

**THE WELFARE INSTITUTE - PEGGS GREEN
(NOW KNOWN AS THE BEAUMONT CENTRE)**



The Original Sandstone Plaque



**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JUNE 2020
DRAFT LIVE DOCUMENT**

PREFACE

This document has been posted on both the Griffydam Heritage Group and the author's website as a *draft live document* with the intention of adding further information from readers as this hopefully becomes available.

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INTRODUCTION

On the front page is a photograph of what is thought to be the original sandstone plaque set into the front of the building, but without a date unfortunately. The author assumes that this confirms it to be a *Welfare Institute* and not a *Miner's Welfare Institute* as thought to be the case by some, and reported as being given to the council after Peggs Green Colliery closed. As this colliery closed in 1859, that is not feasible as we know it was not built before 1925 as the O/S map of this date does not show any building on the site.

The Enclosure Act for Peggs Green and Thringstone was passed by Parliament in 1803 and the final enclosure took place in 1807. Basically, this meant that Peggs Green became part of the Township of Thringstone which was in turn part of the ecclesiastical parish of Whitwick. Thringstone became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right in 1875.

In 1936, there were a number of changes made to the boundaries between Coleorton, Swannington, Thringstone and a small part of Worthington. The major part of the change was the transfer of Peggs Green from Thringstone to the civil parish of Coleorton.

It is plausible that the Welfare Institute was built sometime after Peggs Green became part of the civil parish of Coleorton in 1936 and we now know it was built prior to World War II starting. See supplementary information at the end of the book.

The importance of the "Welfare Centre" to this working class community of Peggs Green and Griffydam cannot be over emphasized. People came from a wide area to be entertained here and memorable evenings were experienced which can still be recalled by those old enough to remember, including the author. The following is an attempt to describe some of the activities and entertainment that took place there after the Second World War.

The building was re-named the Beaumont Centre and is now described as Coleorton Parish Hall. A photograph shown later confirms that by 1972 it was being referred to as "The Beaumont Social Centre".

PEGGS GREEN "DARBY & JOAN CLUB"



ILLUSTRATED SONGS
"DARBY and JOAN."
"Darby dear, we are
old and grey."

From an old postcard



Darby & Joan Club "Women's (Royal) Voluntary Service" emblem

The name Darby & Joan originally came from a poem generally attributed to Henry Woodfall which describes the lives of a happily married devoted couple, leading a quiet uneventful life.

In 1735, Henry Woodfall, a printer's apprentice, wrote a ballad entitled "The Happy Old Couple" about a happily married elderly couple which was printed in the "Gentleman's Magazine, v.153 (March ,1735)

His inspiration for those characters was apparently his own boss John Darby and his wife Joan. The third stanza reads :-

*"Old Darby, with Joan by his side,
You've often regarded with wonder:
He's dropsical, she is sore-eyed,
Yet they're never happy asunder ..."*

Henry Woodfall served his apprenticeship under John Darby and admired him very much. He wrote of his wife Joan: *"As chaste as a picture cut in alabaster. You might sooner move a Scythian rock than shoot fire into her bosom."*

As can be imagined, he wrote his poem after John Darby's death. This poem in turn became an inspiration for follow-up poems and eventually Darby and Joan became a metaphor. As a result of Henry Woodfall's ballad, there are now Darby and Joan Clubs all across the UK. Apparently, the only prerequisite for couples to become members was that they must have been in the same marriage for at least 40 years but the author is rather sceptical about that.

THE WVS

The eagle eyed will have noted the letters **WVS** on the Darby & Joan badge on the preceding page. This stands for "Women's (Royal) Voluntary Service".

The following is taken from www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk website© WRVS 2008:-

W.V.S. members gave every care in their power to the welfare of old people during the war years and many of them made it a regular duty to look after those who were alone during air attack, either taking them to the shelter or staying with them in their own homes. In addition to this form of neighbourly aid, warm blankets and comforting hot water bottles were provided ... for many who were ailing or infirm, shopping was undertaken ... and any who were confused or worried by the intricacies of pension books, form filling and rationing were assured of ready and kindly help and advice at the nearest W.V.S. Centre.

Released by the end of the war from the constant over-riding importance of its Civil Defence duties W.V.S. gladly turned its attention to the means of increasing its work for the welfare of old people , a cause which it had much at heart.

In 1946 WVS enacted two major initiatives to improve welfare for old people. The first was the creation of residential clubs, which aimed to house the growing number of old people who had nowhere else to go after the end of the war, which were funded by the Lord Mayor of London's Air-Raid Distress Fund.

The second were **Darby & Joan clubs** where people could meet in pleasant surroundings for a friendly chat and a cup of tea and perhaps a quiet game of cards or half an hour with the wireless. In some cases, too, a hot midday meal cooked by W.V.S. members was available. The first of these clubs to open, for which we have a firm date recorded in the WRVS Archive and Heritage Collection, was at Lincoln which opened on 26 July 1946.

At this stage, we are not aware of what date the Peggs Green Darby & Joan started, but the following three photographs are dated 1954 and 1955. Members mainly came from Griffydam and Peggs Green and judging from these photographs it was well supported.



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN 1954

FRONT ROW L TO R

Christine Allcoat's Grandma, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Wilton, Mrs. Brooks, Mrs. Reed, Mrs. Harvey, Mrs. Flo Morley, Mr. Wilton

MIDDLE ROW L TO R

Mrs. O' Reilly, Mrs. Dimmock, Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Morley, Sarah Barkby, Mrs. Barkby, Mrs. Fern, Mrs. Fairbrother, Mrs. Watkins, Mrs. Morley, Mrs. Howkins, Mr. Barker ?, Mr. Morley.

TOP ROW L TO R

Mrs. Williamson, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Rowell, Mrs. Morley, Mrs. Morley, Mrs. Bradley, Mr. Harrison, Mrs. Harrison
(the first five ladies were thought to be the helpers)



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN 1955

FROM L TO R ON BENCH

Janet Draycott (Grandmother of Sheila Fisher), Albert Draycott (grandad), Mary Williamson (Sheila Fisher's Mum), Lillian Platts

BACK ROW L TO R

Mrs. Morley, Sarah Barkby, Liza Waterfield, Mrs. Dimmock, Mrs. Leeson, Louie Hutchinson, Mrs. Marshall

ENTERTAINMENT WITH VERNON SMITH AFTER THE WAR YEARS

One of the stalwarts of the community and a natural entertainer was Vernon Smith who lived in "New Row", Peggs Green. He was chairman of the management committee at one time and worked tirelessly to keep the Welfare Centre (Beaumont Social Centre) open. He produced and took part in entertainment events like pantomimes etc. at the centre, and the fact that it still survives today as the Coleorton Parish Hall owed much to Vernon's efforts.

Vernon was a natural comedian and a good man, and will be remembered also for the pantomimes at Coalville Adult School where he partnered Roy Johnson in comedy roles. Vernon sadly passed away in 2012 at the age of 87.

He apparently conducted the Sunday School choir at the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Griffydham and prepared them for the Anniversary.



Mr. Vernon Smith (second left), chairman of the Beaumont Social Centre management committee, receives a cheque for £100 from Mr. Reg Burton on behalf of customers of the New Inn, Peggs Green. The money was raised from a sale of harvest produce at the inn. With them are the landlord and landlady of the pub, Mr. and Mrs. E. Bradford.

Photograph taken in 1972

PANTO'S AT THE WELFARE CENTRE



IBSTOCK'S David Beniston has identified all the adults from the panto picture featured in the December 30 edition of the Times.

From left to right, the picture sees Roy Johnson as the first person on the back row.

Next is David's wife Janet, while Vernon Smith and Gerald Callagan complete the row.

David added that he didn't recognise any of the children in the photo but that the photo did bring back wonderful memories.

The date of the above photograph is not known or whether it was at Coalville or Peggs Green

Sheila Fisher of Griffydham relates.....I don't think I have any photos of the pantos that Vernon did, all I know is that they were great fun and I helped my cousin, Alan Williamson, learn his lines as he always played a comedy part, and I used to be in the dance group doing stuff like 'tiptoe through the tulips'. The whole production was a laugh a minute.

Alan Williamson was the gentleman that kept the hairdressers in a shed on the piece of land next to the Cross Keys, Newbold where the author remembers going to have his hair cut. At the age of about 14 in 1956 it cost two shillings in old money to have a hair cut there.

THE RED ROSES ENTERTAINERS

Around 1982/83 another entertainment venture held at "Newbold Working Men's Club" was shows organised by Vernon Smith to raise money for Newbold School and other local good causes. An important part of the shows were "The Red Roses Entertainers" dancing troupe which performed during the shows. The author understands from a past member Sue Smith (nee Dimmock) that dance practice took place in the old Griffydam Wesleyan Methodist Chapel Sunday School room.

They performed around the locality to raise money for deserving causes and to entertain the elderly and school children etc.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

MEMORIES OF PETER HARVEY, A FORMER RESIDENT OF PEGGS GREEN SUBMITTED BY HIS DAUGHTER LINDA GRIFFITHS

Peter Harvey lived in the cottages opposite School Lane on Nottingham Road, Peggs Green and now lives in Hugglescote. The Kidgers' lived in the large house next door. At the age of 91, he has great memories of his younger days in Peggs Green and has provided the following information about the Welfare Institute:-

Peter recalls a billiard table being in the Welfare Institute (possibly a Youth Club was held there?) and because there was no chalk for the cues they would use the snowcem paint on the ceiling as an alternative.

Bernard Hutchinson who lived in the cottage at the Zion Hill end of School Lane was the caretaker who would come and light the coal fire. Bernard was also an ARP (air raid warden) and school attendance officer.

Apparently men from the RAF base at Castle Donington would come over to the institute for dances and the ENSA type entertainment. ENSA was an organisation set up in 1939 by Basil Dean and Leslie Henson to provide entertainment for British armed forces personnel during World War II.

He recalled the outside toilets where he and his mates fled to when being chased by a swarm of wasps which they had disturbed!

The above information is important as it confirms that the Welfare Centre would have been built prior to World War II commencing in 1939, and possibly after 1936 when Peggs Green became part of the civil parish of Coleorton

VE DAY CELEBRATION MEMORIES BY GWENDA LEESON (NEE. BIRD)

I remember there was a parade, everyone in fancy dress. I was dressed as a gypsy. We walked round the village.

Games were played in Mr Blakey's field (Mr Blakey lived at the Engine Inn). Tea was served in The Welfare Institute (now the Beaumont Centre), everyone contributed. I took a mixing bowl filled with orange jelly which was flavoured with concentrated orange juice, which was issued to babies and small children, my sister Margaret would have been three.

In the evening there was dancing and I think this was repeated on VJ Day.