



The Message of the Well Dressings

The art of ‘well dressing’ has been firmly established in Derbyshire for many years. The custom is thought to have originated in Tissington following the plague that swept through Derbyshire in 1349 AD. During this plague many people throughout Derbyshire died, but not in Tissington. Their survival was attributed to the pure water, which ran from their wells. Out of gratitude for the wells, and to God who put the water in the wells, the people of Tissington ‘dressed’ them each year on Ascension Day.

Originally the ‘dressing’ consisted of garlands of flowers, but during the 19th century the style changed to the beautifully arranged collages which can still be seen today. Out of respect for God, the residents of Tissington have usually based their collages on scenes from the Bible. Over the years, hundreds of Bible stories have been displayed, from the familiar children’s favourites



like Noah’s Ark and Daniel in the lion’s den, to some of the less well known stories like Ruth the Moabite.

The villagers in Tissington put a great deal of work into making the well dressings. First, the heavy wooden boards are lowered into the pond to soak for a week before they are lifted out and spread evenly with clay. The clay is dug locally and then ‘puddled’ to make sure there are no lumps or stones in it. Water and salt are added to make the consistency just right for spreading on to the boards. Once it is spread, each team will lay out their design on top of





the clay, and then prick through the paper design with a sharp implement which will mark the clay beneath. The next task is to carefully press coffee beans and alder cones into the clay to mark the outline of the picture. This is followed by patiently pressing flower petals on to the clay to bring out the bright colours

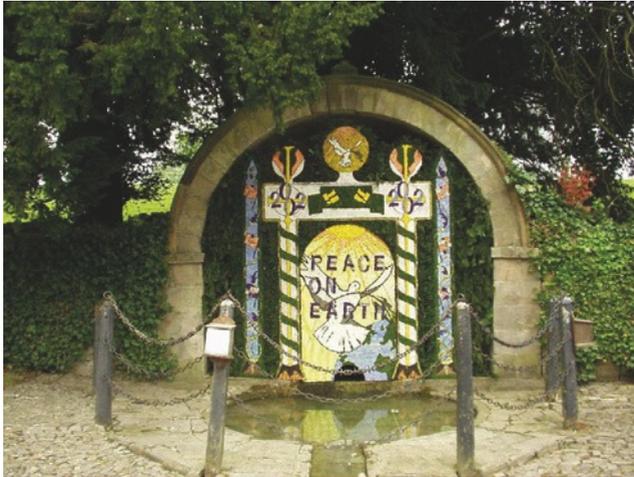
which make the well dressings so vividly striking. Once completed the boards are transported from the barns and erected by the wells so the full effect can be admired.

It is said that every picture tells a story. That is certainly true of many of the Bible scenes on display in Tissington. Each one helps to illustrate God's great plan of salvation. The Old Testament is full of signposts pointing the way forward to the One known as 'Messiah', who would one day come into the world to bring salvation to sinners. When the angel announced to Joseph the name to be given to the Messiah, shortly before He was born, he said, "*You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).



What a marvellous thing to know that God loved the likes of us so much, even though we have rebelled against Him and broken His laws; He sent His own Son the Lord Jesus Christ to earth to rescue the lost. To do that it was necessary for Him to die on the cross to bear the punishment that our sins deserved. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for the sheep. Then, to prove that salvation had been secured, He rose again on the third day and was seen by many eyewitnesses.

Sometimes people protest and say, ‘*What has God ever done for me?*’ He has provided us with every good gift we enjoy, but much more than that, He has provided a Saviour who loved sinners like us so much, that He suffered and died in our place. Everyone who turns away from their sins and trusts in Jesus Christ can then say by personal experience, ‘*The Lord is my Shepherd*’.



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