

## The Oaks Fair

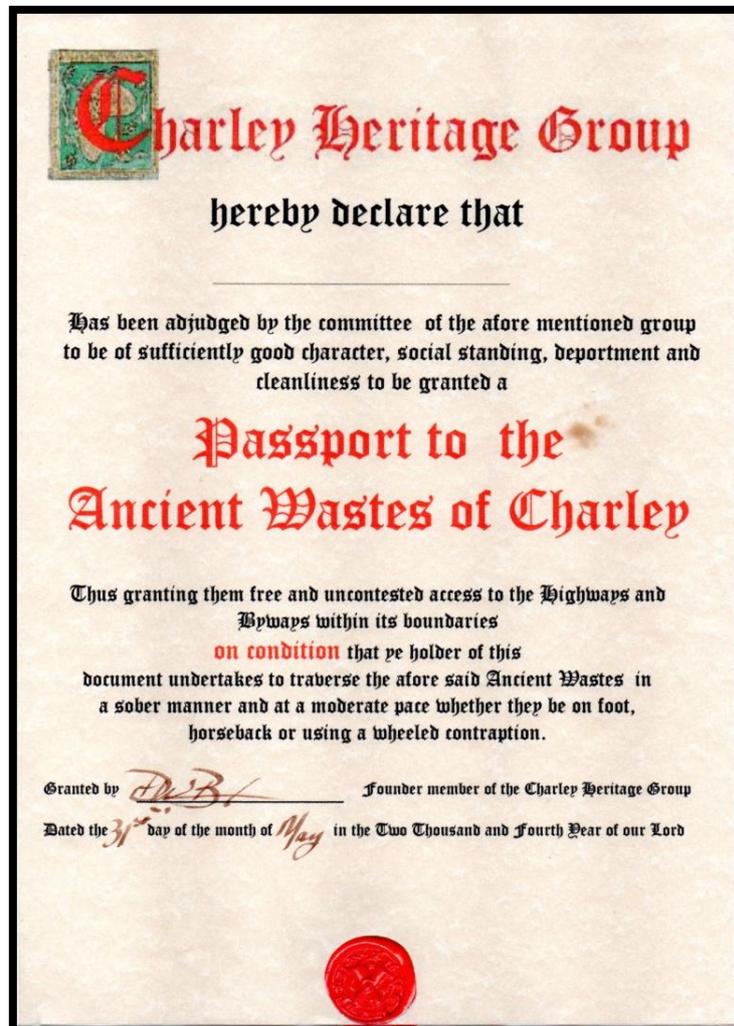
A fixture in the life of Charley people is the annual Oaks Country Fair held on Whit Monday in the field adjoining the Church. With the exception of the Foot and Mouth years and the Covid pandemic of 2020 it has been held since 1928 or 1930 – there is some confusion about the date. For three years it was organised by Richard Froggatt and his wife until they handed back the reins to the Parochial Church Council in 2018. Charley Heritage Group has had a presence at the Fair in a variety of capacities nearly every year since being formed. Roger manages the car park – a mammoth task given the number of motorists attending, Sandra makes sure there is food for everyone at the Church's barbecue stall, others are the gate keepers working in shifts and the Group's display tent is manned to chat with visitors. A theme is chosen by the Group for the year to showcase our activities, present some historical facts and also to stimulate interaction with familiar and unknown faces. The weather has not always been kind to the Fair and many of the photographs over the years show us clad in warm, waterproof clothing and there are memories of physically holding down the gazebo when we were situated at the top of the hill.



The displays we staged always attracted attention and conversations, especially those focussing on the Beambender. The wedding photos of marriages at St James Church collected over the years caused a queue to form as people were keen to spot their younger selves, parents and even great grandparents in their finery. Some of the photographs went back to the nineteenth century. Maps and the complete National Census records for the Parish were always well scrutinised, follow-up contacts were made when we were able to provide further information of past residents, and it was a two-way process. Many times we were surprised with a name unknown to us who had a connection with the parish.

“Charley in Twenty-five Objects” 2016 was a joy for us to stage, arguments over what to include raged for weeks: a resident loaned us a stuffed fox – in the past known as a Charley- and the items displayed ranged from farm implements to souvenir mugs, all telling a part of the history of Charley. A Charley whittle stone was identified by several visitors as ‘one of the best sharpening stones in the world’, sadly no longer quarried in Charley at Whittle Hill. A list of some of the items shown is below.

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a recurrent theme in the Group's discussions was 'Declaring UDI for Charley' (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) as we complained about the speed of traffic, fly tipping and the merits and demerits of various governments. For the Fair in 2014 David Burton and Joyce produced a Passport for Charley complete with Seal and ribbon which was then inscribed with name, rolled and tied and awarded to carefully vetted recipients deemed worthy and of sufficient wealth to contribute £1, to pass into and out of Charley.



The passport idea was resurrected in 2018 when Brexit was consuming the thoughts of the nation. The Group passed a Solemn Resolution that Charley Parish should indeed seek independence and border posts be constructed at the four points of ingress to the Parish with only those holding a valid passport granted through passage. The design for the Checkpoints was duly completed by Stephen Upton and the mocked up photographs displayed at the Fair with accompanying text announcing the proposed date of implementation. We were rather taken aback by the number of people who took it seriously!



In 2019 we did not have a stall due to manpower shortage but we attended as individuals and this poignant photo of Sheila and Wilf was to be one of Wilf's last outings.



#### CHARLEY IN 25 OBJECTS

1. Sharpening stone
2. Charley Parish map
3. Charley jubilee mug
4. Plough
5. Charley passport
6. Oaks Road sign
7. Books, DVDs etc
8. Brain coral (Mike)
9. Forest Rock sign
10. Stuffed fox
11. MSB medallion
12. MSB Psalter
13. Reformatory Plank
14. Monastery Pottery
15. Goss crested ware – Mount St Bernard Abbey
16. Butter pat
17. Milk Church

