

Chapter Activities, Exhibitions etc

Charley Heritage Group was, and is, rural people who love nothing more than to be outside and many of the activities – rather than projects- centred on being in the amazing locality of Charley. A walk on New Year's Day was a feature for several years and took in places that perhaps were unexplored to some members. Some walks we led ourselves; Sandra guided us over their farm fields to the derelict Gun Hill House with its wealth of stories and a rock stone, curiously inscribed with a date; a summer walk across the public footpath by the Monastery had an unexpected twist when we saw in a distant Drybrook field the huge water spout emerging after a main had been ruptured by a farm vehicle; with Mike's enthusiasm we tried to trace the route of the medieval Earls' Dyke across the Vale of Charley and up through Charley Woods emerging on Whitwick Road. Someone mentioned that a local farmer could dowse for water and there was a rather sceptical reaction. Before long, that farmer knocked on the door and said 'Come and try for yourself'; so we did. Forked hazel twigs were supplied, a twenty acre field and a minimum of instruction; for two members their own attempts were convincing. We assisted the Parish Council in their decision to move the Parish Pump from its original location dangerously close to traffic lights, to a more secure position where it could be maintained.



Field walking a rarely ploughed field, Flat Hill, John Havers found a strange piece of stone with a hole at one end which was later confirmed to be a Stone Age wrist guard. Some time later it was 'loaned' to the County Archaeologist to illustrate a talk and despite requests, it never made its way back to John. Last seen in the Ashby Heritage Rooms! There was always an excuse for walking the parish and absorbing the tales that an individual had to give us, finishing, of course, somewhere for refreshment! Occasionally we treated ourselves with Pie Nights at Beaumanor Hall and the local Tea Rooms.

But we were not an elite group, nor did we want to be. We wanted to show the public what we were learning about Charley and to hear their stories but initially had no means other than word of mouth and occasional items in local newspapers. So in May 2008, backed by our Member of Parliament, David Taylor who said "Charley Heritage Group are committed and energetic and engaged on a highly worthwhile project which deserves to succeed", we successfully applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Awards For All. The money bought display panels, a laminator and equipment and we embarked on learning new presentation skills to stage our first exhibition in the Oaks Storer Hall. 'From Domesday to Twenty First Century' (held 18th-19th April 2009) presenting aspects of our research to local people and showing items which were not generally on open view. An appeal for photographs of weddings at the Oaks Church brought in enough to fill a display board and it was difficult to move the crowds from this display as reminiscences flew thick and fast. We

stood by with note book in hand! A different audience was attracted to another table. Terry had been to the National Archives at Kew and found the WARAG (WW2) records for farming in Charley where each field had been assessed as to size, crop and general condition. These had Terry's usual superb presentation, detachable laminated pages in a lever arch file and copies were offered to the present day farmers who spread the word about their hitherto unknown existence.

Buoyed up with that first success we vowed to do it again, varying the theme each time. The monks at the monastery were approachable and helped on occasion, bringing a selection of their pottery, loaning an enormous old, wooden bound Lectionary which had been used in their daily services until the late twentieth century and providing authenticity by manning their stand and chatting to visitors. One unique contribution from them was a series of photographs of the illuminated manuscripts painted by Father Anselm Baker in the 19th century, rarely seen within the monastery and certainly not on general display.

The Leicestershire Association of Local History held an annual History Fair in the 19th century Beaumanor Hall and we were invited to present visual accounts of our research to a wider audience thus promoting our tiny hamlet of Charley but also collecting unexpected memories and stories from people we met there. One of these with the theme 'Bringing History Alive' awarded our display a Highly Commended certificate in a field of forty strong entries.

As the Group's 'fame' increased, we were on occasion asked to contribute articles to county magazines and publications and this task fell to Terry and Maureen. Local History Groups abound in Leicestershire as do WI, U3A and other social groups with regular meetings whose programme invites a Guest Speaker and Terry and Maureen gave many talks and Power Point presentations across the county on the Beam bender and the Reformatory respectively. Again, it was a two way process as there was often information gained as well as imparted.

The Group's activities often highlighted the expertise of an individual but needed the co-operation of everyone to make something happen. One such was David Burton's 1940's film night which was held to commemorate the end of World War Two. We invited the public to a showing of the black and white films, 'Gasbag' and the German Boxing Day favourite 'Dinner for One' and Margaret Metcalfe made Woolton pies for the buffet, named after Lord Woolton who was Minister for Food in 1940. Working together, talents were discovered that sometimes surprised even the holder of that gift. For the Millennium, Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee and the Commemoration of the ending of the Second World War, St James Church, St Peter's at Copt Oak and the Monastery collaborated to hold Three Churches Flower Festivals and members of the Heritage Group were closely involved with interpreting the themes with floral displays to decorate the buildings and being on hand over the viewing days to as stewards and serving refreshments to the public.

We have all made paper planes during our lifetime but Steve Upton took the activity to new heights for our first Heritage Open Day; realising that there might be children attending with parents and that the war time theme could be beyond their interest, he devised a paper plane challenge to build and compete to fly the greatest distance. The children were engrossed and had several attempts to make their designs fly further but the real competitive streak was in the adults! Conversations about weight, drag and dynamics were not what we had expected!