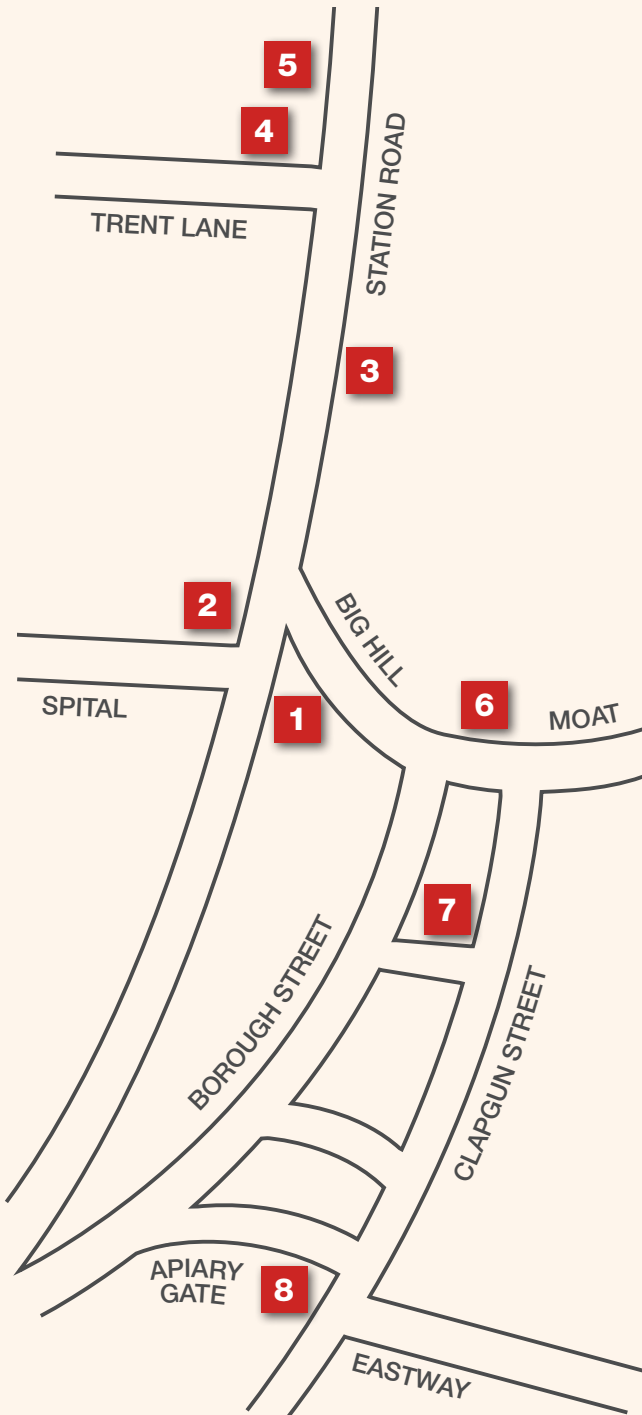


## PLACES OF INTEREST



<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Crown House Family home</b> and workshop of Albert Saxelby</p> 	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>The Hub</b> (Crampton &amp; Ward)</p> 
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>The Silk Mill</b> collection point for shell cases</p> 	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Moll's Row</b> Site of the osier processors' cottages</p> 
<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>Albert Villas</b> Home of Albert Crampton</p>	<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>Bargain Fabrics</b> (Flewitt workshop at rear)</p> 
<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>Lee's Basketmaker house</b> Another local basketmaker</p> 	<p><b>8</b></p> <p><b>The Museum</b> with a long tradition of local industry</p> 

University of Hertfordshire **UH**

**Everyday Lives in War**  
First World War Engagement Centre

**MAGGIE COOPER BASKET MAKER**  
EST. 1988

### 'A Lifetime of Studying and Making Baskets and Contributing to the Heritage of the Craft'

Maggie Cooper [www.maggiecooperbaskets.com](http://www.maggiecooperbaskets.com) was uniquely involved in the project 'Everyday Lives in War' in 2017 with a perspective on baskets and basketmaking. The project was a collaboration between the University of Hertfordshire and other researchers and makers. You can see her on film here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka1ElsqI82A> showing some of the walk around Castle Donington. Other films and reports from the project can be found on [EverydayLivesinWar.herts.ac.uk](http://EverydayLivesinWar.herts.ac.uk)

Maggie Cooper © 2020 in collaboration with University of Hertfordshire

# BASKETMAKING in CASTLE DONINGTON



## A BRIEF HISTORY WITH A LOCAL WALK

### Locally grown materials

Willow grew extensively in Castle Donington and the Trent valley area. The terrain is particularly suited for willow growing because of the quality of the soil and its fertile alluvial beds. Although willow grows easily in the East Midlands, it is an extremely labour intensive material to work, because of the need to cultivate, sort, peel and prepare it for manufacturing purposes.



Many people were involved in some or other part of the willow growing process, which provided both casual and permanent employment. Behind his house, willow rod merchant Herbert Moll housed his employees on Trent Lane to farm his willow beds nearby. Workers were involved in planting, cutting and sorting willow into sizes, as well as boiling willow for the buff rods used for domestic baskets. Casual labourers were employed for willow stripping to produce the white willow used in furniture making, and carting was done seasonally by women and young people.



## Basketmakers at the Heart of the Craft in Castle Donington

Many of the individual makers in the town worked in a loose type of cooperative, each person relying on the others for the maintenance of stocks, work processes and markets for selling. Families passed on their skills and the craft remained constant through many generations around the Trent area and beyond. This has made Castle Donington a chief home of basketmaking in England.

### Two Master Basketmakers, father and son

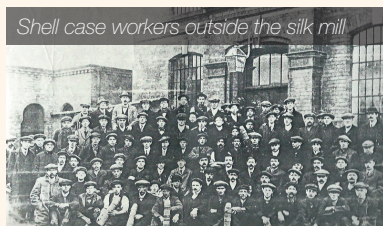
The Sutton family lived in Crown House and by marriage became the Saxelby family. The company made and sold chairs, baskets, prams and bespoke wicker work.



The Saxelbys were linked to the Mills basket makers in Kegworth and East Leake. They had osier beds along the tributary to the River Soar and the Trent. Albert Saxelby and his son Martin were noteworthy not only as basketmakers but also for their contribution to teaching and furthering the craft. Albert became a Freeman of the City of London, and both he and Martin taught at Loughborough College from the early 1920's. This period coincided with a resurgence and big investment in craft skills education nationally, partly an effect of the rehabilitation of soldiers after WW1.

### Census Evidence

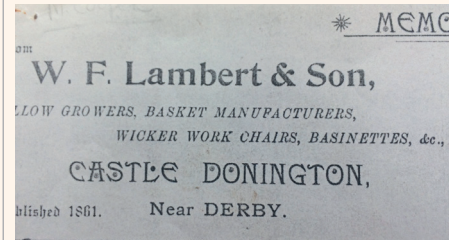
The 1891 census shows that there was a surge in the number of basket makers in Castle Donington - nearly 200. Ten osier peelers were also recorded at this time. There was a decline at the turn of the century due to a demand for cheaper foreign baskets, but there was another surge due to the war effort during WW1.



Shell case workers outside the silk mill

The baskets that have made the town famous are the shell cases made to encase bombs for transportation to the front lines. It is not clear how many basket makers were employed to do this work which was a reserved occupation.

A further example of the many local family businesses is the Lamberts in Clapgun Street, which was established in 1861.



**BASKET MAKERS.**  
Cook John James & Son, Bondgate, Castle Donington, Derby  
Crampton & Ward Limited, Bondgate, Castle Donington, Derby  
Dixon George, Castle Hill, Castle Donington, Derby  
Ellmore & Sons, 145 Highcross st. Leicester  
Foster Henry, 10 Albion Hill, Leicester  
Frakes John, Clapgun Street, Castle Donington, Derby  
Frakes William, Station Road, Castle Donington, Derby  
Hamilton Arth. Wm. Walcote, Rugby  
Hough Arthur John (dealer), 15 Bartholomew Street, Leicester  
**Institution for the Blind**, 50 Granby Street, Leicester  
Rilhorn Reuben, The Barrow, Castle Donington, Derby  
Kirk Thomas, 2 Constable Lane, Coalville, Leicester  
Knight S. M. 45 Up Bond St. Hinckley  
**Ledger Mrs. Elizabeth**, Station Road, Castle Donington, Derby  
Lees Albert & Enoch, Clapgun St. Castle Donington, Derby

Local companies would often do contract work for larger Nottingham and Leicester basket firms. Thousands of baskets made in the East Midland Trent valley area were woven for all sorts of products used at home and abroad – baskets for knives, lace, vegetables, chickens and Post Office parcels.

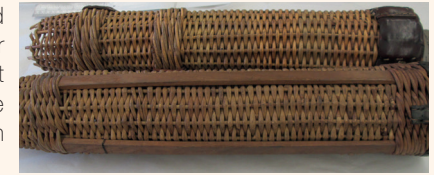


### Crampton and Ward

This company was set up in the early part of the 20th century. Although it was not considered to be a 'Donington' firm, many local makers would have been employed by them. Albert Crampton established the firm after he split from his family company of cane furniture makers in Leicester. His rival firm made and supplied high quality cane and willow furniture, imitating the Dryad designs of the Arts and Crafts movement.

• **Have a look for Albert's House (Albert Villa) on Station Rd. Near Trent Lane.**

Crampton and Ward became famous for consolidating the First World War shell case makers and war work in the town.



### A Fiendishly Difficult Skill

One of the most unusual baskets was a cattle feeding skip, a typical design from around Castle Donington. Very few makers managed to master this skill.



Castle Donington had one such maker, Mr. Flewitt, who built his basket by standing bare-footed inside it while he wove it. The skill of making a cattle feeding skip would have demanded extraordinary physical endurance, flexibility and dexterity.

Mr. Flewitt was the last of many generations of basket makers specialising in this skill as indeed the many others who made specialist items such as traps, cages, hampers, postal and transportation baskets.

### An Ancient Basket found Here



During an archaeological excavation in 1998 an extensive fishing system in Castle Donington was discovered: two 12th-century large fish traps made of willow. Their unique design was masterfully constructed with three chambers of decreasing size, and the design was probably based on a technology that went back over time immemorial.

This gives us a tantalising view of the longstanding history of basketmaking in the region, and an interest that continues locally still today.