

April 2022 Edition

We have a new bench in the village that sits to the east of the Pond surveying the ducks and other wildfowl looking toward the Avenue. It has been erected in memory of the Finney family who brought fun fair rides to the Estate during Well Dressings for families to enjoy. On my inheritance I remember the swing boats and rides that stood by the pond and were enjoyed by young and old alike. Time moves on and the attractions went in the late 90s to be replaced by large inflatable slides that seemed to obliterate the Hall in the 00s .however we now have no such fun as children seem to be more in touch with their interactive sessions on their computers. The daughter of the last Finney to man the rides, the late Walter, wanted to commemorate the family and the bench sits resplendently lightening the load for travellers and visitors alike. Why not come to the village and see for yourself?

The return of Ashbourne Royal Shrovetide after the pandemic prevented the game from taking place in 2021 was a huge fillip and celebration for the people and visitors of the town in early March. On Shrove Tuesday 91-year-old Ashburnian Bay Spencer , a lifelong player and supporter, had the honour of ‘turning up’ the ball from Shaw Croft. Before that ,at the lunch for 500 in the Leisure Centre, Bay regaled the merry throng with the story of his life and career. Having been born at the Maternity Hospital in Ashbourne he joined the family firm , Spencer’s Bakery before signing up for the Derbyshire Yeomanry and ended up as an HGV driver after the war. His family’s association with the game dated back to 1911 when grandfather William Spencer goaled at Sturston. His ball was also scored for the Uppards by local James ‘Monty’ Lyon at Sturston as the townsfolk partied long into the night. After observing the game, I managed to explore various local hostelrys during the subsequent afternoon before being bungled into a waiting Landover at 10pm to get home. A happy day after a challenging two years for the town.

The crisis that is the ghastly war in Ukraine was central at our recent Derbyshire Dales District Council Budget meeting in March. Before we started our business Michelle Morley, councillor for Brailsford ward gave a moving speech about her family’s experiences(Michelle was born in Poland) at the start of the Second World War. Speaking passionately for five minutes about her history, Europe’s history, our History it put our deliberations into perspective. As a Council we were all united in our support for Ukraine and we lit up the Town Hall in yellow and blue in sympathy and support but Michelle’s poignant speech made us all stop and think. That night we did pass the forthcoming year’s budget (despite some abstentions) but moreover we in the Dales committed our support to democracy and to the fearless people in Ukraine. God bless them all.

It is always nice to receive an unexpected package in the post. Shortly after Christmas I opened a large envelope to reveal a book called ‘The Poems of Francis St. Vincent Morris’. Written during the First World War the collection was written by Lieutenant Morris of the 3rd battalion The Sherwood Foresters who was attached to the RFC (Royal Flying Corps). It is a charming and poignant read and so relevant today during our present world events as it talks about the pointlessness of war and the strength gained from faith. Sadly, Morris himself died of wounds on April 29th 1917. It was sent to me from a lady in the Wirral who had been clearing out her late Mother’s belongings. The book had been given in August 1918 to Abbie Walwyn born at Broadclose Farm on the Estate, educated at Tissington School and subsequently , after Ashbourne Grammar School, was one of the first lady graduates from Liverpool University. Quite an achievement in those times. Her daughter wanted to ‘rehome ‘ the book at Tissington and I am delighted to house it in our library next to our other military musings.

'Only the Good Die Young' as Billy Joel wrote in one of his songs but in January a great man died in Warsop as a result of cancer far too young. I have been visiting the Estate and properties at this mining town for over 40 years and I first met Keith 'Moggy' Morgan in the late 80s on the contours of the old slag heaps at Warsop Vale Colliery. Keith was an ex-miner but loved the outdoors and his array of dogs, pigeons and birds that he kept at his home in the town was second to none. Always agreeable with a cheeky chuckle and a huge smile we became great friends over the years as we pursued stray pheasants and partridge over those Warsop Hills. He died too young at the age of 65 and I was honoured to say a few words at his funeral at Ollerton Crematorium. Another life well lived but gone too soon. Our condolences go out to his widow Dawn and son James.

Photo Royal Shrovetide Bay Spencer turns up the ball
Photo Bay Spencer and his Shrovetide Ball
Photo

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