

Chagford Local History Society *Newsletter* March 2021

News from the Society

Welcome to the second of the CLHS's special lockdown newsletters. It's bringing glimpses of the history of our community into your own home. In the first issue we had to announce the cancellation of our AGM in November 2020 and indeed of the whole of our talks and visits programme for the Spring/Summer of 2021. Not happy news. But wait! We can announce that we now have a new season to look forward to, an exciting and varied programme for 2021-2022, starting this October. It's a long time to wait, but waiting is something we've become used to. By the end of October we can be fairly confident that we can meet in the usual venue at Endecott House in person. In the meantime here are some Society news items and some stories about Chagford's past to intrigue and entertain you.

New programme

We're way ahead! Jean Rhodes and our chair Jon Lawrence have already organised a new season of talks. Starting in October this year, the programme, as customary, will carry on through the winter and spring months of 2022, as always on the last Thursday of the month. And there's a bonus, unlike the usual five talks on the programme, as this time there will be six. Our opening talk in October will be presented by Jon and will be about our changing notions of community. We're delighted that Todd Gray will be coming to Chagford again to give our talk for April next year. More details of this exciting programme will be revealed later.



A view of Chagford in May: something to look forward to

Membership

Currently all members are enjoying a year's subscription "amnesty", this in recognition that the CLHS had to cancel most of its programme for 2020 and also for this year – until we resume in October. So at the next AGM, scheduled for 28th November this year, the new subscription year will begin.

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World War Two evacuees in Chagford

The story of the thousands of child evacuees who were moved to Devon in the early years of WW2 is not well known, even though there are many books available on the national picture. A part that Chagford played in the story came to light when the son of a wartime evacuee sent me an article that his mother, Pam Carter (née Hancock), wrote about her experiences, most of them pertaining to Chagford. She and her older sister Ruth were hosted with the Holmes family in Broomhill. Pam is now 90 years old.

Ralph Mackridge

We were set to Chagford in June 1940 from Stillington School (Battersea) via Clapham Junction and onto Okehampton. We walked to the Junction and put on a train not knowing where we were going. Once on the train, I can remember how crowded our carriage was. One girl, I think was called Barbara Mills, always wore a woolly hat. Then there were the posters that said "You are going to the strong county". I always thought it was going to do us good, not that it referred to the Cider!



Evacuee children boarding a bus in Kingsbridge. Photo: Imperial War Museum

It seemed a dreadfully long journey but I can still remember the smell of the smoke from the train engine, and just lots of children. We arrived at Okehampton and were taken by coach to Chagford, there we were taken to the Village Hall to be selected. My sister and I were some of the last to be chosen as we wanted to stay together, but finally we went with a Mrs Holmes, the widow of the village Rector. We travelled about a mile to her home which was a large detached house with a big front and back garden. Our home in London would have fitted into part of the front garden, so you can imagine we felt quite lost.

We were introduced to the family, a son called Charles who was an Army Officer, and a daughter called Molly. There was also a sister-in-law Miss Holmes, a retired Hospital Matron, and a live-in maid, who we spent most of our time with. We were rather overwhelmed by all of this class system. We ate our meals in the kitchen, and were not allowed into the dining room or drawing room.

We walked to school each day no matter what the weather was like but came to enjoy that. The school was in an old barn type building and divided into three classrooms, and we had to walk "again" to the 'Big' school for lunch.

Being evacuated wasn't too bad but we did miss Mum and Dad such a lot. I wasn't too keen on School as I was always being compared to my sister. She was the clever one. Sometimes after school we would stop at the blacksmiths in the village and watch the Smithy working. He would make us laugh by raising his eye brows and make his cap go up and down.



Evacuees at South Brent station.
Photo: Imperial War Museum

Sunday wasn't too bad as it was Church in the morning and Sunday school in the afternoon. Quite a lot of walking though for two little girls, as the village was a long way away. In the good weather we would go on to the Moors to pick whortleberries and primroses. Ruth remembers that we used to make up baskets with the flowers and take them to the local Hospital at Moretonhampstead.

I was later to go into Hospital as I caught pneumonia, which was nasty as I suffered with asthma which didn't help. The ambulance couldn't get up to the house so the driver had to carry me down the drive.

Once when Mum came to visit she turned up with two of the biggest dolls we had ever seen, goodness knows how she managed with them on a train. I later remember feeling quite sad as one of the dolls heads got broken, and could not be repaired.

Mum and Dad came to visit us, and they stayed in a B&B in the village. Dad was in the AFS and was more often than not on duty fighting fire in The Docklands, London, so if Mum came on her own she would stay with us, but was expected to help out with the chores.

In 1942 it appears that Ruth, Pam's sister, was due to go to school in Okehampton, having passed the entrance exam to the grammar school, but they instead both returned to their home in Battersea. According to Pam's account further evacuations happened with the threat of the V2 bombings; Ruth was evacuated to Winsor and Pam to Cheshire.

Plans for the evacuation of children away from urban areas which were thought to be targets of aerial bombardment had been laid before the outbreak of war and were put into action when it was declared, although most of the evacuations occurred about a year later. It appears that this huge task was done very efficiently and led to what was in effect a unique social experiment.



There seems to be very few existing references to evacuees in Chagford, so Pam's story puts some wonderful detail on the little information we have in the Archive. The Chagford Parochial School (in New Street) logbook for 7th October 1939 notes that there were 15 new admissions "due to evacuation". On 26th April 1940 the log book states: "18 evacuees from Battersea schools commenced this morning". Pam Carter came from Battersea, but she says her month of arrival in Chagford was June, suggesting that there were more arrivals after that log book entry. In addition to the Chagford Parochial school, it's well known that Holy Street Manor hosted a private school during some of the war years. A report in the *Western Times* on 8th September 1939 shows this must have happened very soon after war was declared, with "over 50 girls, with their teachers from a London school arrived at Holy Street manor, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Barley". The "London" school was probably St Monica's, a private school in Clacton on Sea. Although it

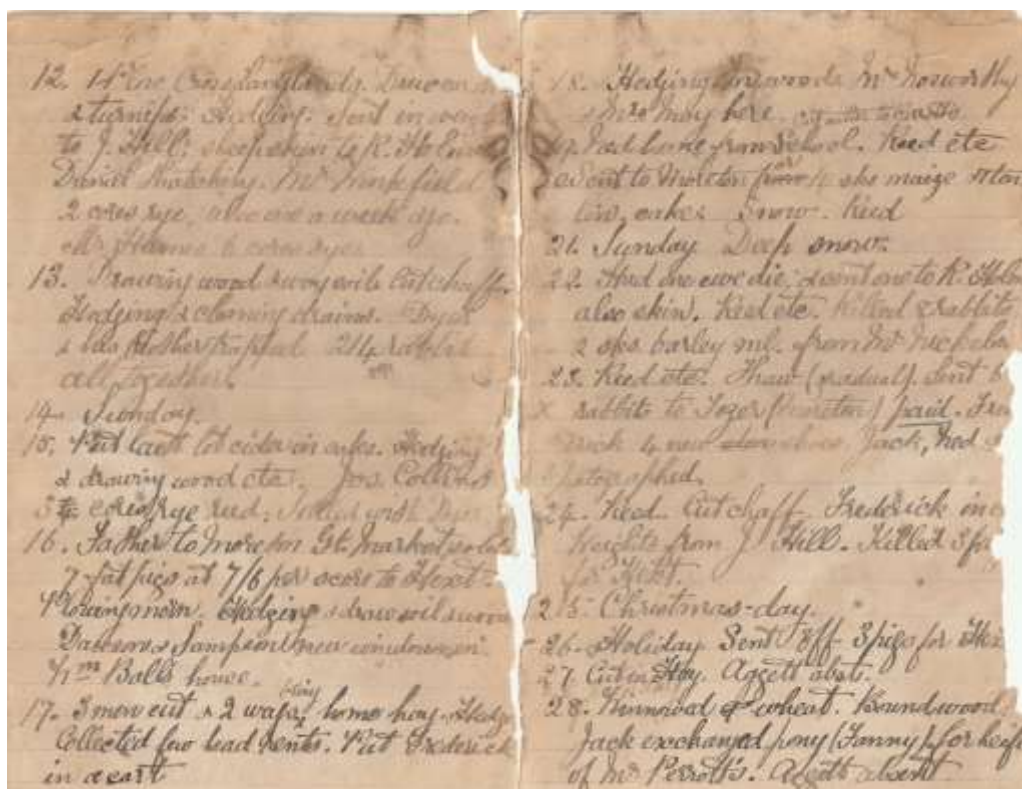
accords with a commonly accepted understanding, Pam's memory of being "rather overwhelmed" by the proprieties and affluence of her host family was not necessarily typical of child evacuees from London and the South East. Recent research on Devon points to the fact that most evacuees stayed with working class rural and village families whose standards of living were likely to be lower than those of many of their young guests. What must have been different and unfamiliar for most of these children, whoever they stayed with, was the opportunity to spend time in our beautiful countryside, as well as the difficulties of separation.

Can any reader add to our knowledge of evacuees in Chagford?

Farming at Waye Barton 130 years ago

Jean Rhodes has been handed an extraordinary diary of farm work contained in a very fragile notebook, for the years 1888 to 1890. Apparently found in a barn in Waye Barton, the history of the diary is a mystery and the writer unknown. It appears to have been written by a farm manager, quite probably at Waye Barton. An estate the size of Waye Barton would certainly have employed such a man. The diary details the day-to-day activities of farm work, which are extremely varied and point to how mixed farming was in those days, although the practices detailed here were up-to-date for the time. Jean has transcribed the whole diary, a real feat considering its length and the near illegibility of much of it due to damage and fragility. The History Society will seek advice on its conservation and, thanks to Jean's transcription, a copy of the diary will be available for people to read in the Heritage Centre, once it has reopened. Jean has chosen the daily entries for October 1890 to reproduce here, which show the immense variety of farm tasks, brief references to the different people employed on the farm and tiny but tantalising glimpses of the writer's personal life

1. Picked off mangel seed and combed reed. Mr. W. Thorn 2 ores of reed. Sold Mr. R. Holmes Dockham ram £33.
2. Chagford Fair. Digging 1 team D. Pk. Ferretted ricks, 1 rat. Mr. Cumming here. Two ducks killed.
3. Digging 1 team D. Pk. Two hens killed.
4. Digging 2 teams. 1 pullet killed. Weaned 5 calves. Uncle and aunt left.
5. Sunday.



The Waye Barton farm diary: two pages from December 1890 © Chagford Archive

6. Dyer trapping. Digging. George for himself. Two teams Benchfield.
7. Digging One team.
8. Digging. Robert for himself. Father to Newton. Mr. H. Gidley 8 cores. (Paid Nov. 5th)
9. Digging. Mr. Richard Thorn's funeral.
10. Digging. Two ducks killed. 3 fowls
11. Finished potato digging. Aggett for himself. Wm. Ball absent. Mr. T. Amery fetched "Gentle" cow and calf. £22 Dyer trapped 277 rabbits, paid him £2. 17. 8½. Sold them to Dyer at 12/- a dozen for £9.6.6.
12. Sunday.
13. Wm. Ball absent. H.B. digging for himsl. 2 men combing reed. Planted first cabb. plts. Sold J. Clements 2 cocks 5/-
14. Father to Exeter in answer to a summons on the Petty Jury at Quarter Sessions. Wm. Ball abst. George and H. Bennett for themselves. Cleaning stroil (couch grass) and Potatoe stalks etc. New halter.
15. Thrashing straw and liners etc. and winnowing. Wm. Ball here again. Tripolionions (trifolium, clover) planted out. Two old ducks killed. Polly 4 new shoes, also Darby.
16. Barn work. Drew furrows in Great Close. Pulled seed mangel. Sold D. Osborne 2 pigs £3. Trapped 11 rats in ricks.
17. Barn and drawing earth. 2 sks. from Mill. Packed wool. 14p 3qrs. 12lbs. Trapped 7 rats.



Scything barley near Chagford in the 1930's. © Martin Perryman Collection

18. Picked out hogs, 56 ewes and 55 wethers; 15 ewes on with ram. Planted bed of strawberries near nut tree. Drawing out earth and spreading. H. Mears and Wm. Ball absent ½ day. Trapped 6 rats.

19. Sunday. 20. Began pulling mangel. Stormy. Tommie? Heifer bull calf. Darby fell into pit (logging bob) in Kenslade. Dug out unhurt, been there several hours through the night with the wheel in motion.
21. Storing mangel. Very good weather. Moreton Great Market. 1 stag killed. Horse clipping machine 5/- from Plymouth. Pair spurs from Thorn's 7/5 (paid) Trapped 8 rats Drewston Park ricks.
22. Storing mangel. R. Hill castrated 4 lambs. 1 stag killed. Trapped 3 rats.
23. Storing mangel. Lower Barn held all Beanpark. Pair new wheels on little cart. Rake, wheel and plow.
24. Storing mangel, pit in Broadpk. Trapped three rats. Hedge heifer, heifer calf. 3 hens, 1 duck killed.
25. Finished storing mangel. Sent off wool to Mess. H Bros and brought back 10 sks maize, 8 barley meal, 1 ton Linsd. Cake (linseed cake = an animal food), 1 cask of petroleum from Ply. H. Bennett absent.
26. Sunday.
27. Two men combing reed. Pitted 2½ loads seed mangel. Fetched 48 bushs oats from Mr. Haydon's Newton. H. Bennett absent. Mr. G. Brimblecombe 10 cores reed. Mr. Nickels 3 cores. Paring hedge. Throw earth.
28. Storing potatoes in Silo. Hen killed.
29. Finished storing tatoes. Paring hedges. 9 h.hds lime for Bennett's Plat. Mother and I to Newton; I had teeth (stumps) extracted and one filled, one prepared.
30. Held Court for Manor of Southteign at Three Crowns, Chagford. 12 h.hds. lime for Bennett's Plat. Reed etc. Took up traps from ricks. Caught 55 rats (total).
31. 9 h.hds. lime for Beanpark and 3 for B. Platt. Spreading lime. Brandy shod. Ferretted corn ricks. Killed 9 rats. Cut 3 tons chaff. Flung away mangel seed: Old 1889 2 bags 38 and 10 (bags) 10lbs. New 1890 3 bags: 27, 31, and 33lbs. Clover 36lbs Eaver 3 pecks.

At the end of every year our farm manager writes a short summary of the year. Each of the three years seem to have very different outcomes. As always the weather is very mixed. This is his assessment of the year's output for 1890, 130 years' ago:

*Very cold sunless summer. Potatoe crop plain. Turnips fairly good. Mangels small. Corn fairly good; oats very good. Apples partial. Honey scarce. Grass very plentiful. Beautiful Autumn. Patchy hay harvest; corn harvest wet at beginning but very good after. Extraordinarily good weather for potato digging & mangel storing. Very severe frost through the Christmas time. Good luck with livestock. Cauliflowers & other vegets. Killed**

*(presumably the hard frost killed the vegetables)



Fishing on the Upper Teign

Colin Burbidge of Bedford recently sent us the following poem from the *Western Times*, dated 5th May 1902. It's a tourist's lament for lost youth, and in particular for an era when he had been free to fish at will in the upper Teign and its tributaries. In its evocation of 'dimple cheeked' maidens, sunbeam dappled waters and above all the joys of the fly, it nicely captures the easy, privileged world of the Edwardian gentleman, and his sense of outrage that other privileged gentlemen should have asserted proprietary claims over the landscape of his youth.

Jon Lawrence

"At Chagford Again

May Day once more! But, Oh! The rain
The mists, and winds so dreary!
To don my thickest coat I'm fain,
And find a fire cheery.
They wondered if I cared to see
The Chagford Fair to-day, Sir,
But cattle have no charms for me,
And are not in my way, Sir.

Yes, I do love the Chagford Fair
Of quite another fashion
Whose dimpled cheeks and nut-brown hair,
Provoke the tender passion!
You meet them in the quaint old street,
Or up the green lane riding.
Their locks with ribbons neat,
Such locks for love to hide in!

And then the trout! To cast a line
In some well-guarded water,
Is now a cherished wish of mine,
For I'm agog for slaughter.
"Hard lines,!" alas! Are all I get,
The folk who own the fishes
Won't suffer me a fly to wet,
And pick out pretty dishes.

On to their precious trout they hold,
These dwellers by the Teign, Sir!
As they might grip their bags of gold
If thieves had broken in, Sir!
With one consent they make excuse
Like those who shirked the wedding.
I blush for Devon! What's the use?
Still notice boards are spreading!

In bye-gone days no boards were there,
Now everywhere they slip 'em.
Then free as air the waters were,
You did no wrong to whip 'em.

Now some are wild if you protest
You'd like to try their trouting.
Well, all is ordered for the best;
At least, I have the outing!

With Perrott gone, and all the streams
Denied me, saving one now,
Where is the Chagford of my dream?
The place is over-run now.
But there the birds again are gay,
And golden sunbeams quiver.
With only half-a-crown to pay,
Each morn to fish the river!

Chagford, 1st May 1902 **FBD** Note - The notice boards by the river will soon be as thick as the trees!



Leigh Bridge c. 1890 © Robert Sampson

Poaching on the Sabbath

Poaching on the River Teign was evidently a popular activity, and clearly had its risks. But it seems that lack of respect for the Sabbath was the main offence of three unnamed young poachers, as the *Western Morning News* reported on 3rd September 1889, in which the mysteries of the class system are all too evident:

Before Messrs. Lethbridge Hill and Hayter-Hames at Crockenwell Petty Sessions yesterday three youths were summoned for angling in water at Leigh near Chagford on Sunday the 25th August, the right of fishing being the property of Rev. Arthur Grisley Barker. The keeper, Arthur Bolt, said he was desired by his master to state that he particularly pressed the case because the offence was committed on a Sunday. The Chairman said he thought Mr Barker was right in thinking youths of the defendants' position should have known better than choose such a day for the bad example to those less educated. They must pay the costs, £1 1s. 6d. With regard to the rods which were seized, the Bench recommended they be returned, having no power to make an order in that matter.

Other events & activities

Devon History Society Devon in the 1920s - launch event

Devon History Society's big project **Devon in the 1920s** is to be launched on Zoom. Postponed from last year, the launch will now take place on **Saturday 24th April 2021**. The guest speaker will be Dr Stefan Goebbel on *The Legacy of the First World War*, and he will be joined by Professor Henry French on *The Fall of the House of Palk*; Penny Lawrence on *A New Dawn: changes to life in a rural parish*; and Peter Mason on *Wagonettes and Charabancs: Tourism on Dartmoor in the 1920s*. The talks will be followed by a chance to discuss the research programme.

All are welcome to join this FREE event. To book your place visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/devon-in-the-1920s-formal-launch-tickets-139641929771>

Poor on the moor

The Widecombe History Group have just released a series of fascinating short talks, entitled 'Poor on the Moor', about aspects of poor relief and other support in Widecombe. The talks are based on parish documents and use examples from the group's recent publication *Welfare in Widecombe 1700 - 1900* and the associated digitisation project. The talks can be accessed here: <https://www.widecombe-in-the-moor.com/pooronthemoor/>, and can be watched in sequence, using the playlist, or an individual talk can be selected from the list.

Recommendations for lockdown screen time

Over the past year many of us have been watching our screens more than ever. Here are some recommendations which won't make you feel you're wasting your time!

The famous **Sutton Hoo** burial finds have captured the public imagination (again) recently with the release of the film, **The Dig**, available on Netflix. Starring Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan it's based on the story of the excavation of this site in 1939. Highly recommended. And if you want to know more about some of the Sutton Hoo finds there are two excellent videos on the British Museum You Tube channel, part of their Curators' Corner series. Start with the helmet. To find this go to:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYkoGH5iFY

Other short videos from Curators' Corner are well worth watching too.



BBC 2's recent "**Stonehenge: the lost circle revealed**" tells the story of the discovery of a fascinating extra dimension to the famous bluestones from the Preseli Mountains. Available for the rest of this year on BBC iplayer: [BBC Two - Stonehenge: The Lost Circle Revealed](https://www.bbc.com/iplayer/programmes/b09t8t8t)

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