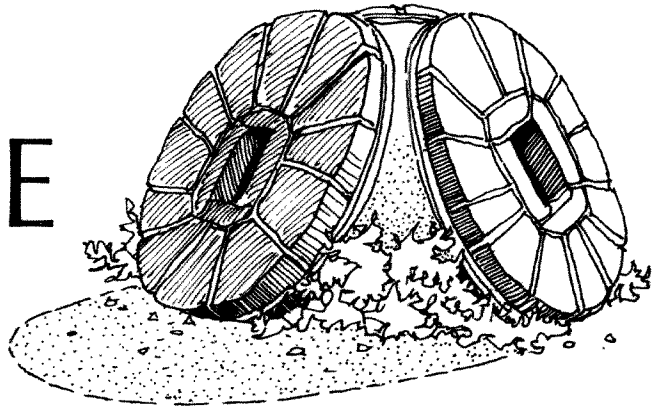


DEAN VILLAGE NEWS



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Issued free to members of the Association

LET'S CELEBRATE 1984!

It's the centenary year of **Well Court**. This coincides nicely with the **Festival of Architecture in Scotland**, which will run from May to November.

So let's celebrate! We are planning to do so with a series of happenings for all tastes and ages, in Well Court itself on June 21, 22, 23. If the residents agree, we shall have a marquee roof erected over the centre of the courtyard and install a platform and seats, lighting and sound equipment.

An ambitious project, which promises to be very enjoyable. To bring it to fruition we hope to obtain sponsorship, and we shall need a lot of willing helpers. Volunteers please get in touch with Ian Cowie, 20 Well Court (226 3984) or Mrs Peggy Valentine 31/2 Belford Road (225 8942).

*Have you something to suggest? Please let us know.

A FLITTING

Our President, Basil Skinner, has left "the House on the Bridge" for Southfield Farm, Duddingston. We are sorry that he and his family are leaving the village, but we expect to see them from time to time (e.g. at the Well Court Centenary celebrations).

CALENDARS FOR 1984

An attractive drawing of the old stone bridge is available at 75p (with envelope) from the Secretary and other committee members.

ALLOTMENTS

We hope to obtain entry on March 1 to land at Dean Education Centre. There will be a further meeting of those who are interested, in Dean Education Centre on Thursday January 19 at 5.30.

ROTHESAY TERRACE

From which house in Rothesay Terrace did Sir William Fettes Douglas paint the view of the Village of the Water of Leith in 1878? From No 3 it seems, for it was done for John Ritchie Findlay who lived there from when it was built for him in 1876. But he must have been dissatisfied with its style, for as early as 1883 he got the young architect Sidney Mitchell to reconstruct it. That is why it is so different from the rest of the Terrace, with its porch and its elaborate windows with small panes. The interior is very rich.

Nos 1-6 and 7-8 were all built in 1875-6. After a pause, nos 9-16 were built during 1898-1904, then nos 17-18 and the final block (19-24) with its tower of circular bays dominating Douglas Garden is wholly Edwardian in date (1906-7). Source: SDD List.

The painting mentioned above is in the City Art Centre in Market Street. It is not always on display, but can be seen on request. (Phone 225 1131). The Dean Village Association has an attractive postcard reproduction (obtainable from the Secretary and at meetings) but it scarcely does justice to the original, which is large.

DEVELOPMENTS

Jericho: This was the tall building on Miller Row, built six storeys high in 1619 as the principal granary for Edinburgh. (The Baxters' stone built into the house on Dean Bridge probably came from Jericho). No one knows the origin of the name. One can only guess that a previous building on the site collapsed. Its history after 1860, as a distillery then a warehouse for theatrical costumes, and the great fire which destroyed it in 1957 were recounted in DVN No. 72.

The walls of 1619 stood until November this year, when they were brought down by a monstrous machine, unaccompanied by trumpets. New offices will be built there for Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners. The work will not be complete until June 1985, but the disturbance in Miller Row should decrease as the building progresses.

The access to Miller/Row has had to be widened to allow fire engines to reach the new building. It was a pity that the old wall had to be altered, but we had accepted this necessity and had made suggestions as to how it might be well done. (The poor masons had critical eyes on them as they worked!)

The memorial seat for George Burns had been taken away for safety. We shall try to ensure that it is reinstalled before next summer.

Having seen so much litter on the Cala Homes site (and downstream of it), we have appealed to the supervising architect — from the firm of Covell Matthews — to see that we don't suffer from that problem in this even more sensitive location. He has instructed the contractor accordingly.

Miller Row will be open to pedestrians at all times, but the public is warned to keep off the building site, which includes the area round the millstones which the District Council have rented to the contractor for temporary huts.

The excellent design incorporates car parking which will be reached from Bell's Brae. So we can hope that it will be possible in 1985 to erect a bollard to keep unauthorised traffic out of Miller Row. Unfortunately the upgrading of the road surface there is not in the contract. It is a matter for the District Council's Planning Department; we must urge that they programme the work so that it is done as soon as the contractors move out.

The Tannery Site: Smart's have begun work (destroying what had developed into an interesting botanical site). They have planning permission, obtained in 1980, for 58 dwellings (15 flats, 27 maisonettes and 16 houses). They hope to have some houses on the market before next summer. The whole project will be completed more or less rapidly according to the progress of sales.

The conditions on which consent was granted include the provision of a public footpath on the river bank. Although the shop belongs to Smart's, it was not included in the 1980 plans. Applications for change of use to a pub, wine bar or bistro were unsuccessful. In the meantime it is being used as a site office; so we no longer fear that it will be allowed to collapse; but any permanent change of use (from shop with dwellings over) would require planning consent. So would demolition. We very much hope that it will be well restored.

High Green and Hawthorn Terrace (The vacant ground south of the river): The borings and laboratory tests have proved favourable. McTaggart & Mickel will definitely build on this site, which they have purchased from the District Council. Their architects are now "beaver away" to produce detailed plans for submission in March. The Association has been promised a preview.

OBITUARY

It is with regret that we announce two deaths in November.

Peggy Ross (Mrs Lewis) left the Village on her marriage some 25 years ago but was still felt to belong here.

Alice Norris had lived in the Village for about 20 years. She hailed originally from Grange-mouth and had been a nurse and a health visitor. Former colleagues as well as friends and neighbours packed the Cloister Chapel at Warriston Crematorium where the service was conducted by the Minister of the Parish, the Rev. W. Thoms Webster. We hear that Constable Middleton was very helpful in making investigations and seeing that the funeral was arranged; for no relatives could be found.

SEWERS

An unsavoury subject? Look at it this way: it's the sewers that keep our river clean enough for trout.

The Water of Leith Act of about 1890 led to two sewers being laid along the course of the river from Balerno to the sea. These removed the highly polluting effluent of the paper mills as well as providing drainage for the houses being built in the valley.

To give access for carts during the construction of the sewers, a road was built all the way. It was originally above water level but is now mostly submerged, as the river bed has become silted up. Moreover, since the sewers were laid partly beneath the river, some of the present bed is man-made. Some of the resulting mason-work can be seen opposite Well Court.

(Information provided by Lawrence Walker of Bell's Mills).

On the morning of 14th July a startled committee member gazed with increasing alarm at a group of men, clearly from the Lothian Regional Council Department of Drainage, who were preparing to undertake some form of construction work on the river bank, opposite Well Court. The weather was unusually warm. The workmen were taking pleasure in their watery surroundings, paddling in the stream. Twenty yards downstream a family of mink gambolled unconcerned, dreaming no doubt of their next duckling dinner.

And then the concrete arrived. Tons of it. The workmen, confident in their appointed task, began to spread this concrete liberally over the river bottom, while removing the earth river banks to permit further application. The dressed stones forming the Victorian river channel began to disappear.

It was time to take defensive action. The site foreman, questioned, described how the main sewer which passed discreetly beneath the river bank at this point had become undermined and required stabilisation. As to why rough concrete had to be distributed with such insensitive abandon, to the permanent mutilation of this ancient waterway, he was unable to respond, except by affirming that this is how it is always done.

To the telephone. Urgent calls to the Drainage Department — the District Engineer to be met on site that very afternoon; to the Planning Department — the local Conservation Officer would try to halt the work until after site discussion; to the Cockburn Association, to Roland Wedgwood Associates, to Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners (Mr Clark of this firm lent particularly helpful weight to the campaign).

By the afternoon, following a site meeting with the Drainage Engineer, the river bank had virtually been restored to its former appearance, the concreting restricted mainly to pointing and under-filling. Some damage was irreparable, but this had been kept to a minimum.

After this dramatic day a plea was lodged with the Department of Drainage that, if major works affecting the visual and historic aspects of our river are contemplated in future, could the Planning Authority, at least, be alerted, to avoid such potential damage, both to our heritage and to our blood pressures.

LET'S HONOUR SIDNEY MITCHELL!

Sidney Mitchell (1856-1930) is usually credited with the design of Well Court, but the SDD list of historic buildings in Edinburgh attributes it to the partnership of Sidney Mitchell and George Wilson (1845 - ?). It may well have been their first major building; Mitchell was under thirty. During the 1880's he went on to design, on his own or with Wilson, Dr Guthrie's School, Lasswade Road, the baronial Students' Union in Teviot Row, and our local Belford Church.

It is Patrick Geddes one always hears about in connection with Ramsay Garden, up by the Castle, but the architect for much of it (all of the side facing Princes Street) was Sidney Mitchell, in 1893. In the same year he was responsible for the extensive new buildings for the Asylum at Craighouse. Towards the end of their career the partnership designed the Royal Victoria Hospital (1907) and the highly original Church of Scotland Offices in George Street (1911) So let's honour Sidney Mitchell!

HOGMANAY, 1845

I closed the last daylight of this year amidst the ruins of the old place of Dean, once one of the best mansion-houses near Edinburgh.

Hereafter, people will know the ground solely by its being the Dean Cemetery. Until this autumn there stood, about the centre of it, a large, venerable, old mansion-house, the seat of the now extinct family of Nisbet of Dean, a family long of great local influence. The place was so heavy with wood that it was all that winter could do to make the house visible. There was an old garden, and a good deal of shrubbery, chiefly of evergreens. In the days when there was no distillery near, and when the Dean, which has always had a peculiar population of its own, quite distinct from that both of Edinburgh and of the country, was a tiny village, and what is now the New Town was all open fields, so that except Lord Moray's villa of Drumsheugh there was nothing but rusticity between the mansion and the Castle, this must have been one of the best gentlemen's residences in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh. A high position, well-sheltered, the Water of Leith then pure, foliaged banks, and magnificent views — what else could be required?

How the savages were smashing the wood to-day, as if for mere pleasure! I thought that venerable trees and undying evergreens were exactly what a burial ground would long for. But here they are in perfection; plenty hollies and yews, apparently a century old; and how did I see these treated? As a drove of hogs would treat a bed of hyacinths. Not a planner there seems to be in Scotland who has any other idea but that whatever piece of ground he is entrusted to make the most of, must first be reduced to absolute flatness and barrenness. If one of those fellows had been required to build a house for Adam in Paradise, he would have begun by making the garden as level and as raw as a new fir table. There are still trees in the Dean, under the shade of which many a mourner might think; evergreens that might have marked and softened many an honoured grave. I shall be surprised if a single one shall have a leaf to taste the coming spring. I knew this place well in the days of Lord Swinton and his family, who lived there long.

The Journal of Henry Cockburn, 31st December 1845.

BELFORD CENTRE FOR THE DANCE

This new organisation is installed in Belford Church. After a successful Festival season in 1983, they hope to make the main part of the church into a permanent theatre for the dance. Scottish Ballet's touring company may perform there in February.

In the meantime, the lower floor is being used for day and evening classes in both classical ballet and contemporary dance (and even tap-dancing and skiing). Several distinguished dancers are teaching there regularly; others do so from time to time. A new series of classes begins on January 3.

The Centre will also act as a base for various dance groups, professional and amateur, in the Edinburgh area, and it has administered the recent festival of "Dance Umbrella" in Scotland.

We are pleased that a good use has been found for this fine building and that the new occupants appreciate it and have begun to remedy some of the neglect. Have you noticed that the tree has been removed from the tower? (It was an elder, of course).

FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday, January 19 — Meeting of those who want allotments. Dean Education Centre, Belford Road, at 5.30.

Tuesday, January 30: Patrick McVeigh — Observations on Some Antiques Dean Church Hall, Ravelston Terrace at 7.30

Tuesday, February 28: George Smith — Edinburgh through the Eye of My Camera. Dean Church Hall at 7.30

Wednesday, April 4: Beer & Skittles at Duddingston

Thursday, June 21 to Saturday June 23: The Centenary of Well Court.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS (1983-4)

Ordinary £2.00 (or £2.50 with postage)
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