

How to find us

William Alvey Primary School

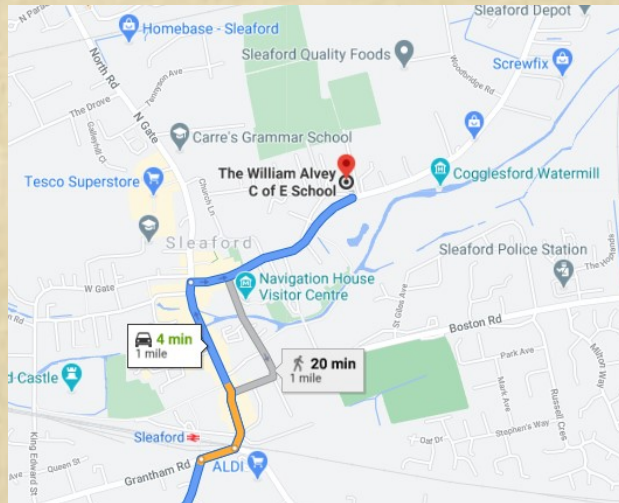
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If you would like to make an appointment to visit the air raid shelter museum, please email: Natalie.Mason@william-alvey.lincs.sch.uk or alternatively you can ring the school to book an appointment.



THE ALVEY AIR RAID SHELTER



'Learning today for living tomorrow'

WELCOME TO OUR SCHOOL



William Alvey was a local merchant and wealthy gentleman, who lived from around 1700 on North Gate in Sleaford, in a house which still stands as part of Lloyds Bank.

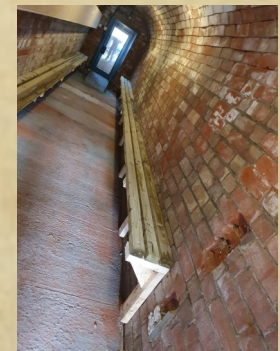
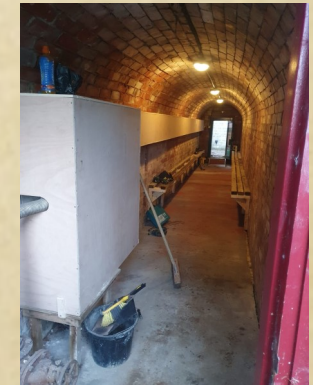
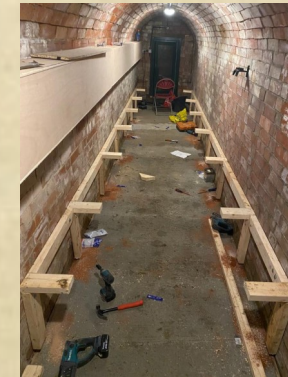
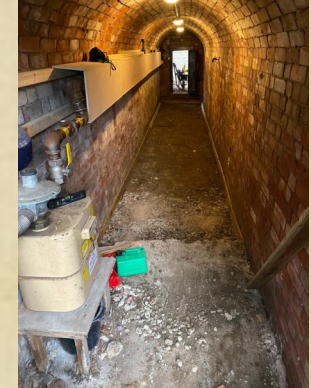
William was obviously interested in education for he was the Bursar of Carre's Grammar School, as well as a church warden at St. Denys' Church and he felt compelled to help the poor children in the town.

When William made his will in 1726 he decided that after his death a new school should be set up in Sleaford. He died on 10th August 1729, at the age of 60. The school was built in 1851 and opened in 1852 for both boys and girls which was unusual for the time, although they were taught separately until 1935.



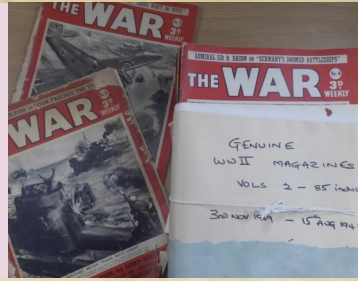
Pictured left is Lloyd's Bank where we have installed a bronze roundel to commemorate the work of William Alvey.

PROGRESS IN PICTURES





ARTEFACTS AND PROPS



Once the air raid shelter was back to its war time condition (if not better!) we went ahead with sourcing artefacts which would really bring the museum to life. With help from a local business to source the mannequins, finding genuine 1940's clothing online and generous donations from the school community, we were able to give the shelter some added character and help our visitors to imagine what life would have been like in the past. We hope you agree!



World War Two

If you look up the access road through our front car park, you can see the entrance to our air raid shelter. According to our school log book (see below), several air raid shelters were built on the school grounds in 1940, but just one remains.



10 Sept. Mrs Roscoe left the school today. School reopened this morning after summer holidays. Air raid shelters are being built in the playground. Ninety children have been admitted, eighty two children have left, having been transferred to the Sleaford Senior Council School, Gains Grammar School or Girls' High School.

In the past, we have used the shelter to bring to life the experiences the children at the Alvey would have gone through during an air raid warning, of which there were dozens in Sleaford. There are two benches alongside each wall, it is dark and uncomfortable and today's pupils are keen to get out again, as they would have been in the 1940's.



MARY BEAVIS

Mary Beavis, born 1886, was just 27 when she became Headmistress of what was then the Girls' School, on the 8th July 1912. During the First World War, she would often appear in school wearing her Red Cross Nurse's uniform, having been on duty all night caring for wounded soldiers at a military hospital in Sleaford. She earned the respect of many and was greatly loved and admired by her girls.

Service card for Mary Beavis, dated 17 DEC 1918. The card lists her name as Beavis, Christian Name as Mary Walls, and her address as 29 Eastgate Sleaford, Leic. Her date of engagement is Nov. 1914 and her date of termination is Dec. 1918. The card also mentions her service in the Red Cross Hospital and her period of service from Nov. 1914 to Dec. 1918 at the Red Cross Hospital in Sleaford, Leic.



Pictured above is the 'Old Place' on Boston Road, loaned by the Marquis of Bristol, to be used as an auxiliary Red Cross Hospital. Her service card (shown above) tells us this is where Mary worked as a nurse in the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) for 1000 hours until the hospital closed in December 1918. Whilst the hospital was in operation it provided 50 beds and treated 1010 patients.

Problems with quality control, in their hurried construction, meant that some failed to provide the protection expected. Rumours began to circulate and although improved designs were introduced, they became very unpopular and remained so throughout the war.

The Civil Defence Act 1939 declared that:

'To lessen the number of casualties from a direct hit, the unit size of shelters should preferably be limited to parties of not more than 50 persons.'

From then on, this became the common size for surface and semi-sunken air raid shelters in schools, businesses and public areas.

Today, many of the wartime generation can remember their experiences of different types of shelter: the damp and cramped Anderson, the bleak and unhygienic public shelters, and the novelty of school shelters where shrapnel, gossip, and exam answers could be exchanged. Many also recall the attempts by parents and teachers to make shelters into a more familiar, domestic space, with amenities, decorations and stoves for brewing tea.

SURFACE SHELTERS

At the outset of World War Two it was quickly recognised that there was a need to protect members of the public who might be on the streets or in public spaces during an air raid.



A programme of building communal shelters began in haste in March 1940, with the intention of accommodating fifty people.

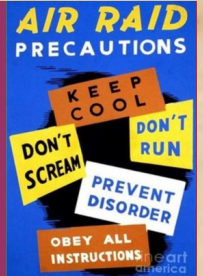
Thousands of air raid shelters were built on waste land, in parks and beside buildings. These surface shelters were often simply long brick and concrete structures which had one or two entrances. They were strong enough to provide protection from the blasts of exploding bombs, which was important as

more people died from bomb blast than from direct hits.

Nevertheless, many people were killed in direct hits on these shelters.



During the Second World War, Mary Beavis was awarded the L.A.R.P (Local Air Raid Precautions) silver brooch for her efficiency in evacuating the children to the shelters.



Mary's surviving family kindly gave the school her brooch which we proudly display in our front office, alongside her Red Cross First Aid medal which she earned during the First World War for her work at the VAD.



On the morning of 8th January 1935, Miss Beavis became

headmistress of the Alvey Junior Mixed School, and the Alvey School as we know it came into being. The Infants and older children now went to their own schools in the town.

Miss Beavis lived in the school house (Mr Tapley's current office) from 1935 to 1946, whilst she was Head of the Junior School. She had previously lived at 29 Eastgate, before moving out of the school to 63 Eastgate after retiring in 1946.



AN ALVEY ICON

These early years of the Alvey Junior School proved to be a time of 'firsts', giving us some idea of what a pioneering character Mary was, as well as highlighting the changes which were taking place in education during this period.

In June 1935, a wireless set was installed in the school, a gift from the Committee which had organised the Silver Jubilee celebrations in the town, and the children were able to listen to radio programmes about music, nature and science.

With the ending of the war in 1945, things slowly returned to normal. However, Miss Beavis, who had been absent from school for three months, due to the effects of an accident, decided to retire at the end of June, 1946.

The Director of Education, Dr J. W. P. Golby, Canon Waudby, the Vicar, school managers and parents and children presented her with a "bag and wallet of Treasury notes." She was 61 years-old, and had given 34 years of her life in dedicated service to the school and to the children of her adopted town, Sleaford.



PAST EXPERIENCES

During the renovation project, Jim Shortland, a past pupil, got in touch to tell us that he remembers using this exact air raid shelter in 1943/44 with Miss Beavis. He said there weren't doors then, just a 'blast wall' (see similar picture below).



He doesn't remember the little entrance but did say there weren't any benches, just a brick seat that scratched the back of his legs. Jim wanted to be the last one in so he was by the entrance and could look up to the sky to see what was going on during an air raid.



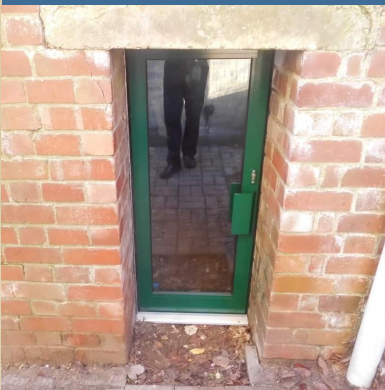
Blast wall

RENOVATION PROJECT



The inside of the shelter also needed some care and attention, including: clearing and levelling the rotten floor; boxing in the large gas pipe work; removing the damaged concrete benches and replacing them with safer wooden seating, similar to those pictured above. There was also a partition wall, which we believe had been put up in the 60's to separate the gas meter from the rest of the shelter which then fell into disrepair and became a store. Our plan, with guidance from Sleaford Museum, was to remove the partition wall so that the children could walk through the shelter from one end to the other as the children would have done during the war.

There was also the task of installing electricity for the lighting and replacing the small wooden door with a glass one so that we could illuminate the shelter and look in from the outside.



It is somehow comforting to think Mary's medals hang in what was her lounge at the front of the school and that she would have worn them whilst evacuating the children through what we now call the 'disco doors' to the recently renovated air raid shelter.


Mary died in Billingham, Sleaford in 1966. She really was an inspirational woman and a role model for our children today.



A PERMANENT MEMORIAL

In our previous community based project, 'Project 72' we tracked down the 72 children who attended the Alvey and then tragically fell during WW1. We worked with the artist David Mackie to make a permanent memorial which you can now see at the front of the school, opposite the zebra crossing. This made us think we ought to do something for the 'Old Alvey Boys' who fought and died in action in WW2.

During the summer of 2020 we decided to begin renovating the then abandoned air raid shelter and turning it into a small museum. It would serve as an exciting resource for the children of the school, as well as a permanent memorial for the sixteen servicemen who tragically lost their lives.

Harold Simon Clarke Bee Jan 1922-Aug 1942	George Edward Benfield Apr 1910-Feb 1942	Harold Burley Jul 1912-Nov 1945	Leslie Henry Callow Aug 1917-Apr 1944	Gordon David Colby Apr 1924-Apr 1945	Cyril Gordon Corby Nov 1910-Mar 1947
Walter Gash May 1906-May 1940	Herbert Joyce May 1914-Dec 1939	 The William Alvey School Killed in action 1939-1945		Peter Middlebrooke Mar 1924-Feb 1944	Hugh Revell Mar 1918-Aug 1942
William Henry Sellars Nov 1916-Sep 1943	John Fred 'Jack' Sharp Jun 1904-Sep 1943			John Shipton Oct 1901-Apr 1941	Herbert Edward Thorpe Oct 1920-Dec 1942
Arthur Edward Todd Jan 1916-Oct 1940	Roy Wheatley Apr 1920-Sep 1944	Our Project 72 memorial remembers those who attended our school and fought and died in WW1. This engraving commemorates the 16 servicemen who attended our school as children and went on to fall in WW1.		Installed 22nd July 2020	And to those known unto God

The first job was to clear away the weeds growing on top of the shelter roof. Mr Tapley, who had this gruelling job, was worried that he might fall through the roof, then remembered it was built to withstand bombing, so he would probably be okay!



We then had to clear the inside of the shelter of leaves, debris and rubbish, which had piled up over the years - all without any lighting.



The state of the shelter was relatively good for its age, although it was not water tight, therefore this was our first priority.



Builders began work in the Autumn on the roof, affixing a waterproof material to it in order to make it last at least another hundred years.

