

Chagford Local History Society Newsletter, November 2020

Looking to the past and a brighter future

Since March the CLHS has held none of its scheduled events and, unfortunately, this is likely to be the case well into 2021. So much of the routine and social contacts of our lives have been disrupted over the past months that the loss of our talks programme and summer visits is probably small compared to much else that we've had to adapt to. But this newsletter is sent to you to signal that a shared interest in the past of our parish is one way of maintaining a sense of community in the present. We hope that you will find something of interest here and that you may be able to provide further information to the items presented or answer some of the questions that are posed.

Annual General Meeting and annual subscriptions

Sadly we will not be holding our AGM this year. The committee have decided that under present circumstances we must postpone the AGM until November next year. In light of this the committee have also decided that we will grant the membership a "subscription holiday" until next November 2021.

Like most AGMs, ours is an opportunity to look back on our achievements of the year, present the accounts and refresh membership of the committee. And, of course, it's the only meeting we have when the real purpose is to socialise over the traditional wine and cheese. Clearly any wine and cheese will now have to be consumed at home....and at your own expense! This newsletter can do some of the official work of the AGM, however, as here you can see the accounts for 2019-20 and remarks from our chair, Jon Lawrence and me, your secretary as well as some interesting written and visual contributions by active CLHS members and also people from outside our area who have contacted us through our website.

Chagford Archive: a living record of the past

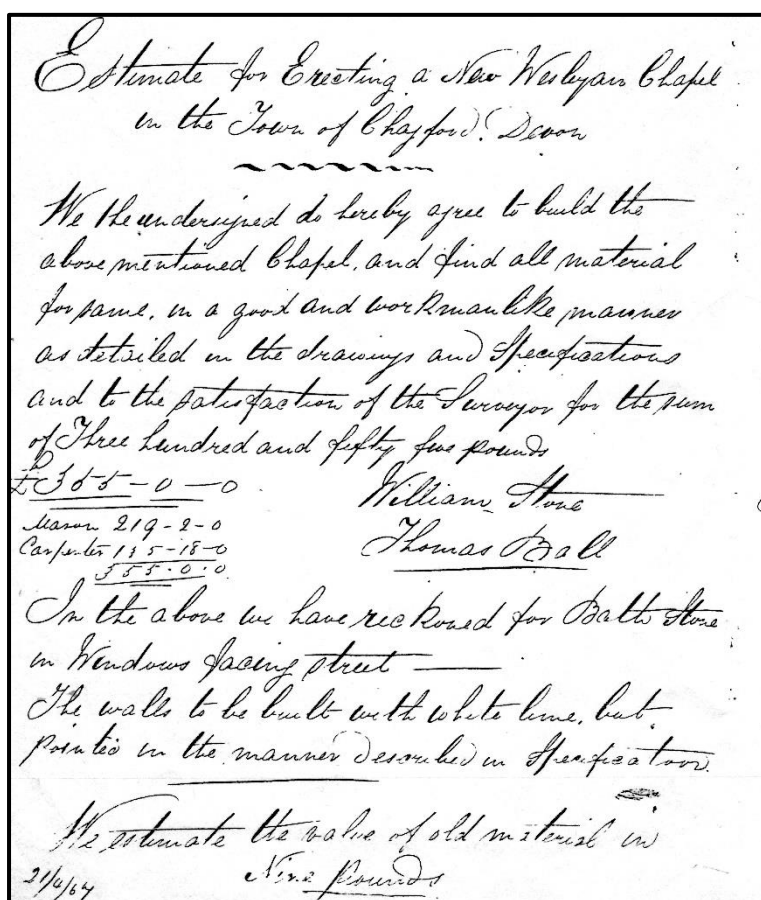
Over many years the Chagford Local History Society has acquired a large collection of items recording and illustrating the history of our area, from medieval tinnerns to experiences during the current Covid crisis. And since we set up our archive rooms next the library a couple of years ago many people in the area have donated historical material to us. There is now a place where documents, photographs, maps and so on can be safely stored, properly catalogued and made available for viewing by visitors (of course, in present

times that last facility is not possible). As well as original material and “hard” copies, such as mentioned by Jean Rhodes in her article below, we have electronic copies of images that the CLHS can use and put on its catalogue, even though the originals may still be owned by others.

Jean Rhodes, Perran Newman and Sue McNeil are three of the volunteers who have been helping to catalogue the material in the archive. Here they write about some of their experiences.

Among the archives

I hated History at school. Seventy years ago it was all Kings and Queens, Wars and Treaties. Now it has become *all about people*: their societies, literature, art and music. We are so lucky in Chagford to have acquired a room in the Jubilee Hall to house the Chagford Archive. This now provides a safe home – for a lot of paper records, photographs and audio recordings that were until recently distributed in houses around the parish or in the dusty projection room above the hall’s entrance.



Chagford Local History Society has received two exciting items this year. Elinor D’Albiac brought in a fragile old Diary, found in a barn at Waye Barton during the time her family lived there. Diaries are like gold dust. Covering 1888 and 1889, it’s 130+ years old. Amongst entries about digging mangolds and potatoes, we see the writer take his horse and cart to Moreton Station to collect coal and coke for the ‘Company’, (Great Week Mine). Recently Marion Barnes brought in some old deeds. The earliest dates to 1685. How exciting is that!

Jean Rhodes

From the Chagford Archive: builders’ estimate for the construction of the Methodist Chapel on Mill Street, 1867 (now Helpful Holidays). Cost: £355.

Hidden amongst the Deeds

I have always been excited to discover what happened in my home in the past. Maybe it was prompted by finding some physical evidence under floorboards and behind wall panels. Items such as children's alphabet tiles - the difficult ones such as Y is for Yacht and Q is for Queen (a grumpy looking Victoria). A scrap of the Standing Orders for an anti-tank regiment and razor blade packets and toothpaste tubes indicate that troops were here in the war. The real icing on the cake was found amongst my neighbours' deeds. We occupy the two halves of the same house which was divided in 1954. Amongst the numerous Indentures and Conveyances nestled a four page handwritten letter and a photograph taken in 1905. The letter was from the first owner, who bought the land and paid to have the house built in 1885, to the new owner in 1907. It contains wonderful details about the property, the land, the fruit trees and the lavatory facilities. Mr. Unwin, who was a retired Inspector of Schools in Burma was very proud of his 'water closet' and gave tips on its operation and use. I am pleased to say that we still have the 'thunder box' as we call it, with its magnificent mahogany seat and panels. A modern bowl lies below the seat and the pull up flushing handle has gone but it is the same space with its double lockable doors that has been the seat of contemplation for all the previous owners.

I am pleased to say that the descriptive letter and other documents relating to Mr. Unwin will be deposited in the Chagford Archive to be rediscovered with a smile by future owners.

Perran Newman

*The Archive was closed during the first lockdown, which brought the on-going cataloguing to a standstill. So we're very grateful to **Sue McNeil** and Angela Stone who resumed working on their own intermittently from early July.*

During 'Lockdown' I have really missed my co-worker Marion Daly when uploading archive material onto the digital archive. It's not only slower without her but I miss our tea-break chats. I haven't done any work on sunny days over the summer but now that winter is on its way there is a better chance of continuing. Some sessions can be painstakingly tedious, uploading one similar document after another but at other times one can get totally waylaid by interesting photos or names or events. Just last week in "Box 59" there were papers and receipts concerning the making and launch of the film, "Nearer The Weather" made to commemorate Chagford 500, the 500th anniversary of the Great Court of Tinnors, held on Crockentor in 1494. Making the film was obviously a massive project with some help from the South West Film & Television Academy, but so was the launch and selling copies in 2005 which left me full of admiration for Jean Rhodes and everyone involved. It was a huge

endeavour. When working on the uploads I am constantly in awe of the dedication and diligence of the cataloguing and conservation work instigated and continued by the founder members and aware that we need to be collecting and gathering contemporary event records for future generations. What seems un-extraordinary today could be fascinating for folk to read in 50 years' time.

Sue Nosworthy (aka McNeil)



What the Archive shows us. Chagford Bridge, with Higher Factory on the right. ©Robert Sampson

Chagford Memory Bank

The Society has begun to develop a new addition to its website – an **interactive ‘Memory Bank’** where registered users can post their recollections about Chagford life in the past, or comment on recollections that others have already been posted to the site. The Memory Bank can be accessed directly from the website’s main menu bar, but you can also find it by clicking [here](https://www.chagfordlocalhistorysociety.org.uk/forum-register/).

So far most of the contributions have been actively commissioned from local people and then posted to the site by the Society’s officers, but we are now keen to encourage you, our members, to post directly to the website’s ‘Forums’. To do this, you will first need to become a registered user of the blog-site by completing the form at:

<https://www.chagfordlocalhistorysociety.org.uk/forum-register/>

This is necessary as a protection against cyber-attacks and other malicious use. Once registered, you will be taken to the Forums page, where you will find sections that give advice on how to use the site ('How to Post...'), a general discussion forum, and the four themed 'Memory Bank Forums': one for posts about '**Chagford Places**', one for '**Chagford Life**', one for posts concerning **the surrounding area**, and one specifically for blogs about the **local natural world**. We hope you will enjoy the posts that have already been added to the site, and that you will also consider adding your own posts or comments. Please spread the word about the 'Memory Bank' and encourage people you know to add their own recollections. Ideally we want this to be a site that will reach out to anyone interested in sharing their memories of Chagford, including those who have moved away, and those with fond memories as visitors to our special corner of the country. At this difficult time, when we are all feeling the loss of social connections, we hope that the Memory Bank will come to be a useful resource for the community and a point of virtual connection.

Jon Lawrence, Chair, CLHS

Voices from the Memory Bank: Chagford livestock markets

***Timothy Garratt** tells the story of Chagford livestock markets since he arrived in the town in 1975, to take up a partnership in Rendells. The full version of this article can be found in the Memory Bank, on the CLHS website.*

Although Rendells had (and still have) a widespread auction and estate agency practice, covering all of South Devon, the main income at the Chagford office came from the seasonal livestock sales at Chagford Market. People will have seen old photos of cattle herded and gathered for sale in the town centre and around the Market House. When we arrived the market had long since been removed and was held in a field borrowed from the Webber family, behind the Globe in what is now the group of houses called Market Field. Sales on this site were held 7 times a year, including the Pony Sale and 6 for cattle.

I had never had anything to do with ponies of any sort before, so the Pony Sale was a real eye-opener. About 300 ponies would arrive on site, starting in the pitch black before 6.00am as ponies were sold in order of arrival and the first lots always had an advantage. I recall one particularly wet sale at which every pony lost its lot numbers to the rain at least twice before the end of the sale and I don't think any pony left the sale-yard with a number on its back. But the skill and goodwill of the buyers prevailed, enabling every pony to be recognised and consigned to its correct destination, with only one being mislaid.

Market days were significant for the entire town, as there was no room on the site to accommodate vehicles even for unloading and loading. The largest sale

was always held in early March, when as many as 400 cattle had to be accommodated. Sales in those early days rarely comprised less than 150 head, a lot of stock to get into and out of a small space. Most stock was driven in on foot from the surrounding farms and had to be held up in the street in herd groups while the previous consignment was penned up. A few from further afield came in farm trailers, also waiting along New Street, High Street and down from the car park: chaos (though orderly) even in those traffic-less days!



Chagford Pony Sale, 8th October 2020. © Chris Chapman

Many buyers came from all over England, glad to take our healthy and hardy hill cattle away to rich fattening pastures and yards in the corn-producing areas. Big lorry-loads went to East Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Norfolk and Suffolk from each sale, and the lorries waiting to take them away parked up nose to tail all along beside the Churchyard wall. That is unimaginable today with the amount of domestic traffic about.

Of course, everyone knew that “the writing was on the wall” and no one was surprised when the Webber family wanted to develop the site for housing. In any event, holding the market on the site was becoming ever more fraught as the local community found the activity less and less quaint and more and more aggravating to daily town life. And so, in 1991, after a heart-searching period of reflection and encouragement from the local farming community, the firm purchased the present site at Crannafords from the Ellis family, holding its first

market on the new site in March 1992. The market continues to this day, but with a good deal less aggravation to the town population than in former times.



*Chagford sheep
market, 1935.
© Martin Perryman
Collection*

Chagford Oral History Collection

As you can probably imagine, the Society's plans to reboot our work collecting local oral histories have had to be put on hold in 2020, given the current health emergency. However, we have at least completed our work archiving and preserving the Society's historic collection of recorded interviews with local people. In 2019, as part of our Heritage Lottery Fund award, the Society's officers managed to get all of its taped interviews transferred to digital files. Compact cassettes are prone to deterioration over time, and there was a real risk that some would become unplayable or inaudible if this work was not undertaken soon. These have all now been transferred to digital files and multiple back-ups have been made. The Society is also continuing to archive the original recordings.

It is largely thanks to the dedication of Jean Rhodes that we have amassed a precious collection of more than thirty interviews with local people, most of whom can be heard reminiscing about Chagford as it was in the early twentieth century. The bulk of these interviews were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s with local characters who are sadly no longer with us. I had hoped to be able to give a talk to the Society about the collection this Autumn. That will now have to wait for better times, but I wanted to let you know that the collection has now been made safe for posterity. More than that, Jean Rhodes has been seeking permission from interviewees' descendants to allow us to make some of the interviews available to the wider public. It is hoped that some will soon be

uploaded to the website, to be played as audio files. We also plan to host a full list of the interviews as part of the website's 'Memory Bank', including brief details of the main topics each person can be heard discussing. We are extremely fortunate that Jean has been so assiduous, and so skilled, in collecting these precious memories about the town over so many years. They represent a valuable and unique collection. We will keep you posted about our plans to make these memories more widely available.

Jon Lawrence, Chair, CLHS



Thatching Bellacouche, Chagford, Summer 2020. © Chris Chapman

A note on the photographs

In the digital world, so much can be easily shared. Among the recent acquisitions in the Archive are the two excellent photographs by Chris Chapman displayed in this newsletter. Chris keeps the copyright, but allows the CLHS to keep a digital copy and to use them. There's a similar arrangement in connection to two fascinating groups of digital images "loaned" to the CLHS, two of which are here in the newsletter, one from Robert Sampson and the other from Martin Perryman.

Local history and the world

The CLHS's website has proved to be a link for people living well beyond our parish to find out more about their past. Through its email contact page we've received many enquiries from people, usually about past family members, and often the enquiry includes some interesting information. One of the most recent was to do with the untimely and violent death of a young man 120 years ago. From the *Western Morning News* of Monday 22nd August 1898:

CHAGFORD - Killed By Lightning At Chagford. - Mr Prickman, Coroner, held an Inquest at Forder Farmhouse, Chagford, on Friday, on the body of JOHN HENRY HUTCHINGS, the young man killed by lightning near Forder House on the previous day. - JOHN HUTCHINGS identified the body as that of his son, aged 20. Deceased and himself on Thursday were at work in the harvest field for Mr Nickels, of Sandy Park Mills. The storm coming on they had to stop work. Witness went to his home about twelve o'clock and left his son in perfect health. - Mr George Endacott, farmer, of Forder, said he found deceased lying in the road. The clothes were stripped completely from his back. - P.S. J. Mortimore also gave evidence. Deceased's clothes were torn in shreds, particles of his clothing lying about the road. Some had been taken across the road, over the hedge, and into the field adjoining; one of his boots was torn off, and was found 45 feet from the body, while part of the other boot was found 20 feet in the opposite direction. He considered he must have been leaning against the elm tree for shelter and was struck by the electric fluid, for the ivy had been stripped from the tree for many feet above where his head would have come, but below that it was not scorched. - Dr Hunt said he had no doubt that death was caused by the lightning. The Jury returned a verdict "That death was caused by Lightning by the Visitation of God." - Deceased was a member of the Right Half Company 5th V.B.D.R., and will be buried on Monday at Chagford with military honours.

Wendy, my informant, filled in some of the background to the unfortunate young man, whose middle name was apparently "William", not Henry, as stated in the report:

“The 20 year old who was killed by lightning, John William Hutchings (1877-1898), was born in Whitehaven, Cumbria, where his parents, John Hutchings....and his wife Susan Hutchings had moved and where John worked as a coal miner/engine operator.”



Forder Bridge today, from the Deer Park. No elms trees now

But clearly, at some point before 1898, Wendy implies, but after 1884, the family moved back to Devon, having lost their third child, an infant, in that year.

Question: *the enquirer specifically asked “what was the Right Half Company 5th V.B.D.R.?” Can anyone answer that?*

CLHS contact details

Chair: Jon Lawrence

Secretary: Ralph Mackridge Tel: 01647 433204

Email: enquiries4clhs@gmail.com

Website: www.chgfordlocalhistory.org.uk

Thanks to all contributors to this newsletter and the volunteer cataloguers at the Archive who are working to make Chagford’s history available to all.