

Bilsthorpe Heritage Museum– Our History

Bilsthorpe is a village situated in the North of Nottinghamshire within the Dukeries.

The village was initially developed around agriculture. Then in so many areas within the Dukeries the development of the coal mining industry changed the landscape and social development in the village.

The Bilsthorpe Heritage Society began in 1997 as the Colliery was closing. Founders Frederic Hall and Eric Purdy with a handful of village residents had the foresight to begin collecting items of historical interest as items were being delegated to the 'skip'.

This 'hobby' group amassed a significant amount of material and held three exhibitions of memorabilia in the village. Eric, Fred and a few village residents decided to form a Society with a written constitution, chairman, vice-chair, company secretary and hold regular meetings.

Donation of materials has come from as far a field as the Canary Islands and closer to home from people who do not want their village heritage to be forgotten until there was no longer room in Fred and Eric's garages.

In 2005 Bilsthorpe Parish Council offered storage in the old squash courts at the rear of the Village Hall, the offer was gratefully accepted. So began the process of moving all artefacts, documents and photographs etc into a 'new' home.

During 2007 it was decided that we would have to move forward or dissolve as we couldn't stay forever as a memorabilia society holding on to a collection. We became more involved with museums and became a member of the Museum Forum. With their help and training we learnt how to conserve our collection, to create and file forms for donations and loans etc, becoming a more professional body.

We began to get involved with areas of heritage within the village; our first project was a grave stone for the 14 Sinkers who had died in 1927 who were buried in a mass grave, a wooden cross to mark the spot which had long gone.

This venture had been successful so our second one a Memorial for all Miners who had died at the Colliery. We raised funding through Nottinghamshire Local Improvement Scheme, we liaised with the local Primary School, the children gave several designs for the memorial, and after public consultation the design chosen was sent off to stone masons to be produced. We won a Museum Forum Award for this venture.

Our third project was the restoration of the original Bilsthorpe Colliery Banner which we had been given. It had lain in the Church, stuffed in a carrier bag when wet and had been left there for about 25 years. It is now fully restored after raising funding from Nottinghamshire County Council's LIS Scheme and is in pride of place on the wall of the museum.

We are now in the process of erecting half a Pit Wheel at the entrance of Pit Lane.

In 2009 we decided to go for Charitable Status and in 2010 we became Bilsthorpe Heritage, a registered charity.

Whilst waiting for acceptance by the Charity Commission we had meetings with Bilsthorpe Parish Council towards a long-term lease on the Squash Courts so we could become more than a storage area.

In 2010 we signed a lease for the building, and began changing the area to suit our needs.

Our next decision was obvious to all members – to open up as a museum.

So with support from the Parish Council we upgraded the electrics and added heating, decorated and begged display cabinets from other museums and shop-fitters to hold our artefacts etc.

On July 11th 2014 we finally opened our doors to the public.

We are open Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday between 10am – 4pm. So far we are feeling very positive as between 11th July and 10th August 2014 we have had 224 visitors. Entry is free of charge.