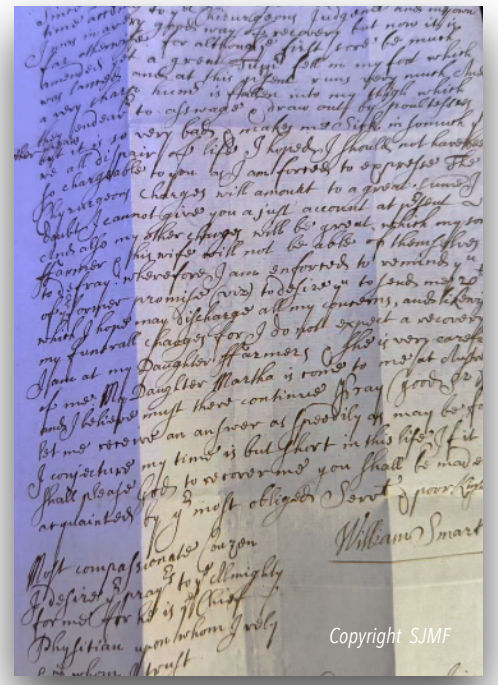
Local History Cafe NEWSLETTER Number 77

The Letter …

Sally Lowe has researched more details into a most astonishing find …

In 2025, a letter was found in a cupboard during a school clearout. It was dated 1694.

It was written by a Mr William Smart, who was asking Sir John Moore to give him the £20 he had previously promised towards his medical bills and sadly, expected funeral costs.



A delve into the records shows that William Smart was a soldier in the Civil Wars, some 50 years earlier. He and his father had a smallholding in Austrey, a little village just next to Appleby Magna and the Sir John Moore Foundation. Leaving his father, who was also a joiner, in charge of the smallholding, William enlisted at the Roundhead barracks at Maxstoke Castle, some 12 miles away.

He was related to Sir John Moore, but we don't know whether he was his cousin or nephew, or something even further removed. William was certainly close enough to ask him to look after his children when he died, and to cover his medical bill and funeral costs.

William's smallholding was looted by soldiers at some point during the Wars. This was a common occurrence in the village and surrounding areas.

There was fierce fighting all around Austrey, although no records survive of any fighting in the village itself. Nearby Ashby, Belvoir, Coleorton and Cotes all saw pitch battles and skirmishes. Garrisons were placed all around the area – Swarkestone, Donington, and Shardlow. And the Scots were invited by the Parliamentarians to help fight. However, records show that once the Scots came to the Midlands, local soldiers were reluctant to have anything to do with them. They were forced to steal food, and no-one would accommodate them for more than a night.

William Smart's father, Barnabie, asked the Exchequer to compensate him for housing soldiers. He wanted reparation for 25 horses, 25 shillings' worth of cheeses, and quartering 15 men.

Unfortunately, Barnabie died during the Civil Wars. We do not know if his death was connected to the wars, or if he died of natural causes.

William married after the Wars had ended, and had at least three children, Anne, Martha, and Jack.

He did not die in 1694, as he had feared. He actually outlived Sir John Moore, who died in 1702. William died in 1705, peacefully at his home in Austrey.

Lest we Forget…

Anne Stiins recalls the reasons why ….

We are once again observing November 11th. This date marks the exact time and date the Armistice was signed in 1918 – as most people will know it was at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, in 1918. Armistice was created to mark the end of World War 1 and to remember the soldiers who died in that war.

The Appleby Magna War Memorial, it was erected in 1920. t is listed as Grade II for the following reasons: it is a memorial and witness to the tragic impact of World War 1 on the local community, and to the sacrifices made during that war. Most important it is to those villagers who were lost to their families. This War Memorial which was erected in 1920, documents those who died in World War 1, and later in World War 2, with the addition of the Cyprus conflict in 1956. There is stone cross, with a carved head and an inscribed shaft, and at the base a plaque with the names of those that were lost.

Remembrance Services in the U.K. are commemorated on two days, with the two-minute silence on November 11th. At the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, the Monarch, Senior Royals and political leaders all attend and lay red poppy wreaths. A National Service plus many local services are held on the second Sunday in November and this is known as Remembrance Sunday.

Other Commonwealth Realms also have their own Remembrance Services. In New Zealand, ANZAC Day, April 25, is very important, they do have a smaller ceremony on November 11th. My husband and I were on a ship which sailed into Auckland Harbour very early on ANZAC Day a few years ago. The Captain had announced the previous evening that anyone wishing to take part in the ANZAC service, which would be held on the top deck of the ship, were welcome to attend. We rose early and attended. Nearly every passenger and most of the crew were on that deck and crew members gave to each of us a sprig of rosemary to hold as a remembrance of that landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula. It was New Zealand and Australian troops who swarmed that Peninsula all those many years ago. Rosemary grows wild across the rocky hills and scrub of the Gallipoli Peninsula, and so wearing a small sprig of rosemary pinned to a lapel, or placing it on graves and memorials in New Zealand is for remembrance. It was as troops moved through the landscape during that campaign, that they brushed against the wild rosemary bushes. The distinct, aromatic scent became permanently entwined with the memories of that campaign for returning veterans. They quietly honour and remember those troops who fought and died. Today alongside the red poppy, rosemary remains a simple, but meaningful tribute.

In Australia both ANZAC day and November 11th are marked with the same ceremony and reverence. ANZAC Day for Australians is to commentate the landing of Australian troops in Gallipoli in World War 1, April 25, 1915. In Australia November 11th. is also remembered and there are ceremonies with people wearing red poppies. At the huge War Memorial in Australia's capital, Canberra, a long wall has the names of those who died in World War I and II, and other conflicts where Australian troops fought. The names of the fallen, all 103,000, are inscribed in a long series of brass panels. A touching tradition has evolved where visitors can place small, red fabric poppies in the gaps between the bronze panels next to the names of fallen soldiers as a way to pay their respects. The names are alphabetically by conflict, and then by military unit, intentionally listed without rank or decorations to show that all sacrifices are equal. This War Memorial in Canberra is dear to the hearts of all Australians. Each day at 4.30 p.m. a bugle plays taps and each and every person within hearing of that sound stands at attention and waits while a bugle call 'The Last Post' sounds, followed by one minute of silence.

In Canada the National War Memorial, called The Response in French, was first unveiled in 1939. It is a tall, granite memorial with bronze sculpture in the centre of Confederation Square in Canada's capital, Ottawa. Remembrance Day is always held on November 11th. It commemorates all Canadian soldiers who have fallen in World War I. Later it was altered, and added to, to accommodate those who died in World War II, the Korean War and the war in Afghanistan. The ceremony begins at 10.45 a.m. with the arrival of the Prime Minister, the Governor General of Canada, and the Silver Cross Mother. This Silver Cross Mother is a women whose child has fallen while serving in the military. On November 11th. Confederation Square is the heart of Ottawa, and is filled with people from across the country, from the Pacific coast, to the Atlantic coast, to the Arctic Ocean and all our land between. At the end of the National Ceremony and throughout the day, people remove their poppies from their coats and place them on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier contains the remains of an unidentified Canadian soldier who was found and exhumed from a Cemetery near Vimy Ridge. No name, no rank, just an unknown Canadian solder. By the end of the day this tomb is covered in red poppies.



May the fallen never be forgotten, we will remember them.

News from the museum …

Sally has vital information about the up and coming events at the museum

Bloomberg Connects

The Sir John Moore Foundation Museum is really pleased to be partnering with Bloomberg for this project. It's an app that you download on to your phone for free, and then you have access to the digital content of various museums across the world. The SJMFM is now available – visit us from the comfort of your own home, or use the app to guide you through the museum next time you visit us in person.

The Bayeux Tapestry

You've heard that the Bayeux Tapestry is currently being displayed at the British Museum? Well, the Sir John Moore Foundation Museum is proud to be an outreach partner! We will exhibit high definition images of the original, along with interpretation panels written by the British Museum. There will be workshops and talks, and a further exhibition curated by various local historians and community groups. The exhibition will run at the SJMF Museum from Feb 2027, through to the summer. Tickets for the various events will go on sale at Christmas.

Museum Opening Times

The museum is open to the public on the second Sunday of every month, 12-4pm. Entrance is free, but we don't receive any government support, so please consider giving a donation of £5 per family.
There is a car park, and our volunteers provide refreshments.
Access to the main museum is up two staircases. However, our volunteers and Museum Manager always make sure there is an informative and fascinating exhibition in the Main Hall, which is a little more accessible – there are only six steps to access this room! The building is Grade 1 listed, so we cannot install lifts. Permission to install garden rooms and exhibitions is being sought.
For more information, please contact Sally: museum@sirjohnmoore.org.uk

Volunteer with us

We are always looking for new volunteers! We particularly need people to help us staff events and museum open days. We currently open on the second Sunday of every month, but with more volunteers, we could open even more. We would not expect any more than a couple of hours a month from any one volunteer – all open days are timetabled.
Please email Sally for more information, or to offer volunteer time: museum@sirjohnmoore.org.uk

Remember Remember …

We take a look at the origins of Bonfire night



Every year on 5 November, the UK marks Bonfire Night — also known as Guy Fawkes Night — with bonfires, fireworks and burning effigies. But where does this tradition come from?

It dates back to **1605**, when a group of Catholic conspirators led by Robert Catesby planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill **King James I**. Their aim was to end the persecution of Catholics and restore a Catholic monarch to the throne. Thirty-six barrels of gunpowder were hidden in a cellar beneath Parliament, and **Guy Fawkes** was tasked with lighting the fuse.

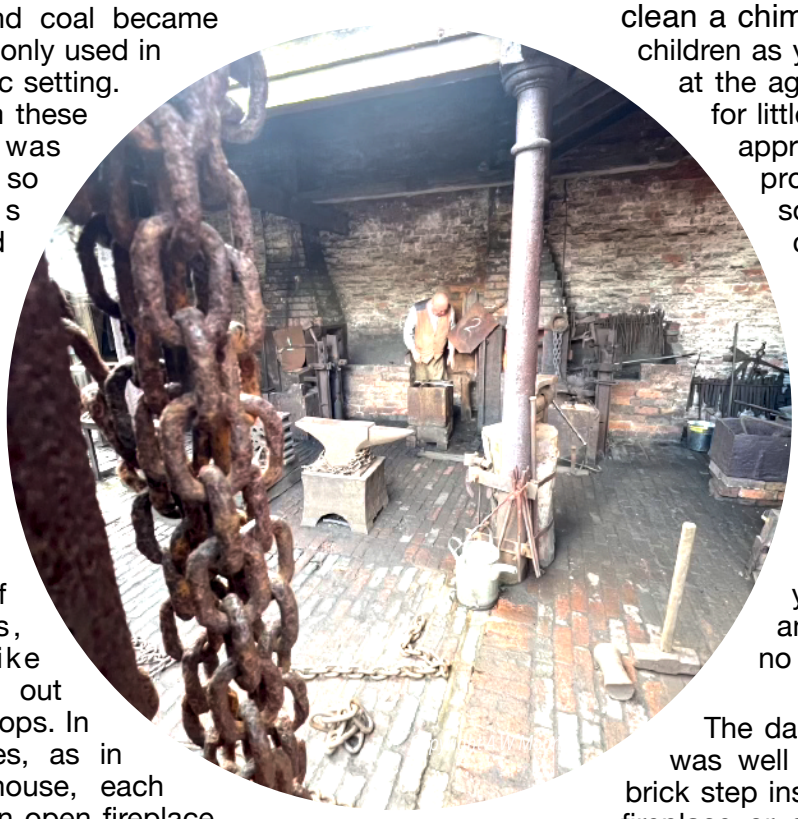
Just hours before the plot was due to happen, a warning letter was sent to one of the intended victims. Authorities searched the cellars and discovered Fawkes guarding the explosives. He and his fellow plotters were captured, tried and executed for treason.

In **1606**, Parliament declared 5 November a national day of thanksgiving for the King's survival. Londoners lit bonfires in celebration, and over the centuries this evolved into the colourful, fiery tradition we enjoy today — a reminder of one of history's most famous failed attempts.

Sweeping Clean ....

Part one of Anne Silins story of the Chimney Boys

The farm house of Lower Rectory Farm, as many other farm houses and residences built in the 1700's, and 1800's in Appleby Magna, had many chimneys. Sometime in the 17th. Century wood for household fires became less available and coal became more commonly used in the domestic setting. Smoke from these coal fires was toxic, and so coal fires required ventilation and that was in the form of a chimney.



At this time chimneys appeared on the roof of houses, growing like small trees out of the roof tops. In most houses, as in our farm house, each room had an open fireplace, even in the bedrooms. The kitchen often had a large, black range where all the family meals were cooked. Around this range were clothes horses where damp clothes and bed linens were dried on wet days. Sometimes in our farm house, beside the kitchen range a motherless lamb would be kept warm and fed from a bottle.

Most of these old chimneys were large with bricks or rocks placed inside and jutting out from the inside wall of the chimney. These brick ledges, or steps, formed a rudimentary ladder on the inside walls of the chimney. As a little girl I was full of questions about these bricks which could be seen as I looked up the chimney in my bedroom, I could easily could see the sky above. Another chimney which interested me was in our lounge. This chimney was back to back with the chimney in the room next to it, they shared the same wall. Somewhere above the fireplaces these two chimneys joined and because of the slight bend in the brickwork it was difficult to view the sky as I looked up. This type of multi-flue chimney became widespread in the 1800's. This was a way to reduce taxes which were based on the number of chimneys in a house. Similar to the window tax which took place a little earlier.

These chimneys needed cleaning on a regular basis. We all have the image in our mind of the 'Mary Poppins' movie, made and enjoyed in the early 1960's. The chimney sweep was dressed in black and his brushes and scrappers carried in a bag. But in the 1700's and 1800's this was not the case. Here we had a 'dark age' of chimney cleaning when small children were used as chimney sweeps. Their diminutive size enabled them to fit into the very narrow, enclosed space of a chimney. This small size was required to clean a chimney from, yes, the inside. With some children as young as six years old, with some used at the age of four and five years, this was work for little children. These ages were considered appropriate to enter the chimney sweep profession. These climbing boys, and sometimes girls, were reliant on the so-called master sweep for employment, clothing and food. These young children were referred to as a kind of apprentice, learning the craft as it were whilst the adult sweep had complete control over their lives. Very often these children had been sold by their parents. Often parents would have signed papers securing the master sweep's status as their legal guardians. And so it was that these young children were tied to their master and their profession until adulthood with no way to escape.

The dangerous work of child chimney sweeps was well known. If their tiny feet slipped on a brick step inside the chimney they often fell into the fireplace or got stuck in the walls of the chimney. Inside the chimney was not just dusty, but coated with black soot, oily tar and ash. If chimneys were not cleaned often enough then they would have a creosote buildup and that was difficult to clean and it could cause chimney fires. So cleaning your chimney was an important job, and oh so dirty and dangerous for those children.

Chimney sweeps usually worked in the predawn hours, after flues had cooled and before the morning fires were lit. Using their hands, knees and feet the children were forced to shimmy up the dark, narrow flue.

They clambered up chimneys with brushes and scraping tools to knock the soot and creosote from the chimney lining. After reaching the top, the children slid back down and collected the soot, which then the master sold to farmers as fertiliser. If the boys were reluctant to climb or were too slow at their work, their masters would sometimes hold a lighted torch under their feet; this is where the phrase 'light a fire under someone" originated.

A second part of this history will appear in our December edition

From the very beginning ….

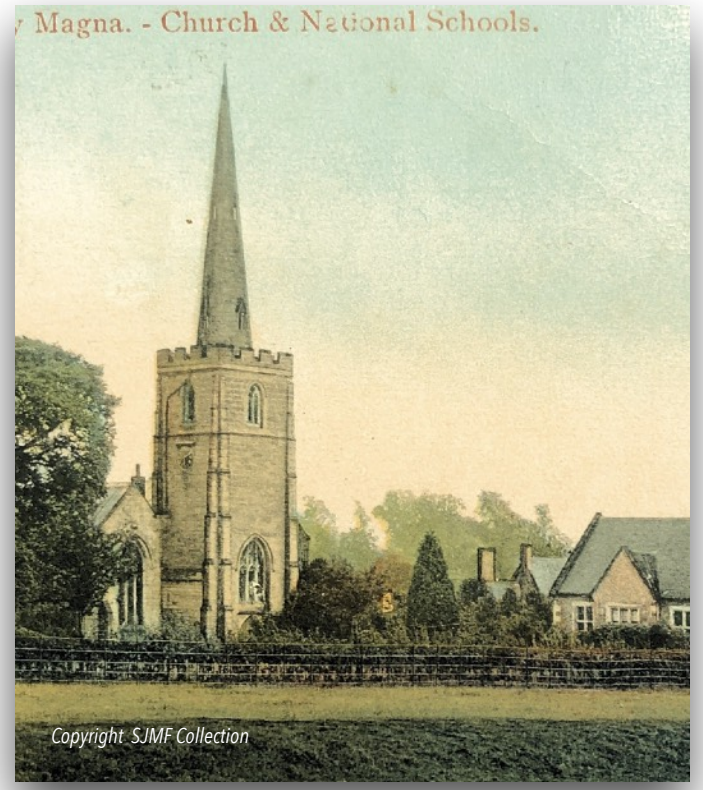
Sally brings together the starting points of two villages …

Appleby Magna and Appleby Parva are exceptional. They are particularly beautiful villages, we know a lot about their history, and Magna is home to the Sir John Moore Foundation, a school designed by Sir Christopher Wren and opened in 1697. But did you know about their Saxon and Norman past?



Hundreds of years before Sir John Moore was even born, never mind instructed his nephews to find land in Appleby to build a school, the tiny villages of Appleby Magna and Appleby Parva existed side by side. Parva was much smaller, supporting only three or so farmers. It was poorly drained, and sat at the bottom of a small hill, meaning it wasn't really the best land in the area for farming. Magna was bigger. It was made up of several farms, which in themselves were like tiny villages, supporting farmers and their families, cowherds, ploughmen, and labourers.

After the Norman Conquest, Parva was given to a Norman lord. He drained the area and placed Norman farmers. In charge. The land suddenly became very productive.



By the time the Domesday Book was written in 1086, the two villages would have become distinctly different. The people of Magna would still have spoken what we now term Old English – a Germanic language, evolved from the Saxon, Angles, and Jutes who invaded the country soon after the Romans left. Parva, on the other hand, would have spoken Old French. The two villages would have had different administrative systems, and the people of Parva would probably have had varying degrees of Norman privileges.

The close proximity of the villages meant that this arrangement did not last long. Intermarriage and the necessity of understanding neighbours, and the trend throughout the country of language change, led to the two villages once more becoming very similar in a relatively short space of time.