaford. Charles continued to work the nursery, but having taken up the production of seeds, he soon discovered that it was the more interesting part of the business and possessed latent possibilities which the other lacked. So it was that he eventually devoted himself entirely to the extension of the new venture, and proceeded to trade as Charles Sharpe & Co.

In his business Mr Sharpe had the able assistance of Mr. J. C. Gould, who was associated with him for a period extending over sixty years. In 1894 the business was, for family reasons, converted into a private company, and in 1920 into a public company, and its history has been one of steady and continuous growth. It started very modestly, dealing with whatever trade could be secured among the local farmers, and it was gradually extended to various local markets. The practice in these far-off days was to drive from Sleaford with a cart-load of seeds, and the cart was used as a stand at each market in turn.



Directors' Room with J.W.Coy

A dip into order books of over a half a century ago shews that even then Sharpe's seeds were gaining a reputation beyond the borders of this country; for whilst there appear the names of buyers at Maidstone, for instance, to as far north as Aberdeen, there also appear others with addresses at Philadelphia, Berlin, Hamburg, Paris, and other parts of France, as well as Finland.

To-day the Company has correspondents and growers in practically every country in the world, its travellers visit every town in the United Kingdom, it has representatives all over Europe and America, and agents in all the Colonies.

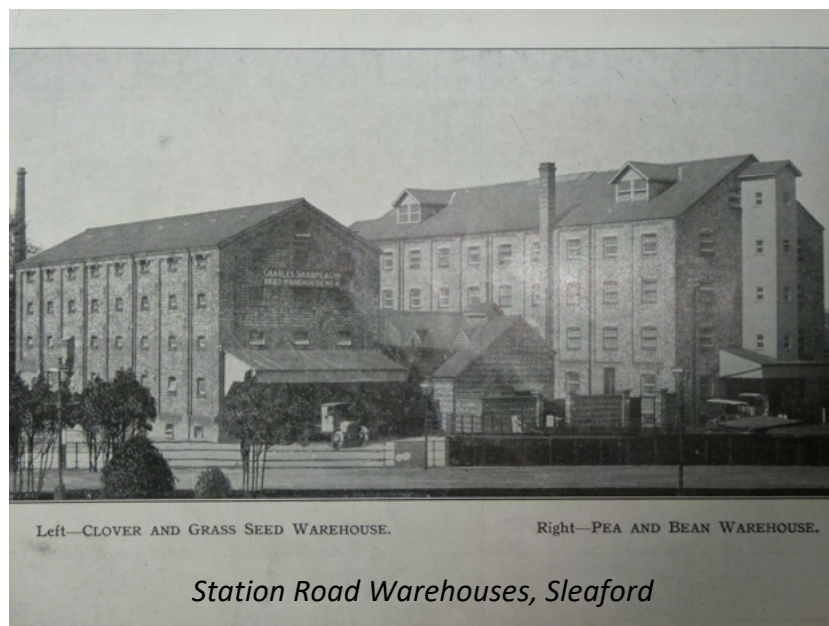


Order Office - the photo is annotated with the names Coupland, Townsend and Barnes

In fact, in all the important countries in the world where seeds are used, Charles Sharpe & Co have established themselves.

One curious incident connected with the early life of the business may be related. The late Mr. Charles Sharpe was at one time a Liberal in politics, but he, along with many others of his way of thinking at the time, could not agree with the Home Rule proposals of the Gladstonian Government, and thereafter he threw in his lot with those who stood out against any attempt at dismemberment of the Empire, and from whose ranks the present Unionist Party was formed. This act of renunciation, apparently, gave umbrage to some of the firm's customers in the Emerald Isle, and the volume of trade which flowed across the Irish Sea diminished. It is hardly necessary to mention that the business then lost has been more than recovered since.

The Sleaford business started with three people. To-day, the Sleaford staff, men and women, numbers upwards of two hundred and fifty. At Heckington there are over sixty, and at Ruskington over forty men and women. In the beginning there was one small warehouse on the Boston Road, and now forming part of the offices; now there are the Heckington warehouse, built in 1890, the Ruskington warehouse, built in 1895, the Jermyn Street premises, which were previously used as a flour mill, occupied since 1900 and recently acquired, the old station warehouse which has been in use for forty years, and the large, up to date new warehouse adjoining it which was built in 1914, and where the produce of 5,000 acres of land is dealt with in the course of every year. The Jermyn Street premises are devoted entirely to turnip and swede seed; Heckington and Ruskington to peas; the old station warehouse to clover and grass seeds; and the new building to peas and beans; whilst there is another building on the Boston Road, on the opposite side of the road to the offices, where mangold seed is dealt with.

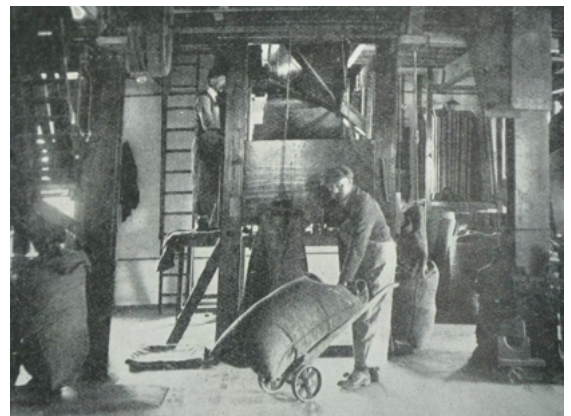


The total floor area of these warehouses amounts to 106,301 square feet, and all of the buildings, with the exception of those on the Boston road, have good (railway) siding accommodation; and this is amplified by the motor service which the Company have at their command.

The method adopted in preparing the different varieties of seeds for sale is practically the same, though special machinery has to be used in some of the necessary and very delicate processes.

The machinery is of the most up-to-date character, and performs tasks which, to the layman, appear to be little short of miraculous. Peas are cleaned by machinery, and are then hand-picked before being made up into bags ready for rail and shipment.

All the smaller seeds pass through machinery which, with wind and velvet touch, cleans them of every kind of foreign substance, and they come out of the operation ready for being sent out to the customer.



Pea Cleaning Machines

As has been said, the business has been built up on very sound lines, and its connections have grown gradually and naturally. The Company, from the very beginning, have always aimed at creating a permanent and regular high-class trade, by taking all possible precautions to ensure a continuity of reliable stocks for the purpose of its business at home and abroad, and have never spared any expense in maintaining the world-wide reputation of their seeds.

By means of a systematic process of selection they raise their own stock seed, and test the same with meticulous care side by side with other well-known and recognised stocks for the purpose of comparison. This pedigree stock is supplied by the Company to the growers, and the resulting crops of seed, which are grown under the supervision of the Company's own staff of experts, are again tested, first in heat for germination, and finally for trueness to character in the extensive trial grounds at Sleaford. This system forms the basis of the Company's transactions, and its success is proved by the steadily increasing demand for the Company's products.



The Seed Testing Laboratory - the photo is annotated with W. Hallam Harding?

Sharpes" have been successful in introducing many specialities to their customers, and to the seed world; and many of these are at present in commerce, such as, among the peas, Sharpes' Queen, Standard, President, and Vanguard; in broccoli, Sharpes' Monarch; in parsley, Sharpes' Lincoln Green; in potatoes, the celebrated "Express" and "Victor"; in swedes, "Ne plus ultra" and "Premier". For these and many others awards have been received from time to time from the Royal Horticultural Society. Flower seeds form a not inconsiderable part of the Company's business, but as the climate of Lincolnshire is not favourable to the growth of flowers for seed purposes, their chief aim is to develop those seeds which can be cultivated in the county.



Vegetable Seed Department - the photo is annotated with the names Moss, Robinson, Kirton, Clayton, Butler, Wilkinson, Bland, Broughton and Hempstead?



Flower Seed Department - the photo is annotated with the names of Kirton and Clayton

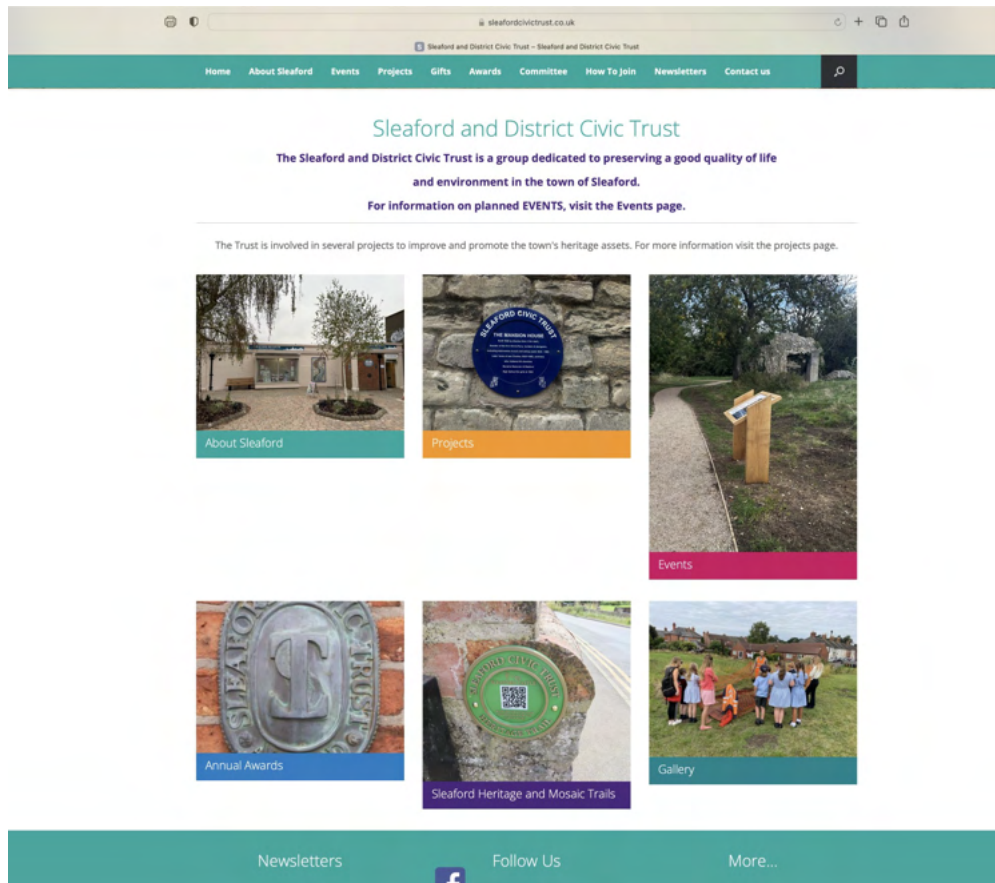
"Sharpes" were responsible for the safe handling and delivery of one of the largest consignments of seeds that has ever been dealt with in the seed world. This was three years ago, when they executed an enormous order for the Russian Government.

Ed.

Sleaford Civic Trust Website

<https://sleafordcivictrust.co.uk>

Have you visited the Civic trust website lately?



The front page of the Civic Trust website has 'easy to access' links to a huge range of information about the work of the Society and general information about Sleaford, past and present. Click on any of the six images to take you immediately to your area of interest, either to find out specific information or to browse more generally.

The Projects area will bring you up to date on the current work of the SDCT – the Town Signs Project, the Sleaford Castle Project – and also to view previous projects now completed. **The Events page** contains a wide range of events taking place in Sleaford, as well as those particular to the Civic Trust and Sleaford Museum.

In the bottom bar, there are a range of other links to useful pages on the website. Notice the button to take you to the **Newsletters section** where you can read and/or download newsletters going back to 2013. These newsletters contain articles of local interest over the years, as well as historical information concerning buildings in the town.

Please do have a browse on our website and let me know what you think. If there is anything you'd like to see added **Email:** sleafordct@gmail.com **FAO Doreen Bamford.**

Doreen Bamford, Website Editor

Museum Display

With the sad demise of two more banks in Sleaford very recently, the latest exhibition in the Museum tells a little of the story of banking and finance in the Town. Our curatorial team have dug out some interesting material which makes for a small, but effective display.

The artefact signage and labelling has been completely refreshed by a professional graphic artist! Many thanks to Lucy for the time and effort she has put into the project – we are delighted with the results.

Our next installation will be another small exhibition which will complement the first of our ever-popular series of Local History talks this year – it took place on 24th March. I hope you were able to attend. ‘The Navy come to Cranwell! The Cranwell Gasbags’ tells the story of ‘lighter than air’ operations from RNAS Training Establishment, Cranwell, including the sad tale of Wing Commander C.M. Waterlow (see next page).

The Art Fund

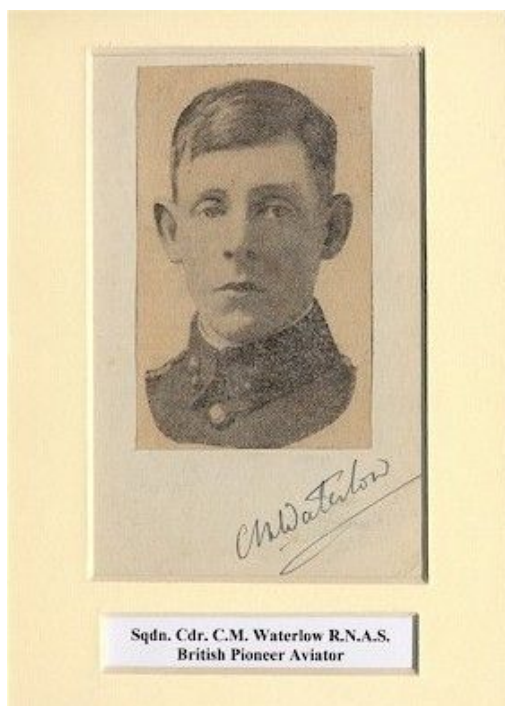
You will, I expect, have already heard of the exciting news of our latest project. With a large grant won from the Art Fund, we are planning a collaborative two-site exhibition entitled, ‘Common Ground: Sleaford’s Shared Stories.’ The two sites, the Sleaford Museum and the Hub’s main exhibition space, will host specially commissioned art work in diverse media. The 3 artists who have been selected, from a field of 116 applications, will produce work which will respond to artefacts from the Museum collection, the environment in which they were found and the people who used them.

In addition to the commissioned work, the grant has enabled us to engage a further three artists who will run residencies and artistic outreach in the schools and community during the period of the exhibition. The work produced will be exhibited alongside the commissioned pieces. These exciting and innovative exhibitions will run from July until November this year. You may wish to be involved and I will keep you up to date with how you might do that. Keep an eye on the Sleaford Museum website (sleafordmuseum.org.uk) and our Facebook page too for more details and coverage as it develops.



C.M. Waterlow - a fatal accident

Wing Commander C. M. Waterlow was originally a Royal Engineer. He formed part of the crew of the Army's first airship, the 'Nulli Secundus' in 1907, as well as of each subsequent airship. He was the 3rd person to qualify as an airship pilot and also a founder member of the RFC, serving with No.1 Squadron.



He transferred to the RNAS in 1914 serving in France and as an Experimental Officer at RNAS Kingsnorth. He was the CO of RNAS Wormwood Scrubs before being appointed as the first CO of the Lighter Than Air Section at RNAS Training Establishment Cranwell.

On 20th July 1917, Waterlow was walking into the shed with the handling party for SS39 when a gust of wind caught the ship, taking her out of the hands of most of the men. However, Waterlow, PO MG Collins and AC2 S Lightstone held on to the ropes and were carried up to a great height. All three eventually dropped off the ship and tragically fell to their deaths. SS39 made a free balloon landing, one and half miles east of Cranwell village and was ripped, but otherwise largely undamaged.



A poignant note is that Waterlow had married Winifred Joan Clare, daughter of John Henry Clare, on 9th June 1917 just six weeks before he was killed. Waterlow is buried in St Andrew's Church, Leasingham.

Mark Bamford, Chairman Sleaford Museum Trust

Future Events

Monday, May 18th, 2026

Civic Trust 53rd AGM - 2pm in the Barge & Bottle, Carre Street, Sleaford. A Copy of the Minutes from the 52nd AGM and a copy of the Accounts as at 31 December 2025 will be available for viewing on our Website at www.sleafordcivictrust.co.uk

Please note that the venue has yet to be confirmed but you will receive a further notification in due course.

Tuesday, May 26th, 2026

Leonard Short M.M. (1893 -1989) - Sleaford Toy maker to Canadian WW2 Propellers and Hurricane fuel tanks' by John Dale, Museum Researcher. Presented in St Denys' Church Rooms, off the Market Place in Sleaford. The talk starts at 7.30pm and lasts approximately an hour.

Donation only - This whole event is free to attend as the 2026 AGM of the Sleaford Museum Trust will follow John's talk.

Tuesday, July 28th, 2026

The Carre Family Vault @ St Denys' by Simon Pawley, local Historian and author. Simon is well-known for his very well researched and interesting talks. After publishing his joint book (with Michael Turland) on the History of the Carre Family, Simon will share more of his extensive research on the mysterious Carre family vault at St Denys' Church. Presented in St Denys' Church Rooms, off the Market Place in Sleaford. The talk starts at 7.30pm and lasts approximately an hour. Refreshments are available and there is a raffle.

£3 for non-members and £1 for members.

Corporate Members

We would like to thank our Corporate Members for their renewed support for 2026.



CARRE
HERITAGE

DUNCAN
& TOPLIS

Blast from the past



Two photographs from my own collection of a Sharpe's Seeds vehicle. This is a Scammell Scarab 'Mechanical Horse' PCT 308, registered in Kesteven. This particular Scarab model was introduced around 1955.

Ed.