

## NEWSLETTER Number 70

### The Great Easter Bake-off ....

Local rivals stand either side of the burners ...

The spring of 1955 had been slow to reach the fields between Warwickshire and Leicestershire, but in Newton Regis and Appleby Magna, warmth blazed in every kitchen where the Mothers' Unions prepared for their annual Easter cake competition. For years, the two villages had traded victories—Newton Regis for their faultless simnel cakes, Appleby Magna for bold, inventive bakes—and 1955 promised to be the closest yet.



In Newton Regis, Mrs Elsie Hart, whose husband kept the village shop, spent three weeks soaking currants and sultanas in sherry saved from her brother's wedding. Her recipe had been in the family since the 1920s: twelve marzipan balls representing the apostles, a thick layer of almond paste beneath the icing, and a cross of candied peel that gleamed like amber in her coal-fired oven.

The village women gathered at the hall to help, their hands dusted with flour as they rolled marzipan and shared tales of past contests. "We've not lost since

'52," Elsie reminded them, though her smile softened—she'd known Bea Thatcher from Appleby Magna since their days at county school.

Over in Appleby Magna, Bea Thatcher was taking a risk. While others stuck to tradition, she'd infused her cake with elderflower cordial pressed from bushes in her garden, and dotted the top with candied violets picked by her youngest daughter. Rationing had lifted only two years prior, and Bea wanted to celebrate new freedoms with a taste of the countryside. "It's not *just* about following rules," she told her fellow union members, as they carefully arranged sugar paste rabbits around the cake's edge. "It's about showing what our village can create."

The contest was held at Twycross Hall, a stone building halfway between the two villages. The judges—Vicar Jenkins from Newton Regis and Mrs Pemberton, a retired baker from Appleby Magna—circled the long table where twelve cakes sat gleaming under paper doilies. They prodded crumbs, smelled the spice and fruit, and took tiny, deliberate bites.

Silence fell as they conferred in a corner. Then Vicar Jenkins stepped forward. "We've never faced such a choice," he said, beaming. "Newton Regis's cake is a masterpiece of tradition—rich, balanced, and made with love that tastes of generations. Appleby Magna's cake is a joyous celebration of innovation—light, fragrant, and full of life."

He paused, then held up two ribbons—one blue, one gold. "This year, we declare a tie. Both villages have baked the 'best' cake in their own way."

The hall erupted in cheers. Elsie and Bea embraced, flour on their aprons and tears in their eyes. That Easter Sunday, slices of both cakes were shared at services in both villages, and the women agreed to swap recipes at next month's meeting.

In 1955, it seemed, the sweetest prize wasn't victory alone—it was bringing two communities closer together.

# Andrew's trips

Andy Moore, History Cafe member recalls a visit to Sutton Hoo last month ...

For many of us, the spark of historical curiosity begins in childhood—often ignited by a single image in a textbook or a local legend. For our editor, Andy Moore, that spark was the iconic, eyeless stare of the Sutton Hoo helmet. Last month, under a crisp March sky, Andy finally fulfilled a lifelong ambition by making the pilgrimage to the windswept mounds of Suffolk to stand where East Anglian kings once transitioned from the earthly realm to the eternal.

Sutton Hoo is not merely an archaeological site; it is the cornerstone of our understanding of the "Dark Ages," a term the site itself helped to render obsolete. Upon arrival, the scale of the landscape immediately strikes the visitor. As Andy walked the path toward Mound 1, the site of the legendary ship burial discovered in 1939, the weight of the seventh century felt palpable. Standing beside the footprint of the 27-meter-long ghostly vessel, one can almost hear the echoes of the mourners who hauled this massive ship uphill from the River Deben to serve as a regal sarcophagus.



During his visit, Andy spent considerable time in the High Hall exhibition, which houses replicas of the treasures now held at the British Museum. Seeing the intricate cloisonné enamel of the shoulder clasps and the sheer craftsmanship of the Great Gold Buckle up close highlights a level of sophistication that defies the "primitive" labels once given to the Anglo-Saxons. "To see these designs in the place

they were meant to be buried," Andy remarked, "changes your perspective on the people who lived here. This wasn't just wealth; it was a profound statement of identity and European connection."

The highlight of the day was a climb up the 17-meter-high viewing tower. From this vantage point, the layout of the royal cemetery reveals itself, showing how the mounds were positioned to be seen from the river—a permanent reminder to all who passed of the power of the Wuffingas dynasty. For Andy, looking down at the mounds while the winter wind whipped across the plateau was the realisation of a dream decades in the making.



This visit also served as a reminder of the fragility of history. Had it not been for the intuition of landowner Edith Pretty and the determination of self-taught archaeologist Basil Brown, these treasures might have been lost to time or development. Their story, now intertwined with the ancient kings, adds a layer of modern human drama to the site's deep-time resonance.

As we look forward to a new year of historical discovery in this newsletter, Andy's trip serves as an invitation to all our readers: never stop revisiting the stories that first captured your imagination. Whether it is a Roman fort, a medieval ruin, or a royal burial ground, there is no substitute for standing on the ground where history was made. For Andy Moore, the ghosts of Sutton Hoo are no longer just figures in a book—they are neighbours met at last.



As the final remnants of winter chill fade across the rolling hills of the English countryside, April arrives with a spirit of renewal and a touch of mischief. In England, this month is a vibrant tapestry of ancient folklore, religious observance, and eccentric community spirit. From the lighthearted pranks of the month's opening day to the patriotic displays of late April, the country comes alive with traditions that have defined English culture for centuries.

The month begins with April Fools' Day on April 1st. While its exact origins remain a subject of historical debate, the tradition of "playing the fool" has been a staple of English life since at least the 17th century. The rules are strict: pranks and practical jokes must be carried out before midday. Anyone attempting a trick after the clock strikes twelve is met with the classic retort: "*April Fools' Day is past and gone, you're the fool for making me one!*" It is a day where even national broadcasters and newspapers join in, often planting elaborate, straight-faced hoax stories that keep the nation guessing.

Because April often hosts the Easter weekend, the month is synonymous with unique local customs. Beyond the universal chocolate eggs, England maintains specific traditions like Morris Dancing. Dressed in white with bells jingling from their shins, troupes of dancers perform rhythmic steps with sticks and handkerchiefs to welcome the spring. In many villages, "Egg Shackling" or "Egg Rolling" competitions take place, where locals race hard-boiled eggs down hills—a symbolic nod to the rolling away of the stone from the biblical sepulcher.

On April 23rd, the red cross of the St. George's Cross flies high for the feast day of England's patron saint. St. George's Day celebrates the legendary dragon-slayer and the virtues of chivalry. While it is not a

public holiday, towns across the country host parades, medieval-themed fairs, and "Mummers Plays"—folk plays that often feature a comedic battle between St. George and a dragon. It is a day of quiet but firm national pride, often celebrated with traditional English fare like roast beef or afternoon tea.

April is also the month of "April Showers," which are viewed not as a nuisance, but as the essential precursor to "May flowers." One of the most cherished sights in the English woodland during late April is the emergence of Bluebells. Walking through a "bluebell wood" is a quintessential spring experience, with the forest floor transformed into a violet-blue carpet.

Whether it is the jovial trickery of the first of the month or the solemn ringing of church bells on a spring morning, England's April traditions reflect a nation transitioning from the introspection of winter to the vitality of summer. It is a month that reminds us to embrace our sense of humour, honour our history, and appreciate the sudden, green beauty of the landscape.



**Sir John Moore  
Foundation Museum**

**Sun 12th April 12pm – 4pm:  
Museum Season Opening**  
(free entry, no booking)

**Sun 19th April 12pm – 4pm:  
Craft Day with WI**  
(free entry, book via Eventbrite)

**Tue 21st April 10am – 12noon:  
Local History Cafe**  
(£3 refreshments)

**Sun 10th May 12pm – 4pm:  
Car Show & Museum Open**  
(£2 at gate)

# Rag 'n' Bone

Anne Silins Concludes her story of Appleby's early recycling business ...

Although 'the rag and bone' business was humble and often dirty this man played an important role in the early recycling in our village and throughout the countryside. For it wasn't just small villages they visited, but towns such as Tamworth and Ashby too. Anywhere there were goods no longer of use, this man would collect useless items and re-purpose them. Clothes which couldn't be re-made into a rag mat, or metal which was damaged and no longer of use, newspapers read from cover to cover and not required to start the kitchen fire, even bones not wanted for the family dog, he took all these away. Yes, even old bits and pieces of furniture no longer of use he would take. The rag and bone man would happily take all and any items that were offered. In return he would give something for the children, a balloon, a goldfish swimming in a jar, a lollipop or sometimes a needle and thread or safety pins for the housewife. These items collected by the rag and bone man would then be recycled and turned into pennies or even a shilling which he quickly stowed safely in his pocket to purchase his dinner later in the day.

In those days rags were sold to paper mills and turned into paper, bones could be used for making glue or fertiliser and some bones were even made into decorative knife handles. All scrap metals - iron, brass and tin, were melted down and then reused. This man operated independently, he relied on his knowledge of materials and the markets where he could sell these items. We now remember the rag-

and-bone man as part of Britain's working-class history, our past culture, he was often a poor man, but an enterprising man never the less. He provided a crucial service and was a familiar part of our village life, for this was a time when villagers 'made do', reused when possible, nothing was thrown away without thought and villagers were resourceful. Today however the rag and bone man is a fading figure, edged out by organised waste collection and the rise of charity shops.

With changes in waste management and waste collection in the mid 1960's the modern recycling system took over from how the rag a bone man made his living. The decline of horse-drawn transport made the trade far less common, although a few kept up this service with a lorry. This re-purposing of discarded items has now been replaced by modern recycling and bins are provided to help each householder do these chores for themselves.

Today residents are encouraged to recycle their unwanted and old items. There are weekly or alternate week pickups by a waste collection service. Collections are easy these days, with a blue bin provided for paper, cardboard, cans and glass. Plastics, glass, and other non-recyclables go into a red bin. The brown lidded bin is for the garden waste. Have your containers or bins out by 6.00 a.m. on your collection day and unwanted items are taken away, gone, out of sight. But times are changing once again and we are seeing a resurgence with scrap metal prices rising higher and higher. People may take their metal items to a collection area, have items weighted and receive money for such metal. I understand that copper is much sort after metal. Times are changing, but the rag and bone man isn't coming back any time soon.



[www.sirjohnmoore.org.uk](http://www.sirjohnmoore.org.uk)

SirJohn Moore  
Foundation Heritage  
Centre

**THE NEWSLETTER IS  
EDITED BY**

Andrew Moore

Contact us via email

[museum@sirjohnmoore.org.uk](mailto:museum@sirjohnmoore.org.uk)

