Chiseldon Local History Group Report for Chiseldon Parish Council

March 2021

Like every organisation our activities this year have been limited by the pandemic.

Our monthly study meetings ceased; the last one was in February 2020; however, we are hopeful that most of the speakers we had booked for last year will still be available once the Church Hall reopens. We were unable to open the museum and it remains unclear when we will be able to do this. Hopefully this will be sometime late this summer.

The committee has kept in touch and even had some meetings in a garden and Chiseldon House Hotel when restrictions allowed. This meant we could continue work on the second interpretation Board in Church Street. With invaluable help from the Clerk around planning issues, and Sam Smith who did the Graphic design, this project is now nearing completion. The design is with the manufacturers for printing onto the vandal proof board.

In October, the first interpretation board in Stroud’s Hill was indeed vandalised but repaired swiftly, thanks to a local metalworker and a kind donation from one of our members. The board itself was undamaged and is wearing well so we have stuck with the same suppliers this time. However, the metal worker who did the repair has offered to make the frame for a considerably lower cost.

We sincerely hope that by the time the finished board is ready and installed, we will be able to have a grand unveiling party.

We had been working hard to assemble displays for the VE75 celebrations planned for May but that, too, was not to be. However, research is never wasted, and the information is filed away.

When restrictions eased in the summer, two of us catalogued the artifacts in the museum. We took photographs as well as describing the items, with a view to creating an online database. In due course this will be added to the photographic database already on our website and accessible to members.

We took up the suggestion (Sam Smith again) to produce a calendar in time for Christmas and this was a great success. Many thanks to Dawn and team at Oakley’s Spar for selling them for us. We made over £300 which compensated for lack of income from membership fees this year.

Our AGM was due in October, but we postponed it to April 2021. However, with so little happening we have postponed it again to October 2021. We can only hope our members will re-join once things get back to some sort of normality.

The issue of the location of the Chiseldon Camp Commemorative Stone came to a head in November and it was deemed necessary to remove the stone to a place of safety to prevent further trouble. A local resident borrowed a JCB and it was transported without problems to a temporary home nearby. We still hope to find out who owns the land in front of the Test Centre in Ladysmith Road and get permission to place it there. Brexit and Covid19 have seemingly made it impossible to contact the relevant people.

We owe a huge debt to the Parish Council, particularly The Clerk, for their tireless work in trying to resolve this intractable problem. Thanks also to Matty Frost, an artist with a JCB, and Neil Archer for providing a temporary home for the stone.

**The future**

CLHG is not short of ideas for future projects We have considered a series of essays on aspects of Chiseldon’s history; a history of Burderop Park; the Golf Course; walks around Chiseldon; and permanent displays for the museum about the Camp and the Railway (like the very successful Timeline.)

However, we are concerned that only a very small number of members is involved in this work. Although we have several volunteers to act as stewards in the museum during opening hours, only two of us are involved in creating displays and this is clearly not sustainable.

The committee works hard but some of us are feeling our age and we lack some expertise, especially in IT. Our website is not working properly and is something we would like to develop more as a way of fulfilling our core purpose; researching and sharing knowledge about Chiseldon’s history. We would welcome help with this.

Over the years we have accumulated a considerable archive of photographs, documents, publications, newspaper cuttings, maps, and artefacts, most of which have been catalogued. Only some of these can be stored and displayed in the museum as the environment is damp and dusty. As a result, committee members have an increasing accumulation in their cupboards. This is not an ideal situation.

We read with interest the Parish Council’s plans to replace the Recreation Hall. Could this building include space for a village archive? Maybe the permanent displays from the museum could be designed into part of the building and would probably thus be seen by more than the handful of visitors the museum attracts each week?

Social Media has proved a useful way of reaching a different audience and no doubt could be used more. Recently one of our founder members, Sheila Passmore posted pictures and stories on the Chiseldon Community Facebook page. A resident very kindly converted these into a PDF which he made available to everyone.

We are encouraged by the interest shown in local history by villagers and we need to find ways of tapping into that interest in the future.

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