

NEWSLETTER

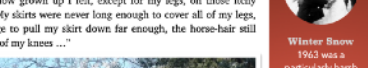
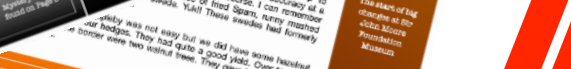
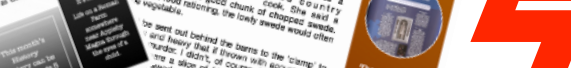
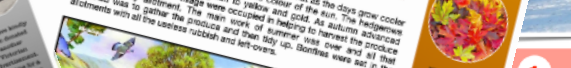
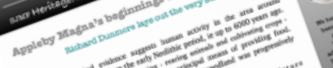
Number 75



The New Normal

When is 'a new normal' not 'a new normal'?

There was a new normal during the Black Death. Second World War and we are currently in reminds us that nothing is new. In the new our Heritage Open Day has become Hello and after a very tight rammed tour. They are going to prove a self guided tour and will combine w



75 Editions Strong: The Little Lockdown Newsletter That Became Our Community's Memory Keeper.



When the first edition of the Local History Café Newsletter landed in inboxes back in 2020, the world felt very small. Lockdown had closed our doors, silenced our usual café gatherings, and left many of us isolated, cut off from the conversations and shared stories that make local history feel alive. What started as a modest experiment—a handful of pages, a quick way to keep our community connected while we couldn't meet face to face—has grown, 75 editions later, into something far greater: a living, breathing archive of the places and people we call home.

That first issue was a lifeline. Titled *The New Normal*, it asked a question we were all grappling with: when “normal” felt gone forever, what could we hold onto? The answer, it turned out, was our history. Readers shared memories of the Black Death's local echoes, childhoods spent in nearby villages, and the quiet resilience of communities that had weathered hard times before. It didn't just tell stories—it made us feel less alone, proving that even in lockdown, our past could bind us together.

As the editions rolled in, the newsletter found its voice, one rich, varied feature at a time. We delved into the harsh realities of *Punishment 1881 to 1910*, uncovering court records and local tales of justice long forgotten. We wandered through *Autumn Days* with Anne Silins, whose evocative recollections brought seasons past vividly to life, and poured over her complete spring diaries in the landmark *Magna* supplement—a love letter to Appleby Magna, packed with photo montages of its church, wildflower meadows, and quiet lanes that felt like a walk in the fresh air when we needed it most. We celebrated Christmas with personal stories of joy and hardship, followed *Journeys through Life* profiles of local characters who shaped our area, and puzzled over

History Mystery features that turned readers into detectives.

What makes these 75 editions truly special, though, is that they have never been a one-way conversation. Every page carries the mark of our community: faded family photos submitted by readers, handwritten memories of long-gone shops and festivals, corrections and additions that turn a single story into a shared truth. What began as a way to fill a lockdown gap became a place where anyone could contribute, where a grandparent's anecdote or a box of old postcards could take centre stage. It turned local history from something you read about into something you help create.

Today, as we mark this 75th milestone, the world has opened up again—but the newsletter has not lost its purpose. It has grown alongside us, adding event previews, date markers, and deeper dives into the

stories that still resonate. It stands as proof that the things we start in hard times often become the things we cherish most. It is a record not just of the distant past, but of our recent history too: a testament to how a group of people, separated by lockdown, built something lasting together.

To every contributor who shared a memory, every reader who turned a page, every editor and volunteer who put each edition together: thank you. These 75 issues are more than newsletters. They are a patchwork of our community, stitched together with curiosity, care, and a deep love for the places that made us. Here's to the next 75 stories, the next 75 discoveries, and the many more editions that will keep our history alive for years to come.

Andrew Moore.
Compiler and Editor.



The Children and the bomb ...

Anne Silins remembers finding radar defeating strips of metal
all over Appleby Magna

Does anyone, who is now in their senior years, like me, remember the = which was dropped on Appleby Parva? It was a 'dud', it didn't explode. It was in 1940, so I would have been only 3 yrs. old, but I vaguely remember that this event was talked about all around me. I didn't understand it, but I knew that something big had taken place. At every meal time my Uncles and Grandparents talked of nothing else. Many people walked up to the field close to Dr. Salmon's surgery to see this bomb sticking out of the ground. It was much taller than the height of the average man. It was sticking up out of the ground at an angle. Needless to say, seeing it up close for many villagers made it even more scary, it was a thing of evil. They all thought about, just what could have happened! Viewing it made their curiosity even more intense. It was talked about not just at the time but for many years to come. Perhaps, even though I was just a child, I still have memories of those talks and I think on it from time to time.

What I have read in my research is that this unexploded German World War 2 bomb was a delayed-action high-explosive device. These weapons sometimes failed to detonate on impact, instead they were designed to detonate hours or even days later after being dropped by the Luftwaffe.

Over the years, these unexploded ordnance (known as - UXO) have surfaced in rural fields, some many years since the Second World War ended. One World War 2 bomb found in eastern England detonated before it could be disarmed. This device did explode while the military were preparing to disarm it. No one was hurt as fortunately personnel and neighbourhood watchers were at a distance. Up to 10% of the UXO type of munitions dropped by the Axis forces failed to detonate. Our village of Appleby Magna and Parva being a rural area, the military archives did not record much about an unexploded bomb. I recently saw a photograph of 'our' bomb on Facebook and I thought I do remember that story. That 'dud' bomb was talked about around kitchen tables and in our local pubs for years. It was an Appleby story.

The war went on and I grew old enough to walk the village footpaths, tagging behind the older children, and getting under their feet as they all were looking for those strips of aluminium foil and film dropped over our countryside. I now know this invention was given the code name 'Window' in Britain and by Americans it was called 'Chaff'. It worked very simply. It consisted of thousands of tiny aluminium-coated paper or metal strips dropped by aircraft to create false clouds that overwhelmed and blinded enemy radar screens. The strips were cut to exactly half the

wavelength of the enemy's radar frequency. A small bundle could produce a radar signature equivalent to an entire heavy bomber, overwhelming the enemy's air defence network. The RAF first used 'Chaff' in Europe on the night of July 24-25, 1943, during the bombing of Hamburg. It was extremely effective, and it drastically reduced bomber losses for the remainder of the war. By flooding enemy radar screens with false echoes, these strips successfully blinded anti-aircraft and night-fighter operations. These strips, known as false 'blips' on radar screens, created a multitude of dots and made it impossible to distinguish between the planes and the foil strips. Today it is hard to believe that this simple invention changed the face of the war.

While these strips were a weapon of war, we children would search them out as they were scattered across our farm fields after a bombing raid.

The German bombers were after cities in the Midlands, such as Coventry, Leicester and Burton on Trent. We children would gather all the strips we found and carry them home, all of us full of pride for these finds. I don't think any of us knew or realised at that time what a help these strips had been to winning the war.



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Later in the war on June 6, 1944, that important day, known as D-Day, these thin strips were dropped in massive, targeted quantities over the English Channel. This was to simulate slow-moving fleets of ships. This tricked German defences into believing that a large Allied naval invasion was approaching the French coast which was far away from the actual landing zone. This became known as 'the D-Day Deception'. Those tiny strips did their job. Authentic examples of these metallic 'Window' - 'Chaff' strips are preserved in military museums across the country.

As I approach my 89th. birthday, memories of my growing up years in Appleby Magna take on a special meaning, even with the war it was a happy place for we children, and those memories and lessons still guide my daily life in many ways. As children we roamed the village footpaths, the lanes, and yes even the two main streets - Top Street and Church Street. Our travels could take us from the Church to the Grammar School, from Duck Lake to the Beeches where we would be offered a biscuit if we kept to their paths and not venture onto their well kept lawns. Enjoy your village life of Appleby Magna and Parva everyone.

The Corn Dolly

With the harvest already complete for 2026, Anne Silins
looks back to previous harvests ...

A Corn Dolly, can be a simple decoration which today a housewife may hang in her kitchen. They come in all shapes and sizes and are very decorative. Do any of us ever see a Corn Dolly and wonder where did this lovely piece of folk art originate? I needed to find how and why. Research shows us that it is something which comes from ancient times and the stories about it are from many different cultures. For centuries a Corn Dolly has been thought of as a receptacle in which the 'Spirit of the Harvest', would rest during the long, winter months. Three, four or many stalks from any grain crop can be braided into this symbol and in many different designs. By braiding and keeping this Corn Dolly symbol early farmers were hoping that next year's harvest made from this year's last stalks, be they wheat, oats, rye or barley, would keep safe that 'Harvest Spirit'. It is thought that the spirit of the corn retreats into the last pieces of standing grain as the reapers clear their fields, and there the corn spirit takes refuge. Wherever and whenever the underlying history began, the origins of the corn dolly began in our British Isles long ago. History tells us that it could have begun in central Asia or even Egypt. The corn dolly was deeply rooted in the agrarian beliefs of pre-Christian cultures. It is there that the Spirit takes refuge to ensure that the forthcoming crop would be a bounteous one.

Farmers cut their fields of grain in two basic patterns. Many farmers started their labour in one corner of their field, perhaps the corner closest to the storage barns. From here they cut the grain in a circular direction slowly moving towards the very centre of the field. It is here where the stalks of grain would be gathered to make their Corn Dolly. Other farmers began close to their barns but moving up and down in rows and completing their harvest at the opposite side of the field. Once again collecting those final stalks of grain for their Corn Dolly. After being kept safe during the winter months, come Spring time the Corn Dolly was returned to the field by ploughing it into the soil. This act ensured the land's fertility and a successful and bountiful crop for that year.

Today, while the ancient superstitions have largely faded with modern farming methods, the corn dolly endures as a decorative symbol of peace, prosperity, good luck and a beautiful connection of seasonal

rhythms of country life. In some counties of Britain farmers would think up a neighbourhood challenge. Who would be the first to complete their harvest and who would be the last. There was pride in being the first farmer to have all his grains harvested and stored. The one who was first would make a corn dolly from his last stalks of grain. He would then, 'tongue in cheek with a smile on his face', toss it into his neighbour's field, who hadn't completed his harvest. That corn dolly would get passed along throughout the area until the very last farmer to finish his harvest received it. A pint may be shared at the village pub, a toast to him, then it was his responsibility to protect it for the entire winter.

It is with a smile that I once heard that a country lad would braid three stalks and when tied into a loose knot which represented a heart, he then had a special corn dolly. This he gave to the girl he loved. If she was wearing it next to her heart when he saw her again, then he would know that his love was returned.

Corn dollies in ages passed were not just the stalk fantasies made today to decorate the kitchen. They were also designs made by the village roof thatcher, the man who also thatched the ricks and stacks of grain. These corn dollies were usually made into the shape of an animal or a bird. Once the thatcher had made his corn dolly he would set it on the ridge of his finished work, be it a roof, a rick or stacks of grain. It was his trademark symbol of how well he did his work. It was almost like modern day advertising of his ability and skilled work up there on the ridge for all to see.

The corn dolly symbolises the cycle of death and rebirth, often linked to harvest goddesses like Demeter. These figures, sometimes called Corn Mothers, were kept indoors as symbols of luck and gratitude for the harvest. They have evolved into our modern day decorative craft.

Now with harvesting becoming mechanised the corn produced is no longer suitable for making dollies. But like many other rural crafts, the corn dolly making had a revival in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, although I am sure, for most people, their original purpose has faded. Corn dollies could now serve as a reminder of our agricultural heritage. They help us have a tangible link with the customs of people from our ancient past in the British Isles.

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SirJohn Moore
Foundation Heritage
Centre

**THE NEWSLETTER IS
EDITED BY**

Andrew Moore

Contact us via email

museum@sirjohnmoore.org.uk

