

Chearsley Village Historical Society

Report to the Annual Village Meeting

Monday 17th March 2025

The Chearsley Village Historical Society was founded in June 2019. We had a bit of a slow start, not helped by the COVID outbreak in March 2020, but I hope my presentation tonight will confirm to you all that we have already and will continue to make impressive strides in the years ahead.

Firstly, I'd like to say a massive thank you to all of our Steering Group Members - Sian Lewis, John Lewis, Derek Allen, David Impey and Karen Vear - with whom I've been fortunate to work to support the continuing development of our programme of activities.

You can find out a lot more about our organisation in our dedicated area on the Village website.

But here's a brief summary of our aims:

- To stimulate interest in and understanding of our local history
- To understand the village history in the context of County and National history
- To enhance our sense of community, appreciation of and pride in the village
- To engage with other local communities and organisations with similar interests
- To build historical records of our distant past, our immediate past (living memory) and contemporary activities, recognising that today will become our past, sooner rather than later.

We had our busiest programme to date last year, which began with a presentation on The Great Train Robbery in February – probably the most well-known event taking place in Buckinghamshire in the latter part of the 20th Century.

In April we supported St Nicholas Church in putting together their 'Church History Day', tracing the origins of our village church as a 'field chapel' in Anglo Saxon times.

In May, we celebrated the brewing and beer drinking traditions of our village on our Pub Revival Day. We have just one fantastic pub in our village today, The Bell, but over the centuries there were five other houses that brewed and sold beer to locals – The Boot, The Plough, The Pig & Whistle, The Red Lion and The White Horseand a big thank you to the owners of all those premises who became pub landlords again for the day.

November was a busy month for our team. On Thursday 7th November, we held an event which featured a presentation of the fascinating history of Bletchley Park in World War Two.

This was shortly followed by a special event on Remembrance Sunday, following the traditional service at the War Memorial. It included the screening of a very moving film entitled 'And in the morning', produced by the Society and edited by David Impey, during which a number of Chearsley residents shared memories of the service given by family members in both wars.

This year promises to be another full one for the Historical Society. We held our first meeting in early February and it included the screening of two further excellent 'Chearsley Voices' films – 'Chearsley through the years' and 'Chearsley School'.

We'll be supporting St Nicholas Church again for the 'Church History Day' on Sunday week (23rd March). Come along and join us for what I know will be a most enjoyable occasion.

We're currently putting the finishing touches to our next event entitled 'Beating the Bounds' on Sunday 25th May. If you weren't aware, 'Beating the Bounds' is an ancient tradition that dates back centuries. It involves a ceremonial walk around the boundaries of a parish or community to reaffirm and remember their exact location. This practice was especially important before the advent of modern maps, surveying techniques, GPS and Sat Nav!

We plan to start at the church and then visit parts of our parish boundary via the southern end of the village down to the river, then proceeding round to Chearsley Furze and back to our Village Green for refreshments at The Bell with some other entertainments. We hope it'll be a most enjoyable occasion for all ages including families. More details will be available shortly.

We're planning further meetings during this year and we're looking at a number of possibilities including learning about local involvement in the English Civil War in the 1640's – in case you weren't aware, Buckinghamshire was definitely in the cross-fire as Mr Cromwell and his Roundheads were mainly London-based and King Charles the First (still with his head on!) and his Royalist followers were head-quartered in Oxford for a period during the conflict.

In recent months, we've also become aware that our village was home to a range of creative talent, including artists, Helen Sampson & Stanley Anderson and the musical composer, Robert Sampson. If you are aware of any other creative talents who resided in our village, please tell us more to help celebrate the artistic heritage of our village.

Over the centuries, our village has also been home to much farming activity and supporting trades. But other traditional craftsfolk, including lacemakers, cordwainers and needlemakers, also plied their trade in years gone by – not forgetting the brewers of beer!

Much of this activity was given significant coverage in Ted Hooton's 'Chearsley – Living through History' but if any of you have any further records or other information about our village history to share with us, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

And I would also like to thank the many who have already provided us with some fascinating information, old photographs and other materials. On which subject, I can tell you that we are also working hard to build up a comprehensive archive of our village history, both in terms of original documents and digital records. This is already 'work in progress' online and can be accessed via the Historical Society tab on the Village website.

In the longer term, we are also looking to put together a Chearsley Heritage Trail around our village, enabling our community and visitors to our village to celebrate its heritage 'on the ground'. We made a start recently with the location of three new footpath signs at key points in the village. Completion of the project may well require some significant financial investment in the years ahead and, now that we have a properly constituted organisation with clearly stated objectives and governance, we are in a far better position to secure external funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the like. Watch this space!

Finally, a big thank you to all who've signed up as Historical Society members for this year. But it'll come as no surprise that we're still looking for new members as well as encouraging all last year's members to renew their support. The cost is £10 for individual membership or £20 for a family membership and allows 'free entry' to meetings organised by the Historical Society, for which there is normally a £5 entry charge for all non-members attending.

For more details, please talk to me or any of my Historical Society colleagues here this evening or access our homepage via the Village website.

Thank-you