



BASKETRY

Then and Now

THE FIRST WORLD WAR YEARS AND THEIR LEGACY

DECEMBER 2017

Image above: A typical Castle Donington 'fancy' basket, held in Castle Donington Museum. Note the enamelled cane in the lapped handle and as a decorative feature in the sides. Cane was imported from Germany by Dryad Cane Works. Courtesy of Castle Donington Museum.

Welcome to the final newsletter of the Basketry Then and Now project.

During the course of the Basketry Then and Now project we have explored basketry in the First World War period from many angles. The results of the research, along with the blog posts, newsletters and exhibition banners, are available on the project website and can be downloaded. We've also made five films and a short timelapse video – some of these are already available on the website, and the rest will be added in the new year. Together, these will be a valuable resource for basketmakers and those interested in the history of basketmaking.

The project ended with an event held in Castle Donington on the weekend

of 25–26 November. This was a brilliant opportunity to show what has been achieved throughout the course of the project and to share our passion for basketry with a wider audience.

Although the project has come to an end, several of the researchers will be giving talks about their work next year, and the banners will be featuring in several exhibitions across the country. And while this is the last official project newsletter, we still have some research summaries and films to add to the website and will let you know when they are available.

A huge thank you to everyone who has been involved in the project – the researchers, volunteers, those who featured in the films, and those who provided images and information. Particular thanks go to Adam Jones-Lloyd for the endless hours of patient filming and editing. We could not have done it without everyone's help and enthusiasm!

Hilary Burns tells us about the Basketmaking in Castle Donington and the East Midlands event, which was held in November and marked the end of the project.

Basketmaking in Castle Donington and the East Midlands was developed and organised by Maggie Cooper, a practicing basketmaker who settled in Castle Donington nearly twenty years ago. The town was once a hub for the basketmaking industry in the East Midlands, and basketmaking was one of Castle Donington's main occupations in the early 1900s. Maggie had long wanted to have an event like this, and put a lot of time and energy into producing a packed programme with a raft of activities and displays.

The event was held at Orchard Primary School, where Anne Sherwood, the head teacher, has been keen to explore the history of Castle Donington and its connection to basketmaking with her pupils. The school has planted a small willow



Image: Baskets made by the Orchard Primary School pupils with Julie Genner's pigeons.

bed in the grounds, and Maggie ran some basketmaking sessions with the children in the autumn term. These focused on the role of carrier pigeons in the First World War, and resulted in the pupils making a pigeon basket. This was on display over the weekend and provided a comfortable home to two wonderful pigeons made by volunteer Julie Genner.

The weekend started with a series of talks. Chris Hills, Chairman of Castle Donington Parish Council, spoke about maintaining interest in the town's basketmaking heritage. Greta Bertram followed this with an overview of the Basketry Then and Now project and its achievements. Dr Pam Fisher, co-author of *The Victoria History of Leicestershire: Castle Donington*, talked about the pre-First World War life of the basketmaking families in the town, particularly about children and their role in the family economy.

Delia Richards, Curator of Castle Donington Museum, spoke about her childhood memories of her family, several generations of whom were basketmakers. Mary Crabb, one of

the project researchers, then spoke about her experiences in reconstructing the artillery shell basket she had seen at the Museum of English Rural Life. She was followed by Maggie Cooper who discussed willow growing and basketmaking in Castle Donington.

Lastly, Keith Hodgkinson from the East Leake History Society, talked about the connections between the basketmaking families who lived in the various villages around Castle Donington and the Trent Valley. The topography and the soil of this area are ideal for growing willow. This led to the development of the industry on a large scale – all of which disappeared after the First World War.



Image: Basketmakers from the Beehive Works, East Leake in 1917. They wear badges showing they are engaged in war work. Courtesy of East Leake History Society.

The five films made for the project were shown on a loop over the weekend. Most relevant to the event was the film *Willow Connections: Exploring Castle Donington*, which tells the history of basketmaking in the town and also shows Maggie making a typical Castle Donington style basket.

There was also a wide range of displays about the local willow growing and basketmaking industries, including: the link between Castle Donington and the

Dryad Cane Works in Leicester; the making of a particular type of basket known as a scuttle; enormous 'skips' used in the textile industry; baskets from the collection of Rodney Cousins, author of *A Basketful: Willow Growing and Basketmaking in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire*; basketmaking in East Leake; Mary Crabb's artillery shell basket and remembrance work – including an original First World War shell basket; and a display of basketmaking techniques and finished baskets from the Froghall Weavers, an active local basketmaking group. The project's exhibition banners were also on display.

There were also demonstrations and workshops over the two days. Rachel Evans wove a large frame basket, Jo Frost demonstrated rush chair seating, and Jean Savage ran a festive workshop to create a herd of reindeer decorations.

Maggie led two guided 'willow walks' around the old town, highlighting the buildings associated with basketmaking in the past. This was the result of years of detective work and proved to be a fascinating journey back in time – and many of the sites can be seen in the Castle Donington film.

Enormous thanks to Maggie, Julie and Anne, and to all the volunteers involved in putting on a such a successful event.



Image: Seedlip from Rodney Cousins' collection. Courtesy of John Roulestone.

In October the Hertfordshire Basketry group visited the Imperial War Museum. Geraldine Poore tells us more.

A small group of members from Herts Basketry visited the Imperial War Museum to look at the First World War exhibition with the idea of using it as inspiration to make pieces that might form part of a small exhibition which could be held towards the end of 2018 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the end of the Great War. Most of us were happier to look away from the theme of war toward one of peace, and a broader concept for the exhibition of 'the end of conflict' emerged.

People came away with ideas and enthusiasm, inspired by a range of images from a mass of shells to a small tobacco box, and we agreed the idea of exhibiting would be something to discuss further with the wider group.

A new edition of *Cultivation and Use of Basket Willows* is coming soon.

Over the past year the Basketmakers' Association, scientists from Rothamsted Research, and the Basketry Then and Now team have been working on an updated version of the publication *Cultivation and Use of Basket Willows*. The revised draft is now with the designers. The new edition, detailing current practice and illustrated with photographs throughout, will be printed in full colour by the University of Hertfordshire and available in 2018.

Other news

Films

Films available on the [website](#):

- Memory and Remembrance
- Willow Regrowth in in Spring
- The Sopwith Camel Seat
- Willow Connections: Exploring Castle Donington

Films still to come:

- Basketry as a Therapeutic Activity
- The Future of Willow: Exploring Rothamsted Research

On the blog

Read our latest blog posts [here](#):

- Final thoughts about the MERL shell basket by Mary Crabb

Borrowing the exhibition banners

If you are interested in borrowing the Basketry Then and Now exhibition banners for an event, please contact Anna Hammerin (a.hammerin@herts.ac.uk). Low resolution versions of the banners can be downloaded from the [website](#).

Contact us

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