

# Beckingham cum Saundby ....

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## Beckingham cum Saundby History Group Trip

### Owston Ferry Smithy 2019



The Smithy Museum and Heritage Centre in Owston Ferry was the venue for an evening trip by the History Group in May with around 16 members attending. The Old Smithy is a small but fascinating building, grade 11 listed, built in 1859. Originally owned by five generations of the Laming family, it also included the family home and a croft used as a joiners and painters shop. When the last member of the family George Laming retired, he simply walked out locked up and left the building just as it was, never going back. When he eventually died in 1988 the whole complex was put up for sale.

The new owner a Mr Arthur Mills donated the Smithy to the Owston Ferry History Society. There is a plaque on the wall of the shoeing shop commemorating this. Apart from strengthening the upper floor with two steel joists the shoeing shop remains the same as when it was left by the Laming family. The restoration of the Old Smithy began in May 1989 and was completed apart from the courtyard in July 1992. The majority of the work was done by members of the Society.



On arrival the Group were welcomed by members of the Owston Ferry History Society and given a brief introduction before being split into two groups to be taken on separate tours.

Walking into the Smithy was like stepping back in time. In the shoeing shop (now the reception) there was a vast collection of agricultural tools displayed in every space possible. These included willow casting tools used to clean out watercourses dating back to 1900's



Along with pitchforks, hoes, rakes, hay trussers, knives and various cutting devices. A treadle lathe and fret saw which looked very similar to a Singer treadle sewing machine, however this was not the case, though it worked on the same principal. A variety of willow baskets, which the members were quick to notice, along with riddles and sough pipes for land drainage were also on display. A manikin stood in the corner dressed as a man in 1930's clothes depicting a farm labourer in his Saturday night attire after a hard week's work of 50 hours for £1.10s or £1.50p in today's money!! Two rings to tether two horses as they were being shod were still on the back wall.



The Blacksmiths shop has been preserved as left by the Laming family, the atmosphere capturing an aspect of village life long gone. Unusual with its two forges both in working order and their leather bellows indicating that this had once been a thriving business.

The Laming family however were reluctant to modernise hence the enormous number of hand tools on display, laid out on a work bench or hung on the wall.



Among the larger items was a hand operated pedestal drill and a threading machine which would have been used for cutting threads for bolt (for screws). The lath and plaster ceiling had been left intact, due to the building being listed.



In the yard outside where the carpenters shop had once been there were more agricultural tools and machinery to see in the storage sheds. These included a Lamings potato sorter, grass cutter and cake breaker. The latter was used to break up slabs of manufactured animal feed. Plus the old school clock bells with their Westminster chimes that sounded quite melodious. There was a restored water pump used to supply the house and Blacksmiths shop and is today a rare item.

Restoration work in the courtyard was started and completed in 1995. Bricks for the storage shed, toilets and store came from a hovel in Gunthorpe and were donated. There is still the levelling plate in the yard used when making cartwheels. Underneath this the village millennium capsule is buried.

Upstairs had been converted onto a museum consisting of two small rooms on different levels, full of artefacts of local interest as well to do with the Smithy, many donated by local people. A new floor has been added to accommodate this. In the first room were many old photos of the Laming family involved in the business, along with old ledgers covering a period 1920's to 1970's recording every business transaction, cost and who placed the order. Many names mentioned are still in the village today. It took George Laming three years to convert from £-s-d to decimal currency!!



Other items included a milk separator which people were invited to have a go at turning – it was very stiff - plus an old fashioned grocer's till. There were old butchers' bills and an array of implements, plus old weekly grocery bills, one for every week from 1933 to 1961, with the order nearly always the same. The Lamings never threw anything away! A butter churn, canning machine and stocking knitter, items in display cabinets and even some old army boots could also be seen!



The second room contained displays on village history, such as, schooldays, the River Trent, WW2 and the Owston Ferry Regatta, which no longer takes place. The cabinets contained collections of saddlers and leather workers tools, toys and pastimes, farm work, chapel crockery and more.



A large collection of old coins, tokens and brooches, some dating back to Roman times were all found in the parish by local metal detectorists. There was an ancient phonograph and several accurately detailed scale models of fairground attractions. Two mannequins, one a young boy dressed in 1950's school uniform and the other a late Victorian lady dressed up to go shopping. Last but not least was a case of birds eggs, gathered in the days when this was not prohibited.



There really was so much to see and far too much to mention, with a fascinating history and collection of artefacts and memorabilia, evoking memories of the past. Well worth a visit – or two! The Group thoroughly enjoyed their visit. Grateful thanks go to the Owston Ferry Society Members who were enthusiastic, knowledgeable and made us very welcome.

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