



ARDEN TRAIL UPDATE

July 2009

Welcome to the **Summer Arden Trail Update!**

Well it's been a while...and as usual it's been a fantastically busy time here on the North Arden Heritage Trail! As we enter the final six months of the project plans are afoot to get our leaflets and interpretation boards completed and out into the parishes...as well as launching the website so those of you with internet connection can find out everything you need to know about where we are, what we're about, and how you can get out and enjoy the heritage art features and beautiful walks that we're developing for North Warwickshire. We're also planning to launch the completed project with a series of walks and events, with guest speakers and giveaways, so keep checking your local press – and your post-box – for details and invitations. Do come along and let's celebrate this fabulous project in style.

And so to what's been happening...

First year Parishes...

Finally our work in Hartshill, Mancetter, Baddesley and Atherstone is almost complete. As I write, we're undertaking substantial path resurfacing and drainage improvements to sections of the route in Mancetter and Hartshill – this should greatly improve conditions so our walkers can really enjoy these areas in even less than perfect weather conditions. We'll also be replacing a broken disabled access gate in Hartshill Hayes Country Park, again a much needed improvement so that the incredibly keen but perhaps less able in our communities can enjoy as much of the Arden Trail as possible.

In Atherstone, together with the Town Council and British Waterways, we have submitted an application for £50,000 of Landfill Communities Funding to carry out extensive and vital improvements to the canal towpath between bridges 37 and 41. This stretch of the trail is already a much used and important section for both local walkers and visitors to the town. The planned improvements, at a total cost of almost £130,000, will deal with much of the current considerable surfacing problems. Part of the route at least will be suitable for wheelchair users and people of varying physical abilities. At the moment the canal is something of a forgotten recreational resource for the people of Atherstone and its surroundings. We aim to tackle this issue head on! A decision on our application is expected in September, with the work commencing soon after if we get the green light...so watch this space – I'll be letting you know!



Getting arty in Arley (...and Ansley, Astley and Fillongley!)

When last we 'spoke', our Year 2 Design Committee volunteers had attended their artist's interview evening. After numerous presentations and thorough grilling by our local residents (not to mention a most interesting 'clash of personalities' for one parish!), the votes had been cast and the artists chosen to interpret the heritage themes and create the feature for each community.

The next step was for each artist to arrange design or creative workshops with their parish residents and local groups to further develop the ideas and themes of heritage that had already been suggested at previous community meetings. In March, Astley artist Johnny White held a clay and wire modelling workshop with the Design Committee and local residents. Themes around gates, oak trees and the castle were rolled and moulded and bent into shape, and enabled Johnny to more fully understand just what Astley parish is all about.

In Fillongley, Bournebrook School headmistress Mrs Pegg kindly allowed the children to take part in Graeme Mitcheson's all day stone carving workshop...the day in fact encompassing both ends of the age spectrum when after lunch Mrs Sheila Onions brought along members of the local Golden Years Group to take up the chisel and get stuck in! Even those nervous of taking part, fearful of the strength they wrongly assumed was needed, had almost to have the chisel wrestled from their hands come 3 o'clock! Some truly lovely stone sculptures were created – all of which now have pride of place in the school's sensory garden.



Graeme was also chosen to create Ansley's feature, and over one week in March he held two consultations and workshops with both the Young Women's Group and the Youth Club, where he collected thoughts and ideas of Ansley's heritage. Suggestions from the railways and mines to the local fish and chip shop all helped give a better understanding of community and history in the village.



Arley artist Steve Tomlinson held a one day plasticine modelling workshop with the children of Gun Hill School. Ideas of play and woodland creatures were evident in the lovely scenes the children created. Steve photographed the work and took these images back to Yorkshire with him to help him form his ideas and designs for their feature.

From the information already gathered, together with the outcomes of their workshops, our Year 2 artists then went away and began putting pencil to paper to come up with three clear design ideas for each of our parish heritage interpretation features. Once they'd been created, tweaked, amended, re-drawn and finally approved...they were sent out into each community – to design committee members, residents, parish councils and local groups - with a voting paper, and everyone asked to vote for their favourite design and return their choice to me by the specified date in May. Our local communities had so much to choose from, so many brilliant creative ideas, some obvious, some intriguing, and all representing the heritage and community so evident in all of our North Warwickshire villages. Astley alone had an interpretative gateway...a head in an oak tree...a mosaic windowed castle...and a sandstone lantern!

And the winners are...

Ansley voted for a 'carved boulder'. To be sited on the village green, with images representing Ansley's ribbon making and industrial heritage, an interpretation of the Norman carving on display in St Laurence's Church showing man's battle between good and evil (the Christian shown being pulled between the dragon and the lamb), the boar and the foot being representative of the Ludford family coat of arms, and other images representing mining, brickworks and the natural world.

Arley selected the snail bench. To be located in Arley Woods, the shell, rather than being flat, will be upright, thus forming a back rest to the seat. It will be carved with the first 2 lines of the famous William Henry Davies poem "Leisure": *What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.* The seat section will be carved with images of nature (including the Wood's unique colony of Red Ants) and a representation of the parish's mining heritage.



Astley chose The Lantern of Arden. To be installed on The Green, on a small path leading to the village church. Based on an old name for the church, the design is based on a medieval lantern. The windows of the lantern will have steel cut and mosaic inlays representing the other ancient themes and historical features of the parish. The main body of the lantern will be made from red sandstone – as is Astley's church itself.

Fillongley voted for 'The family'. Carved from sandstone, it will show the family group, with each family member holding a representation of Fillongley's heritage – the father a lamb (for its farming history), the mother a lantern (as a light used to be kept on in the church to remember villagers who had passed away), the daughter a banner showing the De Hastings family coat of arms, and the son a loaf of bread (a tribute to the village's ancient mill and a reminder that the village was at one time self-sufficient). The piece will be installed on the green at Fillongley crossroads, next to the primary school that took part in the artist's stone carving workshop.



Our artists have been working hard on the winning designs over the summer months and installations are now imminent! I'll be inviting residents and groups, as well as the local press, along to the grand unveilings – so do keep checking the Arden Trail website for dates and details, or get in touch with me and I'll make sure you're kept up to speed with all our developments and get invited along.

And last, but by absolutely no means least, it's the Year 3's...

Our joint community meeting for the parishes of Kingsbury, Nether Whitacre, Shustoke and Maxstoke was scheduled for February 3rd in Piccadilly. In accordance with my proven record of arranging community events to coincide with appalling weather – the meeting had to be postponed due to the worst snow this country has seen in 20 years! At the rescheduled event at the end of February we had a brilliant turn out of local residents and community groups, and gathered so many invaluable contributions and suggestions for the route of the main trail, individual parish walks, and themes and ideas for the heritage features. Our workshops in paths and access, archaeology and heritage, and design were really enthusiastically attended and incredibly well received. We collected some really useful comments and feedback from the event and I want to thank everyone that came along and really helped launch us on our way in these 3rd and final year villages. We really can't do this without you – and I value every comment and suggestion that comes my way. These are your villages...it's your project...and you make it the success that I know it's going to be. So thank you.

It always seems such a long road ahead when we first start our next round of parish community sessions and activities, but already enthusiastic residents have responded to our requests for Design Committee volunteers. In May they attended a meeting to develop and create the artist's brief – the job application – that would be advertised on creative job websites inviting artists to apply for this final round of commissions. We had a brilliant response to these ads and after a brief short listing exercise (where those proposing to work in pink Perspex were quickly filtered out!) we held our 3rd artists interview night on 1st July in Coleshill. Some quite excellent and fascinating presentations were followed by a question and answer session, with our local residents really making sure the artists had done their homework and knew about the parishes they'd be entrusted to represent. Those who hadn't were quickly exposed and shown short shrift by our committees! At the end of the evening our committees each voted for their own favourite artists and unbelievably (and a first for this project) each parish choice was unanimous. I can tell you now that the winning artists for Kingsbury were Cannock based husband and wife team Planet Art – already experienced in working with the North Arden Heritage Trail as they created the already much loved Atherstone sculpture on the canal tow path. Another artist already accustomed to the project, Graeme Mitcheson, was awarded the Nether Whitacre commission. And finally Birmingham based stone sculptor Michael Scheuermann was chosen to create the Shustoke village heritage feature. Michael contributed to the Quarryman's Walk project in Hartshill, and some of his work can be seen and enjoyed along that very popular walk.

The selected artists are currently having meetings with their Design Committees and local residents with a view to very soon creating the three designs for each of these parishes to vote on. With installations scheduled for November this year, there really is no time to lose. If you live in any of these parishes, expect to see your design choices, and the voting paper, through your door (or in your in-box) very soon. Please do get involved and let me have your comments and votes - help us to give Kingsbury, Nether Whitacre and Shustoke lasting and meaningful pieces of outdoor art that the whole community can be proud of.

Its not carved in stone...actually it is!

On March 21st, at Nether Whitacre Village Hall, volunteers from our Year 3 parishes attended our ever popular free stone carving workshop. The enthusiastic group was encouraged, guided and cajoled by Yorkshire based stone sculptor Michael Disley as they first sketched their own heritage themed design onto paper. These images were then transferred onto heavy sandstone slabs and, after being duly furnished with the appropriate safety equipment and tools for the job, the chiselling began. After a long morning and a light lunch, some fabulous carvings were really beginning to take shape. Scenes of the area's outstanding natural heritage and beauty were the order of the day, with Jill Howell from Whitacre carving a swan, Kingsbury's Fred Lee and grandson Alfie depicting the water park's fish and a boat, and the famous Tamworth pig and a tulip from the Onions family from Shustoke. Our industrial heritage was also represented in images of Shustoke's ancient Alms Houses and a steam train. After a thoroughly enjoyable day, we were all able to proudly stand back and admire the 23 fabulous carved stones that our brilliant volunteers had knocked and chiselled into shape. Whilst we at first thought of installing these stones as way markers along the route of the trail, we are now looking at putting the stones together into 'cubes', adding a stone top, and creating seats or benches for along the way...a resting place, created by our brilliant community volunteers, for walkers to stop and rest, or enjoy a bite to eat as they take in our beautiful rural views. So that's the plan! If you've joined us at any of our events, and produced a brilliant stone carving for the trail, watch this space for news of where your seat will be located in your parish...then go along and enjoy!



The next event...

We will be holding a fourth and final stone carving event at the end of September. And this time...the fruits of your labour will be all yours! I want to say a massive thank you to everyone who's ever helped us with the Arden Trail project – if you've attended any of our meetings, contributed your thoughts and ideas, memories and time – if you've come along to a previous stone carving workshop and left us with your fabulous images of local heritage for future generations – if you've done nothing but trawled through, and hopefully enjoyed, my newsletters a couple of times a year – **thank you!!** And I would love to see you over the weekend of **September 26th and 27th** when, again under the expert guidance of Michael Disley, you'll have the opportunity to create a smaller, lighter, takeaway stone, a memento of the project for you to plant in your garden, to display on your patio...to do with as you will. We will be running four workshops over Saturday and Sunday, morning sessions from 10am to 1pm, and afternoons from 1.30 to 4.30pm. The sessions are free, we'll provide refreshments and a light lunchtime buffet, and participants of all ages are welcome. If you are interested in coming along and trying your hand at stone carving for the very first time...or you've joined us before and fancy honing your chisel skills...get in touch now and reserve your place. Numbers are limited and I'm sure there will be a big demand for this brilliant family fun session. So please do get in touch so I can save you a stone – I'll be confirming the venue very soon and will let you have full details when I confirm your place. See you there!

To our priceless volunteers...

Once again our amazing volunteers have done the Arden Trail proud. Not for them some routine path clearance, a little much needed strimming...this time they have truly outdone themselves and built and installed a footbridge over a ditch – and all in half a day! The Thursday Volunteers, led by Geoff Treadwell from Warwickshire County Council's Countryside Recreation Service, were tasked with transforming a popular section of the Heritage Trail, crossing land at Robinson's End Farm in Ansley, that because of heavy use by both cattle and farm vehicles was often turned into an unpleasant mud bath for walkers. Our group set to work in creating the brand new bridge across a nearby ditch, complete with kissing gates at either end to deter any curious cattle! The new crossing will make a tremendous difference to people walking the trail, not only because it is almost completely mud free, but it's also in a more convenient location. Special thanks must go to the farmer, Mr Rowland, and indeed others across North Warwickshire, who have worked with Geoff and the project to make the paths more accessible for people of all ages and abilities. I very much appreciate their help and co-operation – we couldn't have done it without them.



Can you help us....?

Do you live in any of the 12 parishes we travel through on the trail? Have you got memories of industries and lifestyles fast disappearing from our local communities? Did you once work down the mines...in the hatting industry...on the canals...do you remember the sounds, the smells, the struggles of times gone by? I'm looking for your memories...would you talk to us and let me record those memories to use on our website, or in our leaflets? Let others who have no experience or recollection of these fascinating experiences get a feel for how life used to be. If you, or someone you know, has a story to tell then I'd love to hear it. Email or call me on the contact details below and let's see if we can make your memories really work for the North Arden Heritage Trail...

Acknowledgements:

We'd like to acknowledge and thank all the volunteers who have been working on the project and the project partners who have supported the project.

Volunteering opportunities will be registered with *Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire*, who can help with all aspects of volunteering. Tel: 01827 717073, email info@vcnw.org.uk or visit www.vcnw.org.uk.

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