

Charley Parish Map (M.H.)

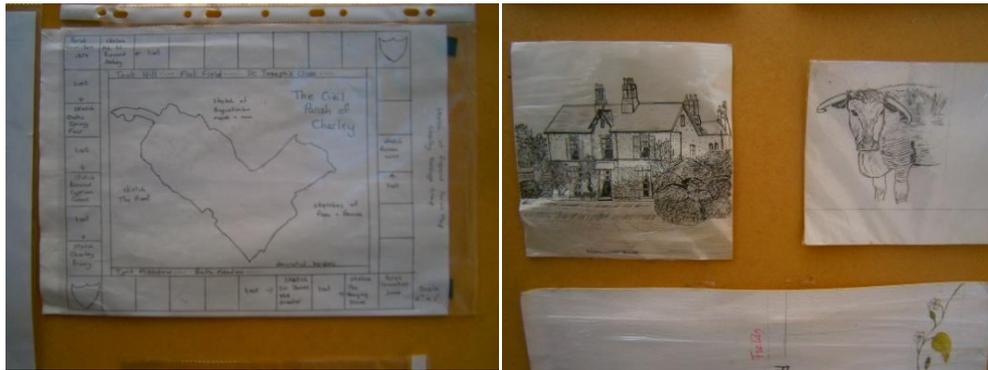
For me the first year of the Local History course raised more questions than answers about the landscape and residents of Charley, and voicing these locally and the enthusiasm on telling and hearing the tales that resulted brought the response that 'someone ought to write it all down'. But I felt that it was not something that should be done by one person and in 1998 a Heritage Group was suggested, advertised in the church parish magazine, passed through the grape vine and ultimately interested locals met for the first time at our home, St Joseph's Cottage, in November 1998. From the start it was a social gathering rather than a formal history group and what we could do as a group brought up suggestions from the simple through the frivolous to the extravagant. Coincidentally, a talk on Parish Maps was advertised by the Leicestershire Rural Community Council and Joyce Burton and I decided to attend with the expectation that historical and geographical maps of Charley could be examined. But we found that what was under discussion was the **making** of maps, 'of the time', pictorial, showing the places and people of interest in the locality, and, crucially, made by the community. We were enthused. This could be the project the group was looking for.

The Group bought the idea. What to include in our map and how became the focus of many meetings and the list of items grew longer as the wine and stories flowed. People divulged their hidden talents, tasks were allotted and contributors persuaded. A design outline was agreed but needed more funds than the group could contribute themselves and we discovered that an approach to the Heritage Lottery Fund meant that the activity would have to gain the approval of independent assessors. A primary requirement to obtaining funding from that or any other source was that we had to be a formally constituted group with a written Constitution, bank account and officers. This was new territory for everyone and a Constitution had to be a valid document, so no room for guesswork. The Finance Officer of the Marlene Reid Centre in Coalville was recommended as the one to go to for advice. An afternoon session with Mary Chesterton and the adoption of her recommendations helped Charley Heritage become a formally constituted group and thus eligible to apply for funding. I was elected Chairman, Sheila Bruce, Secretary and John Havers was to be the Treasurer. Early in 1999 an application was made to the National Lottery for a grant under their Awards for All scheme for a project to produce a Parish Map and in August of that year it was confirmed that a £2000 award would be made.

Once again, there was no shortage of ideas; the map must be large, impressive, include land owners, field names, historical and geographical features and become an incentive for people to look closely, satisfy their initial curiosity but also inspire them to become more aware of what was around them.

A draft was planned and marked out to size by me with the expert assistance of Alison Danvers who was full of ideas about the lettering and artwork. Conversations with residents about sketching the items which would border the map brought more volunteers than could have been hoped for ranging from a nine year old girl to a monk of Mount St Bernard Abbey. All submitted a preliminary sketch to fit the required dimensions and the final layout was approved by the Group. Everything was to be drawn or written directly onto the top quality art paper so it was with some trepidation that I embarked on what was to become a prolonged process of taking the map (5ft x4.5ft) in the boot of my car from one artist to the next with strict admonitions that there should be no food or

drink anywhere near the board whilst it was in their house. Dogs, cats, children and farm animals must be kept at bay!



Draft plan and sketches

It was an anxious time; every element contained a step into the unknown. Would the map ever be completed? Would it be so amateurish that the Group's enthusiasm would be decimated? Would someone spill coffee, tea, ink as it neared completion? While the map was travelling through the Parish, potted narratives were being written about each sketch for the accompanying booklet; a second booklet which would show maps of land ownership and include field names was also under production.

The end product amazed us all. Not only was it full of information about the diversity and hidden gems of Charley but it was beautiful to look at. It merited a bespoke frame and a picture framer was found locally who could deliver what was needed. The printers, Phoenix Foto Litho plc of Leicester, welcomed the challenge of reproducing the original to size for a couple of special orders but also to reducing it to a size suitable for giving to each of the 70 Charley householders as we had specified in our application to the Lottery fund.



Framed and glazed the next difficulty was where to hang the map so that it could be seen by the public and the Group welcomed an offer from Father John Moakler, then Abbot of Mount St Bernard Abbey to display it in their Guest House. John Havers, Father Mark Hartley and Brother Paul did the job and the map remained there until 2018 when the sitting area was redesignated as a

dining room and the space was needed for furniture. The Parochial Church Council of St James Church then accepted the map, still as colourful as when it was first made, to hang in their hall.