



Sleaford  
& District  
CIVIC TRUST

**WINTER 2017**

**River Slea Restoration Project  
Letter from America  
Grace Morris on the early days of  
the Civic Trust  
Poems by Malcolm Doughty**



*Marie Taylor, Project Officer of Lincolnshire Rivers Trust, and one of Slea Clean-up Group pounding a stake into the Slea to hold bundles of faggots in the River Slea Restoration Project.*

## OUR RIVER SLEA

*Although unknown to millions  
'Tis very dear to me,  
The pleasant town of Sleaford,  
Beside the dreamy Slea.*

*I love its fame historic,  
Here were the camps of Danes,  
And still its hoary castle,  
Though ruin, yet remains.*

*Through Bully Wells, the river  
Glides on so pleasantly,  
Besides the banks of Rauceby,  
Where folk stroll after tea.*

*On summer night, how cheering,  
To catch the river breeze,  
To watch the rich red sunset,  
Behind those western trees.*

*To spot the trout a-lurking,  
Or water voles a-swim,  
To toy with the blue blossoms,  
That love the river-brim.*

*To leave the streets behind us,  
With all their restless hum  
And seek the quiet river,  
When eventide has come.*

*Although unknown to millions,  
'Tis very dear to me,  
The little town of Sleaford,  
Beside the river Slea.*

*David Smith*

# ***RIVER SLEA RESTORATION PROJECT***

**Ada Trethewey**

## ***THE BACKGROUND***

The poem 'Our River Slea' was written in the 1930's by Sleafordian David Smith, son of Thomas Smith the miller of the Hemp Mill on the corner of West Banks and Westgate. Les Gostick uses the title of this poem as the title of his book on the Slea (2001) and starts the book with the poem and says the poem appeared in Morton's Almanack of 1935. On p. 63 he gives a useful look at the situation regarding the state of the river in the past.

Domesday Book	12 or 13 mills at or near Sleaford.
1724	8 working mills within 2 miles.
1791	Enough water to supply mills and navigation. Water never freezes.
1794	Navigation opens.
1827	Navigation suffered through excessive use of water by millers.
1842	Stone barged down the Slea from Bully Wells to Castle Causeway.
1844, 1854	Droughts caused problems but boat traffic still continued with lighter loads.
1851	All poorer households in Sleaford depended on Slea for water needs.
1855	Navigation froze.
1872	Trollope reports it as 'never failing source of pure water.'
1881	Commercial watercress growing at Guildhall Springs.
1886	Sleaford swimming baths supplied by river water.
1933, 1956	River polluted by railway and sewage, killing fish and cattle.
1960	Good fishery for trout but declining in 60's and 70's.
1961	Dredging of beck after floods through golf course damaged bed seal, still not flowing through except after heavy rain.
1962	Flow ceased possibly for first time through the town.
1976	First time the channel completely dried up through Sleaford.
1983-84	Flow ceased.

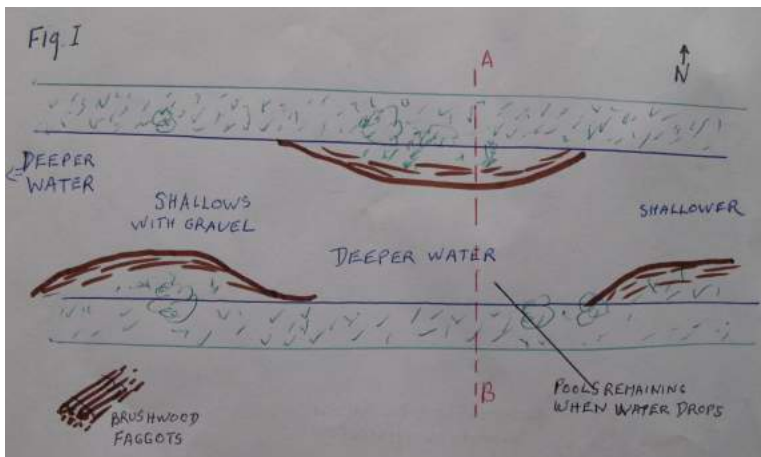
# RIVER SLEA RESTORATION PROJECT

I came to live on the banks of the Slea nearly 50 years ago and my first involvement with the Sleaford Civic Trust was its work to remedy the river. Work by Les Gostick, Harry Gregson, Helen Vidal, Jim Renfrew and others on the SOS (Save Our Slea) campaign meant that I joined the Trust. When the National Rivers Authority was set up 20 rivers in England were identified as being at serious risk of drying up completely and thanks to the Civic Trust the Slea was the first to receive a study and funding for an augmentation scheme and work was begun in February 1991.

This made improvements but gradually further pressures and climate changes have caused another decline and to the rescue has come the Lincolnshire Rivers Trust with a project to restore the river bed habitat from Watergate upstream. The LRT was founded in 2013 with support from the European Union and they work with the Wild Trout Trust who have a lot of experience in this field. The heavy manual work was done by the officers of these organisations and the Slea Cleanup Volunteers.

*Fiona McKenna, former Project Officer of LRT, writes:*

*We cannot put more water into the river, however, we can try and keep the water that is there in the channel for a bit longer. We have created a low flow channel and changed the shape of the river bed in order to do this. This helps to create diversity in the water flow itself, creating*



River Slea Restoration of Flow and Maximisation of Available Water

*areas of low and high flow which enables more oxygen to get into the water. By narrowing the channel and introducing brushwood bundles in an alternating pattern, we will also create a sinuous shape. These structures trap fine silt that would otherwise smother fish eggs and invertebrates and they create natural meanders throughout the river.*

These improvements have already borne fruit with trout spawning and water voles sighted along the river. To capture and publicise these achievements a short film was made of the work. This is on YouTube at:

<https://youtube.be/p-foOlz9Fak> - Saving the Slea Parts 1-3

The work that was done is now blending into the landscape but don't be deceived it was a huge project with 260 big bundles of faggots being inserted into the riverbanks, and a JCB to reshape the bed of the river. All this was done by a handful of people working mostly in the depth of last winter up to their thighs in the water.

My involvement was different. I don't do heavy manual work any more but it was a privilege to be able to provide a work-base, a storage area for the faggots, and hot soup and a warm up place for their lunch.







Tim Jacklin of the Wild Trout Trust explaining the work to the group.





In the Sleaford Standard of 20 January 2016 there was an article by David Seymour entitled 'Helping to boost fish numbers in the Slea: Volunteers needed to help finish installing brushwood bundles.' The article says:

Steps are being taken to boost fish numbers in the River Slea after it was found to be poor in comparison to national standards. The issue was identified by the Wild Trout Trust after it carried out a survey of the river last year on behalf of the Lincolnshire Rivers Trust. The bodies are now working together to improve the Slea with support from the River Slea Cleanup and Sleaford in Bloom groups. The first phase of work involved digging material from the channel and dumping it at the sides of the river to create a low-flow channel, meanders, and pooled areas to improve the overall water quality and habitat diversity. The second phase has seen volunteers join members of both the Lincolnshire Rivers Trust and Wild Trout Trust to install bundles of brushwood into the river to help protect the riverbanks from erosion by ducks and enhance the berms created by the 'dig and dump' works. These steps will not just benefit fishes, but other aquatic life. Marie Taylor, Project Officer for the Lincolnshire Rivers Trust, said: 'It is a great way to be involved with a community based project and improving your local river.'

For more information:  
[info@lincsrivers.org.uk](mailto:info@lincsrivers.org.uk)  
[lincsrivers@gmail.com](mailto:lincsrivers@gmail.com)

## **Contributions Welcome**

**To write for this newsletter, please send letters,  
articles, notes, comments,  
and images to the editor,**

**Dr Richard Shaw, 7 Liverpool Cottages,  
Westgate, Sleaford, Lincs. NG34 7PW  
or email to: [siddha17@gmail.com](mailto:siddha17@gmail.com)**



## MEMORIES AND THOUGHTS FROM AMERICA

Peter Robinson

I'm sitting in the sun with my shorts on in mid-November with the temperature around 80F knowing that tomorrow's forecast brings snow and 30F. That's Colorado! I'm reading my monthly 'Planning' magazine which comes to my letterbox -- a distinct change from all the publicity related to the President Elect! My urge to write to the Newsletter is due to an article by Scottish planner Phil Prentice. Usually most of the magazine is written in a more modern, technical language way above my head. Only a regular article by former Chief Planning Inspector Chris Shepley always makes me smile, as he weaves his page around current problems in a surreal sort of way.

Anyway, Prentice says that we need to refocus our efforts on our town centres especially as sixty percent of Scotland's population live in towns and villages. This statement made me reminisce on what I often think as 'little 'ol Sleaford' and the Civic Trust as he states " it's about local people at the local level taking on the things that they are able to tackle themselves and giving them the confidence to do that". He feels that "the whole of the U.K. is driven by developers rather than democracy". A Town Conference was held early November with workshops focusing on town centres. Each town centre has its own problems -- historic layout, traffic, preserved buildings etc., I wonder what the outcome will be? If there is a way forward I'll certainly report back!

I very briefly visited Sleaford last year as my eldest daughter married Richard Frost in Lincoln. Sleafordians will remember Richard's father, the late Hugh Frost, the local veterinarian. As we travelled up Southgate I began to remember the shopping pattern from years ago. Mother used to send me to pick up various items from the individual shops, I recall eight all close in a line on the east side of the street. Starting at the north end:-- Cowlam's newsagents; Sentance's music; Curry's electrical; Larder's pork butcher's; International Stores grocers; Sleight's fish and game; King's Stores fruit and vegs. and Craven the butcher. All within a pleasant walk or cycle ride, with a saddle bag of course. An added bonus for me included the opportunity to chat-up the young lady who worked in the cash kiosk in the International Stores. There were memories of other incidents: -- market driven sheep who decided to do a run round Woolworth's, in one door and out the other; Pratt's bar where the room echoed with the laughter from off-duty postal workers; the smell from the open door of the "Black Bull" that caused my parents to hasten their step and the mass of people sauntering through the street on a Saturday night to show off their fashions. My present cry would be 'cater for the pedestrian'!

With all these memories in I jump to the present transformation of the Conservation Area with endless motor cars and a shopping area of less impact -- although I have no ideas to improve this environment. Thank you supermarket! The fabric surrounding the medieval street pattern form Sleaford and has been for centuries. I often look at young Denver (established in 1856) and even younger Lakewood where I live, which bear no comparison with Lincolnshire's historic market towns. Maybe this is unfair but the character of little 'ol Sleaford are still in my system.

I was saddened to hear of the passing of a great Sleafordian lady -- Jean Furnival, who performed in early concert parties with dance and song and had an irreplaceable knowledge of local history. Only last year she sent me her excellent well-illustrated book " My memories of Sleaford in W. W. 2". I did phone her to thank her and to have a quick chat and reminisce. I remember her living in the Tower House at the end of Millfield Terrace. Her husband kindly lent the "Dixieland Five", in which I played, the sound equipment for the East Coast Flood Relief Concert /Dance in the Corn Exchange, February 1953.

Compliments of the Season to all from Peter R.



Bandstand being demolished, Riverside Precinct, 17 February 2017.

## **A weir, a green ... projects of a busy Trust**

**Grace Morris**

The Sleaford and District Civic Trust was formed in 1972 at the instigation of the local Chamber of Commerce, who sponsored an open meeting at the Girls' High School. There was an excellent attendance and support was promised both by individuals and various organisations. A committee was formed, and we were extremely fortunate in our choice of secretary, Miss Helen Vidal, whose hard work and enthusiasm has become well known in the town.

Looking back on my notes of the first committee meeting, I see that various suggestions were discussed such as possible improvements in the Market Place, in Watergate, the River Slea and other parts of the town. And how to 'sell' Sleaford to its citizens and visitors. We were also asked to comment on a report which had just been issued by some members of the then Kesteven County Planning Department 'examining conservation possibilities in Sleaford.'

In the spring of 1973 we had our first real challenge - to raise half the cost (£3, 750) of a tilting weir - the other half having been promised by the Countryside Committee of the County Council. This weir would enable a volume of water to be kept in the River Slea in the centre of the town, adding considerably to its attractiveness. Indeed, had the weir not been installed, there would be no water at all in the town part of the river at the moment, because of the abnormally low rainfall.

We headed or campaign 'Save Our Slea' and used the slogan 'S.O.S.' - something which we afterwards discovered we should not have done, since these letters are reserved entirely for life saving appeals!

However, ignorance is bliss and we went ahead. Peter Hopper, the campaign manager, and Helen Vidal wrote over 200 letters between them to Sleafordians in and outside the town, business firms and every conceivable fund or trust likely to donate money. We also held a flag day, selling 'S.O.S.' stickers.

Thanks to the generosity of Sleafordians and, in particular, one businessman who promised up to £1, 000 if we could match it in the month of July, which we did, we raised the money in only ten weeks.

It has taken a long time for the weir to be constructed and put into place, ironically because when it was ready for installation there was too much water in the river.

In the meantime, however, we were developing other projects. Thanks to grants made to us by local authorities and the European Heritage Year Fund, we

have provided a Riverside Green, providing a pleasant riverside spot for townspeople and visitors to use as a picnic area.

We have started to improve the Cut, but this is a long-term project and is being held up because of shortage of water. The real results here will not be seen for some time.

Other schemes are well known, because they were inspected by H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh when he visited the town for a whirlwind tour at the beginning of July last year.

The North Kesteven District Planning Department send up copies of all planning applications within the conservation area which has been established and these are carefully considered by our planning sub-committee. We do want to conserve our attractive old buildings which lend so much charm to Sleaford, but we do not wish to be known as a society which tries to keep buildings just for the sake of doing so and just because they are old. I hope that our comments are constructive and reasonable.

We are shortly to produce a 'Town Trail' - a small descriptive booklet with illustrations, which will encourage visitors to walk round our town and note its best and historic points.

We should so much like more members. We want to get EVERYONE involved in improving and caring for their town. A sign that this is happening was proved when we came second in the 'Best Kept Town' competition last year. Hitherto we had been well down the list. This year we hope to come first!

We are really very lucky to live in Sleaford. How many of us walk through the town without seeing at least one or two acquaintances to greet? How nice it is to go into so many of the shops and be called by name. There are not many of our elderly or sick citizens who lack a helping hand. In most of the sunny and popular places in the town there is a handy seat to rest a while.

So we must preserve our buildings and the records of our history, keep our streets and river clean, plant more trees and flowers - so that visitors will not only enjoy one visit, but look forward to coming again.

***New members please contact the Treasurer:***

***Mrs Brenda Hitchcock, 6 Chapman Road, Sleaford,  
Lincs. NG34 8BX  
Tel: 01529 302775***

*Memories of a Summer Outing: Brodsworth Hall 2011*







# ***SLEAFORD MUSEUM TRUST***

## Coming Events for 2017

### **EXHIBITIONS**

End of March: **History of the buildings of Rauceby.**

Mid-August: **Aspects of Sharpe's History.**

**The Museum is Open on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays  
from 10 to 3.**

### **TALKS**

**At St Denys' Church Room, 7.30**

**£2 non-members**

**Raffle and Refreshments**

28 March

***Mark Bamford. The Sleaford Rail Crash of 1937 - 80 Years on.***

23 May

***Dr Simon Pawley. The Mysterious Origins of Sleaford.***

25 July

***Nigel Burn. Women in Medieval Lincolnshire.***

26 September

***Nigel Ogden. Sowing the Seeds - a History of Charles Sharpe.***



# Photography Competition



## Hidden in Plain Sight

In May of this year, the Sleaford and District Civic Trust, working in co operation with the Sleaford Gallery Arts Trust and supported by artsNK will be holding a photography competition - Hidden in Plain Sight.

The theme of the competition is straightforward: take a photograph that highlights a part of Sleaford – a building, a structure or an aspect of everyday life – that goes unnoticed by the casual observer. Ideally the photograph will be taken from within the centre of Sleaford but consideration will be given to extraordinary pictures taken outside of this area so long as it is within the demesnes of the Sleaford District.

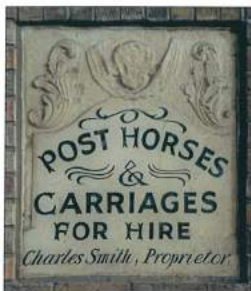
The format is simple. Entries – either printed or digital – must be received no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> April. These entries will be narrowed down by a panel of three judges using predetermined criteria to 60 images that will be professionally mounted and will form a two-week exhibition in the Carre Gallery. These finalists will be invited to a preview evening at the gallery where the prize ceremony will take place.

Entrants will be sorted by age group – under 13, under 18 and over 18, with the best three pictures in each group winning a prize. Each competitor is invited to submit up to three entries.

The competition is being sponsored by members of Sleaford and District Civic Trust, the Sleaford Gallery Arts Trust and Hodgson Estates and is being supported by artsNK.

Entry forms can be collected from Carre Gallery, 29 Carre Street or downloaded from the Sleaford and District Civic Trust website [www.sleafordcivictrust.btck.co.uk](http://www.sleafordcivictrust.btck.co.uk)

### Example Pictures:



Bristol Arcade Carriage Sign



19 Marketplace



St Denys' Church Yard

**PLEASE SUBMIT ENTRIES BY 25th APRIL 2017**

**For more information please contact:**

Sleaford and District Civic Trust, c/o Hodgson Estates, 28 Carret Street, Sleaford, NG34 7TR  
Tel: 01529 415056 Email: [crh@hblp.co.uk](mailto:crh@hblp.co.uk)



## **Hidden in Plain Sight – A Photography Competition**

By the Sleaford and District Civic Trust

### Entry Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age Group: (U13, U18, 18+) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a brief description/ explanation of your photographs, including where it was taken:

1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

**Complete your form and post with a paper print of your photograph to  
C J Hodgson, 28 Carre Street, Sleaford, Lincs, NG34 7TR**

**OR**

**Alternatively, please submit your entries via email to [crh@hblip.co.uk](mailto:crh@hblip.co.uk) with the subject line  
“Hidden in Plain Sight,” including all of the information requested above, ensuring that your file  
is no more than 1MB in size.**

**PLEASE BE SURE TO RETAIN THE ORIGINAL FILE OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPH FOR PRINTING SHOULD YOU BE  
SELECTED FOR THE EXHIBITION PRINTING AND MOUNTING OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS WILL BE  
UNDERTAKEN BY SLEAFORD AND DISTRICT CIVIC TRUST.**

In submitting your entries for this competition, you acknowledge that Sleaford and District Civic Trust may reproduce and mount copies of your image for display in the “Hidden in Plain Sight” exhibition and publish the image on the Sleaford and District Civic Trust website, the Carre Gallery website, the artsNK website and the Sleaford Heritage website.



## SPRING FERVOUR

*Throwing back Spring's curtain, a lively morning light  
Comes flowing down the hill,  
And with the purest washes paints a green world into sight.*

*Mindset forged by Winter, with beauty long denied  
I strike out for the fields,  
Where a blue sky's singing over lark-rich countryside.*

*Woodland pools of bluebells reflect that flawless sky  
The hedges froth with may,  
And with swathes of whiteness almost overwhelm the eye.*

*Drawing on the heavens their geometry of joy,  
A host of swifts career.  
Caught up in their ecstasy I see truth as when a boy:*

*Time is but man's figment - a watch upon my wrist.  
Like the sunshine all around,  
Eternity is shining and I am standing in its midst!*

*Malcolm Doughty*

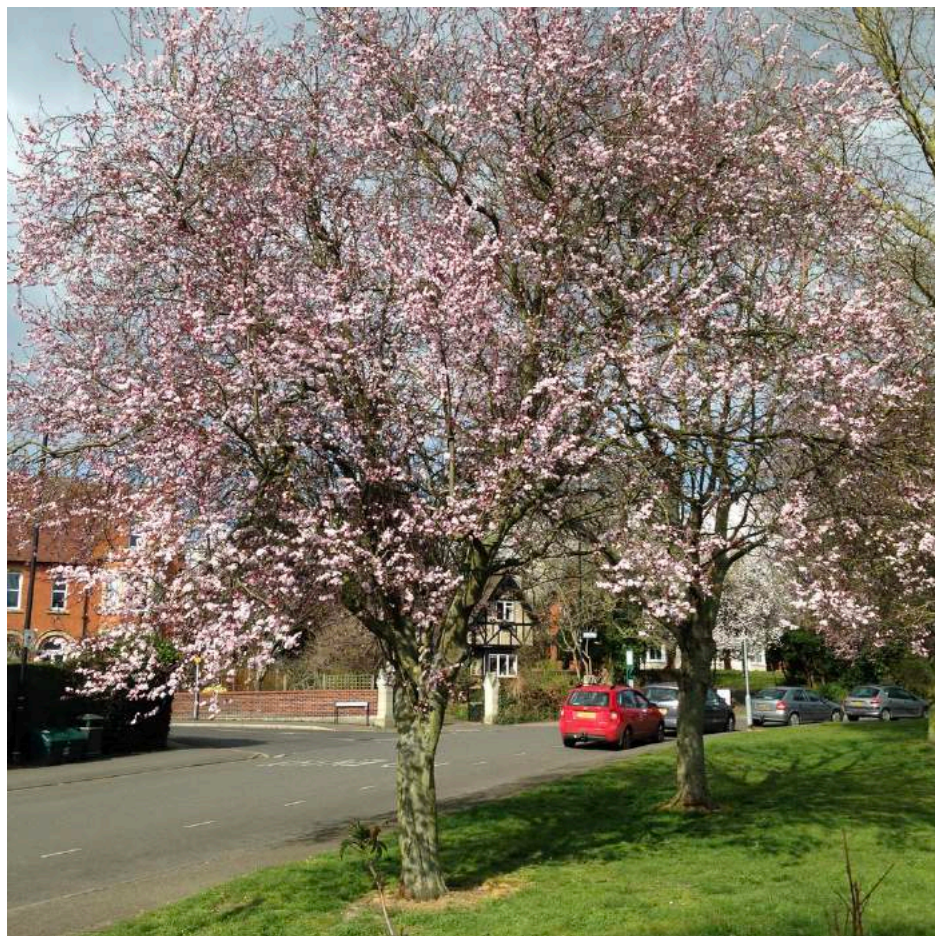


## APRIL TONIC

*I know full well their blatant deeds,  
Wasteful, wanton as they seem.  
Programmed from the hour of birth,  
They can but answer nature's needs.  
With no ambition to forgive,  
I welcome them as sprites of spring,  
Or pilgrims to this promised land  
Where long-haul migrants fly to live.*

*What now stirs my wind-chilled mind  
Is some far echo of that call,  
At once familiar to the ear  
And so peculiar to their kind.  
No matter how the home bird sings,  
What native flowers greet the eye,  
There is no April tonic like  
The pleasure that first "Cuckoo"! brings.*

*Malcolm Doughty*



Cherry tree in blossom, Gregson Green. Photo by Richard Shaw.