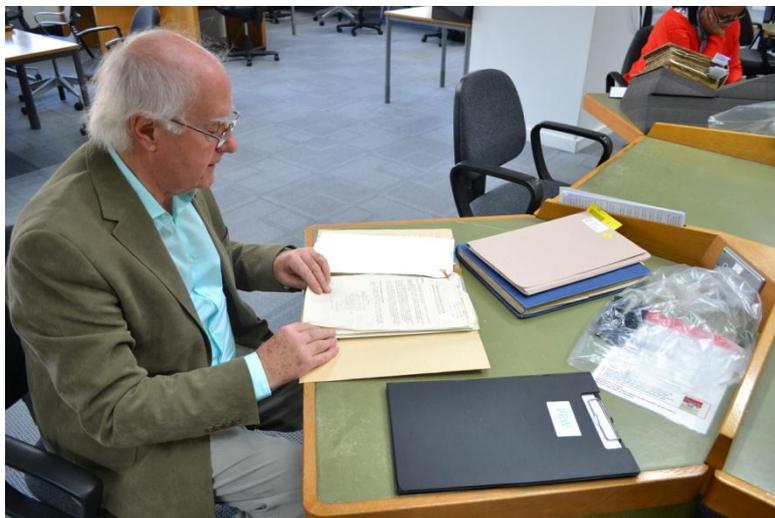


## RESEARCH (MH)

This sharing of local stories was informative and entertaining but we recognised that there was a need for more formalised research if the work of the group was to be credible in the face of local variations in the word of mouth tales. In the early days of limited internet access, some of us visited the Leicestershire Record Office in Wigston, local libraries and even further afield to the National Archives at Kew. With Terry in the Group, avenues were explored that the rest of us didn't even think of and we came to rely on him to take a story from an anecdote to a full-blown historical account. The 'Beambender' structure intrigued him and when I unearthed the brief notes I had made about Ken Nicholls' visit to St Joseph's many years previously and his descriptive diagram of the WW2 navigation beams, Terry wanted the whole story, the local, the national; and the international. He ignited the enthusiasm of us all; the books, the DVDs and the Heritage Open Days held in our field are testament to that work.

Members of the group usually knew who had previously lived in their house, remembered old neighbours and their quirks and eccentricities but dates and length of time were approximate. Again, Terry knew what was needed and patiently unearthed all the National Census records from 1841 to 1911, and presented a file to us containing a laminated copy of each of Charley's entries.



Terry at the National Archives

Michael Froggatt, from Charley Knoll Farm, was a fount of local knowledge; his family had farmed or had business in the area for many years and he had filmed the construction of the M1 through Charley using a cine camera. Mike was of a mechanical mind and was soon joined in the group by his son Richard through their shared interest in WW2 and the Beambender. He was also curious about the fabled Earls' Dyke which reputedly ran through Charley, and disappointed when field-walking and old documents failed to define the course to his satisfaction. This topic launched many reminiscences about the challenges of the Charley landscape, with Roger Cook and Mike revisiting their days and nights of ploughing, snow clearing and the mechanics and merits of various vehicles! Often other conversations developed across the table as there wasn't one hundred per cent enthusiasm about carburettors and cog wheels!

Farming history was uncovered by Terry on an unrelated visit to the National Archives. He found the 1940s WARAG records for each farm in Charley giving details of each farm, its crops and the quality rating – a survey to establish what the country could produce in the war time need to feed the nation. Not content with finding the information and telling us about it, the records appeared, archive ready - laminated and bound.

Each new member brought different local knowledge and hidden stories of Charley were uncovered leading to other avenues of research. Wilf Shelton had memories of visiting his aunt in the buildings which once housed the Reformatory and a relative had worked there as a blacksmith. Photos of the old buildings came out and Wilf was able to walk us through the rooms he remembered visiting. Margaret Pitts told of the connection between her house and the old Garendon Abbey near Loughborough. David and Joyce's home had once been a collection of naval huts, dismantled and transported by road to Leicestershire; his personal archive of photos, receipts and invoices through the decades showed how they had tackled the transformation into a desirable residence.

Many of the projects pursued will be described in further entries here and it will be appreciated that the end products were rarely the work of an individual but a collaboration of members within the group.

Our store of knowledge was accumulating. With the extending availability of the world wide web giving remote access to old records, there was a build up of random paperwork and documents and the need for an ordered approach to storing our records was essential, both for ease of access and for the tidiness of our home! An award from the Shepshed Building Society was spent on files and folders to house what would become an extensive archive. Initially, almost anything printed which included the name Charley was copied or the source noted; future historians would not feel the frustration that had been experienced in the early days when searching for Charley's history.

In these last days of the group, an approach to the local libraries will be made with a view to gifting them the files, and decisions will have to be made about disposing of the equipment, once viewed with anticipatory excitement and now superseded by pocket-sized devices, QR-codes and apps.