

Woodchester Village Report 2017

Woodchester Village Report 2016/17

The Parish Council – *Cllr. Dr. Gervase Hamilton, Chair*

1. INTRODUCTION

If there is a common theme running through so many developments in our village over the past year, it might well be: “On again, Off again, Gone again!” It has at times proved difficult to decide what exactly is going on, if it isn’t going on when it will start and, if it has started, when will it finish?

Fortunately there have been no major new initiatives at central government level that impact directly on local government with the important exception of cuts in financial allocation to local services. Fortunately this has had little effect in Woodchester where the Parish Council has succeeded in holding down the precept (that part of the council tax devoted specifically to Parish Council requirements) at the same level as in 2015/16.

Although there has been some early discussion of whether there should be a combined authority for Gloucestershire by amalgamating Cheltenham, Gloucester and the local district councils into one unity authority, this has, fortunately, fallen by the wayside largely due to Brexit and the uncertain political fallout this might cause.

2. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

Clarification of the way in which the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL- largely replacing the old Section 106 of the Local Government Act) would work in future in the form of a draft charging schedule was agreed by Stroud District Council and implemented earlier this year. SDC has recently issued guidance on how planning policies in the Local Plan relating to affordable housing and local infrastructure provision will be delivered through the use of planning obligations. CIL is designed to ensure that developers meet community needs in the way of education, transport and environmental improvements resulting from new build housing though there have proved to be loopholes allowing developers to claim that the profits made from their scheme would be insufficient to allow them to fund affordable housing on site.

On the positive side, Parish Councils stand to gain from such contributions by 15-25%. In the case of Woodchester, the Parish Council decided that funds made available from s.106 in 2016/17 should be applied to the erection of new metal kissing gates to replace old and dilapidated stiles. Two sites were chosen, one in Convent Lane and the other in Villa Field. Delays have occurred with the latter as explained by Cllr. Warnes in her Footpaths and Rights of Way report (q.v.).

3. THE ENVIRONMENT

The preservation and enhancement of the environment in Woodchester has always been at the forefront of resident’s and the Parish council’s minds, as reflected in the 2013 revised Village Plan and Village Design Statement. In this connection considerable emphasis has been given to making land in the village available for leisure and sports purposes.

3.1 The Bike Trails

After a long gestation period, starting in 2013, with a proposal by the then Parish Councillor Iain Dunbar, that a cycle trail for youngsters be established preferably alongside the existing cycle track and walkway between Stroud and Nailsworth, the trail opened this April and has

proved to be a popular facility with both young bikers and their parents. There were times over the past four years when it seemed nothing much was happening. Delays occurred in reaching legal agreements with Gloucestershire Council over leasing the site together with the need to lease additional land from an adjacent landowner. There were problems with access to the site, Health and Safety concerns, rising contract prices resulting in a change of contractor plus a variety of local nit-picks. Due to the determination and drive of a small number of parish councillors (in particular Cllrs. Baldauf, McNealey and Bayham-Honri) and the funding guaranteed from a variety of sources, the project finally got off the ground with our new contractors Trail Craft completing the trail on time and within budget. Our local Gloucestershire County Councillor, Dorcas Binns proved very helpful in obtaining a grant of £16,000 from GCC's 'Active-Together' scheme plus £3,000 from the Council's 'Children and Young Person's Grants'. These sums plus welcome contributions from Renishaw, the Summerfield, Jack lane and Langtree Trusts, the Gloucestershire Playing Fields Association as well as the Parish Council's own contribution has all but met the £29,000 cost of the scheme, the remainder being made up from the Council's own reserves, much of which will be repaid when the VAT on the scheme is reimbursed.

The Parish Council is also actively pursuing a contribution from a grant of £30,000 available from Stroud District Council to develop a walking and cycling strategy which it is hoped could lead to improvements and enhancements of the existing cycle path.

3.2 Land at Frogmarsh

Notwithstanding the success of the Bike Trails, Woodchester residents have, for some time, been pursuing the idea of purchasing a piece of land in the village for leisure activities, a community garden and a children's playground as well as providing space for much needed parking for the residents of South Woodchester. Two local residents (one living abroad) made an offer to the Parish Council to sell the field they own lying at Frogmarsh running from behind the High Street to Frogmarsh Mill, subject to an agreement on price based on a survey and the commercial value of the site. Unfortunately the land is very steep and difficult to access though some of it might be used where it abuts the road for parking. It is probably going to prove too expensive and difficult to develop and landscape for leisure purpose, though discussions as to its future are still ongoing.

3.3 Redundant Telephone Boxes

With the rise of mobile phone technology, BT is in the process of ridding itself of a large number of its familiar, but now redundant, red George Gilbert Scott designed public telephone boxes including those in North and South Woodchester. BT offered to make available to the Parish Council for community use both the boxes for a peppercorn sale price. Considerable discussion has taken place as to the potential future use of these boxes. Suggestions have included a book exchange (similar to that already in operation in Box village), a defibrillator for emergency cardiac arrest in North Woodchester and a website/hub in South Woodchester, combined in both cases with an information point containing information about Woodchester, its environs and history and access to local places of interest. A sub group of local residents and councillors has been set up to take these suggestions forward.

3.4 Rural Sustainable Drainage Project

In Woodchester we have been fortunate to be spared the major flooding which has occurred in the Stroud Valleys in the recent past. Flooding when it does occur in our area is liable to

affect individual properties, roadside ditches and streams and agricultural land. Chris Uttley, SDC's Rural Sustainable Drainage Project officer addressed the Parish Council recently about plans to minimise flood risk and environmental damage in two areas in the Parish on National Trust land at Boundary Court and Woodchester Park. The scheme aims to direct and control run off of floodwater using local labour to construct small scale local interventions such as coppicing trees to create 'leaky dams' to slow water flow, the digging of additional ditches and sand banks to absorb rain water more slowly and release it safely . Work in both Boundary Court and Woodchester Park has recently been completed and its effectiveness will be monitored over the next year or so.

3.5 Neighbourhood Warden Scheme

Dom Everiss, our local Neighbourhood Warden and his colleagues have continued to provide advice and guidance to local residents on a variety of issues. More specifically he has chased up concerns arising from the perennial problem of dog fouling working with the SDC Dog Warden service and arranged for extra signage in areas of concern.

In addition he follows up concerns such as fly tipping, litter dumping, fly posting, overgrown hedges and confusing, improper or poorly sited parking notices and street signs.

4 TRANSPORT & ROAD SAFETY

The ever increasing traffic on our roads, particularly the A 46 and B 4008, combined with a backlog of repairs and a rapid rise in reported surface cracks and pot holes made worse by adverse weather conditions has been a source of constant frustration to Woodchester residents. GCC Highways and their contractors Amey working in conjunction with advice from the Parish Council have recently concentrated on the areas worst affected, identified those areas where future repairs can be made pending long term wholesale resurfacing of stretches of the A & B roads locally-but not, unfortunately our minor roads which are regarded as a low priority and continue to deteriorate. Highways have now appointed 'lengthsmen' to be responsible for specific patches identifying those areas which require early intervention but are dependent on parishioners reporting where there are specific problems.

The volume of traffic and the potential for injury to pedestrians and other road users remains of concern. Our clerk has attended a preliminary meeting of the local Road Safety Community Hub which, in conjunction with GCC Highways, aims to identify potential accident black spots and to slow traffic by the erection of vehicle activated speed signs, improvements to pedestrian crossings, speed humps and reduction in speed limits. There is continuing pressure to reduce the speed limit from 40-30 mph on the A 46 supported by many local residents concerned about the risks to school children and the elderly. Despite years of campaigning this is unlikely to be agreed as GCC Highways are subject to strict criteria on traffic volume and accident risk laid down by the Department of Transport. The A 46 doesn't meet these criteria (yet!).

Alas, a certain degree of complacency has crept into the '20 is plenty' scheme introduced into Woodchester a couple of years ago with the 'disappearance' of a number of the advisory signs put up by the PC and increased levels of rat-running generally.

5. PLANNING ISSUES

In common with most other Parish Councils, much of our routine work is taken up with examining, vetting and commenting to the SDC Planners on planning proposals for and on behalf of our residents. The majority of these planning applications consist of alterations to, or

extensions of, existing buildings and are rarely contentious. Every so often however we are faced with a moderate to large scale development where the number, nature and scale of the buildings proposed are likely to have a major impact on the appearance and the environment of our village including additional traffic flow, noise and knock on effects on our schools and local services. Further they are often not in confirmation with the Village Plan and Village Design statement previously agreed jointly with Stroud District Council.

5.1 Stroud District Council's Local Plan

The adoption last year of SDC's Local Plan sets out the number, nature and specific requirements attendant upon major planning applications. This takes into account expected population growth, the total number of residential units required, the provision of schools and colleges and likely business growth and transport requirements over the next 10 -15 years all of which must all be factored into any major decision affecting the residents of the District.

5.2 Rooksmoor Mills

In the case of Woodchester two major schemes have been submitted for development within our parish boundaries, Rooksmoor Mills and the adjacent Old Piano Factory site. The latter has gone very quiet and it is uncertain whether the proposal will go ahead as planned. Rooksmoor Mills is a different matter altogether. Plans for this old Mill site have been submitted twice since its original iteration in 2006/7. A new proposal has now been put forward following rejection of the original at Judicial Appeal late last year. As outlined in Cllr. Lead's planning report (q.v), local residents both then and now expressed their concerns about the size and scale of this development and its impact on historic local buildings and the appearance of the village and its immediate environs. In coming to our decision to oppose the developer's plans both the Parish Council and concerned local residents had particular regard to the provisions of the Stroud Local Plan. We do not feel the revised developments are in conformity with many of the provisions of either the NPPF or the SDC plan. It isn't necessary to go into all the details here but our main concerns may be summarised (with reference to the relevant paragraphs in the NPPF and SDC's Local Plan in brackets), as:

*The National Planning Framework looks at planning gain against planning loss. The Parish Council believes the proposed development offers more loss than gain and more harm than benefit to the environment. (NPPF Para 14)

* Levels of development should be in conformity with the requirements of local Neighbourhood (or in our case, Parish) Plans and provide the opportunities for growth and affordable housing - largely excluded from this proposal by the developer. (CP 3)

* Not adversely affect the quality of the environment (CP 5)

* The scale, density and layout of the design should be compatible with the appearance and amenity of the locality. In particular on the edge of development sites the proposed development should not appear as an intrusion on the countryside and retain a sense of transition between open country and the settlement core. Natural and built features of the site worthy of retention are incorporated into the scheme which should have layout access and parking appropriate to the site and its surroundings. (HC1)

*Permission for development will not be granted which could lead to an unacceptable level of noise, general disturbance, smell, fumes, loss of daylight, or sunlight, loss of privacy or an overbearing effect or be detrimental to highway safety. (ES3)

We have made our views clear that while we are not opposed to development on this site, we do oppose the present planning application on the grounds that it doesn't conform to SDC's

own Local Plan or the considered views of local residents. We await the decision of SDC's Planning Committee with interest.

5.3 The Convent

When Matthew and Charlotte Roberts bought the Old Convent of the Poor Clares four years ago intending to convert it into a luxury hotel and music venue, it seemed to be a development many residents were happy to see, notwithstanding the reported somewhat dubious financial background of the owners. After a promising start cracks started to appear in the whole scheme. Difficulties were reported with the licensing conditions, problems arose over access to the Convent via the narrow Convent Lane and parking space was inadequate during music events leading to local residents having their house entrances blocked, as well as complaints over noise inconvenience and general traffic nuisance late at night and weekends.

Following pressure from the Parish Council and local residents, a condition of any further hotel development was imposed by SDCs planning department that an access road be built from the A46 and that adequate car parking spaces be provided. The planning regulations were ignored by the Roberts with a variety of excuses and SDC dragged their feet over enforcement for reasons that are not absolutely clear.

Stories soon circulated in the local press that contractors and hotel staff working in the Convent were not being paid, contracts were not provided or ignored and musicians appearing at the Convent weren't receiving their fees. It came therefore as no surprise when proceedings in bankruptcy against the Roberts were taken out resulting in the collapse of multiple companies. The Convent is now up for sale with the estate Agents Savilles for £4 million. We fear that the site is likely to remain a white elephant for years to come as it could only survive as a hotel or educational establishment and would need considerable sum to bring it back to its original glory. "Gone again" indeed and a sad end to much loved local landmark of the RC Community in Woodchester.

5.4. Southbank

"On again, Off again" might equally apply to Stroud District Council's own planners and developers with regard to a proposed council housing development on land on the Southbank site off the Village Green. Existing viable housing was demolished over three years ago on safety grounds but the proposed four new houses on the site have not yet been finished. There have been site problems but the endless delays in getting the job done seems to be a classic example of Stroud District Council needing to get its own house in order. The sooner the development is "On again" the better!

6. CHANGES AT THE PARISH COUNCIL

We are lucky in Woodchester Parish Council that we have had several long serving councillors with a wide range of skills and experience to offer the Council.

One of our longest serving members was Malcolm Swait, a councillor for nine years and a resident of Woodchester for 37. He retired last year co-inciding with a move to Selsley. A worthy replacement has been found for him and co-opted onto the council in Charles Grundy a consultant and adviser to the Environment and water industries who has lived in South Woodchester for the past two years. We welcome him and his family and look forward to working with him as a colleague on the Council for the foreseeable future.

Planning - *Cllr. Peter Lead, Vice-Chair*

This year has been relatively quiet except for the ongoing application for a mixed development at Rooksmoor Mill and the affairs of The Convent.

In line with our and many residents objections, the previously approved scheme to develop Rooksmoor Mill was quashed by Judicial Review as SDC had not paid sufficient regard to surrounding listed sites and buildings in its decision making process. A very similar scheme has now been submitted that again meets with strong objections from the Parish Council and most residents on grounds of scale and design. This application is due to be heard in June.

The many companies that are involved in The Convent are now apparently in financial collapse and the property is on the market for sale. We understand that enforcement proceedings were instigated regarding the installation of a drive leading to the A46, but now control seems to be under an Administrator for a Receiver. We presume that little or no action will occur until a new owner is found.

Footpaths – *Cllr. Barbara Warnes*

In Woodchester, we are lucky with our footpaths, they are, in general, kept in good order. We don't suffer from them being 'ploughed up' as in some neighbouring parishes and landowners are usually prompt in responding to concerns. I have walked them all from late March to mid-April of this year and have found very few problems that can be reasonably addressed.

For the last couple of years I have reported on the status of the cycle track ie when it opened on the disused railway line, it was never officially designated. There was a proposal to rectify this matter and various designations were under consideration. This, we were told, would lead to a proper maintenance plan. We still know nothing more but the proposal that Stroud District Council take over control may actually resolve this issue and improve conditions. The vegetation at the sides is 'under control' partly due to residents who have cleared stretches outside their houses. We usually have a very good response to fallen trees etc. but it is important to remember that Amey will not deal with something they do not know about. Blockages should be reported to the parish clerk who will pass them on.

We are always grateful to the landowners for cutting back vegetation, especially nettles, on footpaths to allow us to walk through and to the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who quietly improve conditions for us. Please be aware that rights of way only have a right for their particular designation and the right only exists on the path ie bicycles and horses are not allowed on footpaths and there is no right of access to other parts of fields and woodland just because they look attractive!

Using Section 106 payments, we had a plan to replace several stiles with kissing gates. One has been completed by the Cotswold Wardens on Convent Lane and makes access to the path much easier. A second one was due to be installed on Selsley Road next to Park View. Everything was organised for this one but was held up when underground electrical cables were identified. As a result, the Cotswold Wardens cannot do the work and we are looking at other options.

A lot of people have noticed, and commented on, the very muddy state of the path through the wood behind the Old Priory. This is wet all year round and difficult to negotiate. Although it is not in our parish, we persuaded Gloucestershire PROW team to install a handrail and now the Cotswold Wardens have dealt with a spring which will hopefully make things better.

Over the last year, we have gained a new path (status uncertain) leading down steps from the cycle track, through Rooksmoor Mill to the A46. This is a much safer option than the unofficial and unsupported route over the weir so please use it.

I often receive complaints about how difficult it is to get dogs through or over certain stiles so I am including this link to information from the Ramblers Association which covers walking with a dog as well as encountering dangerous animals. <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/rights-of-way-law-in-england-and-wales/animals-and-rights-of-way.aspx>

Remember we have walks from Woodchester and a tree walk on the website, so please take a look and walk our footpaths.

Woodchester Endowed School – *Glyn Aelfryn Jones, Headteacher*

It has been a year of hard work, fun and great achievement at Woodchester Endowed Primary School. All of our endeavours have focused around ensuring that the children at our school receive the best possible education that we can provide, from excelling academically to drenching the Headteacher during the PGL residential! We hope to have provided the children with memories to last a lifetime.

As a school, we have held several exciting events over the course of the year. We transformed the school into an art instillation, during a week, whereby the children learnt to develop their artistic talents. One parent commented that they thought less of the original artists because the children created such great reproductions in only a week! During another Focus Week the children found out about the important role that religion plays both locally and around the world.

Our Christian distinctiveness is very important to us as a school. As a Church of England School, our effectiveness is evaluated by SIAMS (the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). During the very thorough inspection, we were able to share how our Christian nature strengthens the education that we provide. It was nothing less than the staff and children deserved, when we were graded Outstanding in every area. Among the many strengths, the report commented, *“Within this culture of challenge and achievement, all children also know that they are valued simply for being themselves and, as a result, they give and receive love with confidence and self-belief.”*

The SIAMS inspection coincided with Woodchester Endowed Primary School appearing within the local papers. You may have seen reports that our school was ranked the number one performing school in Gloucestershire. This came as a result of the Trinity Mirror Group using the data that is published with regards to exam scores and attendance over the previous two years, to compare the performance of schools. It was apt that a report highlighting our academic excellence was released at the same time that we were inspected by SIAMS. This is because high standards are accompanied by Christian love in our relationships and an overriding sense of fun.

We were delighted to be invited to Forest Green Rovers for one of our many school trips, whereby our children were introduced to two key aspects of the Forest Green ethos. They made healthy, vegetarian food and discussed the impact of exercise. They were also introduced to the

sustainable nature of FGR and why that is important to the club. The club promoted a sense of community, which we at Woodchester can relate to very strongly.

Most recently, Woodchester Endowed Primary School were inspected by Ofsted. We welcomed Steve Smith, one of Her Majesties Inspectors and proudly demonstrated what we do here. We were delighted to be one of the very few schools to be graded Outstanding in every area. This was a highlight of a fantastic year. One pupil, who was quoted on the report, summed up our approach to education by saying "school gives you a good education in a fun way."

The Parish Church of St. Mary - *Andrew Pemberton, on behalf of St. Mary's Parochial Church Council*

We have continued our efforts to make the church building, Churchyard and Green welcoming and attractive to the community it serves. The building has been open to visitors every day of the year and the welcome enhanced by the flower arrangements which always decorate the porch and interior. At Christmas, the floodlights made the building more prominent.

Community events have been held in the church; an afternoon tea for the Queen and St George on April 23rd, the Capriol Chamber Orchestra Summer Concert and an exhibition of village history for the weekend of the Village Produce Show. The church was the focus of the Village Carols organized by the Parish Council. The Undercroft has been used as a meeting room by village groups such as the Parish Council and The Historical Society.

The bell-ringers celebrated the Queen's 90th birthday with a Quarter Peal, and half-muffled Quarter Peals were rung to mark the centenaries of the deaths of World War 1 soldiers commemorated on the Woodchester War Memorial.

Planning has continued throughout the year on the design and fund-raising for changes to the back of the church which will include new kitchen and toilet facilities and will make the building much better equipped for community use. This will be especially true for Lunch-with-Friends, the monthly lunch club held by the Church for people to enjoy the company of others. This event is now well-established and for some is their only social outing in the month. Many of the guests are not church attenders. The monthly Saturday morning Coffee and Chat has also provided an opportunity for people to get together.

Messy Church has continued to draw many families from Woodchester School and others to share in this monthly after-school session of crafts, cooking, stories and songs with a Bible-based theme. In addition, a Light Party was held as an alternative to Hallowe'en. Messy Church families have attended special services such as Mothering Sunday and the Christingle and Crib Services.

Groups have been held for youngsters of all ages on Sunday mornings, from crèche through to Junior Church for primary-age children and teenagers. The Laser Youth group for years 6-8 has continued to meet on a Sunday evening. Several young people have been learning to ring the church bells. Youngsters have taken part in Christian activities outside the Church such as X: Site Glos and summer camps.

Links with Woodchester Endowed Primary School have remained strong. The 'Open the Book' team have presented a Bible story every Monday morning and clergy and lay leaders have taken assemblies.

There have been opportunities for learning together through study groups, courses and on a weekend away in September. Fellowship was enjoyed on a Men's walking weekend in the Brecon Beacons and a Women's walking weekend in Dorset.

In September Revd. Peter Francis was licensed as Priest-in-Charge of Rodborough, the first major step in the process of Rodborough, Woodchester and Brimscombe becoming a United Benefice. Mr Philip Duffy was welcomed as our new organist last Easter; he trained and conducted a choir for the Christmas Carol Service.

Charities supported this year, in addition to our regular Christian mission giving, were: Stroud foodbank, Help for Heroes, Christian Aid, the Poppy Appeal and the Christmas Teams 4 U shoebox appeal.

All told, a very active year for St Mary's!

The Priory Church of the Annunciation – *Jenny Bailey*

A special Centenary Service will be held at 4pm on Saturday 10th June, 2017 to commemorate the consecration of the Wayside Cross by the Right Rev. Dr. Burton RC Bishop of Clifton in June 1917. The service will be attended by our Bishop, the Right Rev. Declan Lang and will be an ecumenical one, led by Fr. Bill Watson and Rev. Peter Francis, vicar of St. Mary's Church.

Representatives of the Armed Services will be present, together with others from the British Legion, Scouts and Guides, Cadet Forces and descendants of some of those named on the Memorial. It is hoped that children from St. Dominic's and Woodchester Endowed School will be involved in a flower laying ceremony as part of the service.

Invitations to attend will be sent to other local Churches and Schools. It is hoped that as many of our own Parishioners as possible will attend, so that the Service will be a fitting tribute to the memory of all those who gave their lives in the service of their country.

Woodchester W.I – *Sally Bull, Secretary*

We have enjoyed a varied and interesting programme this year which had something of interest for everyone. We have lost ourselves in the world of Fiona Eadie's storytelling, encountered, for the first time for most of us, the musical challenges of the autoharp, enjoyed animal encounters with elephants and donkeys in need of sanctuary, travelled round the world with Peter Berry's images and commentary and responded with competitive spirit to two quizzes. And, of course, we have enjoyed food together with a successful very late celebration of Christmas at the Clothiers in April where some sported tiaras to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday. In August we enjoyed an excellent fish and chip supper, kindly delivered by Nick, and in October we sampled a lovely range of puddings provided by members on Members' Night. We have also considered some of the social issues so important to the WI in our consideration of the Resolutions before voting in May.

Village events have, as usual, provided an opportunity to be an active part of the community and to fundraise as we provided teas at Atcombe Court and a lucky dip stall in the September Produce Show. We intend to finish the year by replacing the traditional Christmas Concert with an

afternoon tea in the village hall, an event for older village people and an opportunity to raise money for ourselves and a local charity.

Members have taken up some of the many opportunities provided by their membership, enjoying walks, attending the county meetings, visiting local temples and mosques and sampling an afternoon's croquet followed by tea at Cheltenham.

A number of members also enjoyed the Group Meeting at Nailsworth where a belly-dancer spoke and performed before we all enjoyed an excellent tea. It is our turn next year to be hostesses when we intend to organise two meetings; I'm sure we can provide equally successful events.

New to the WI and to the position of Secretary, I have been very grateful for the advice and help I have received from much more experienced members and officers, especially Val and Kath. The committee is a small and friendly group of people but we are always looking for new ideas and ways of attracting new members so do consider joining in!

Village Events Committee – *Rachel Hemming, Secretary*

The first event of the year was a Cream Tea held to mark the Queen's 90th birthday. The day was fine enabling the event to be held in the school playground, which was decorated with bunting. A good number of villagers and friends attended and enjoyed the occasion. Music was provided by the Mozaic Wind Octet. There was a fancy dress competition for the children with commemorative mugs as prizes.

The usual Produce and Craft Show was held in September, with a Dog Show on the Green. An extra attraction was the fairground organ on loan from Philip Ford.

A record number of people joined in the Carols just before Christmas, walking from Frogmarsh to the church green. The Nailsworth Silver Band provided accompaniment. The evening was fine, allowing the Nativity scene, singing and refreshments to take place on the Green.

Future plans include Open Garden. Suggestions for other events would be welcome.

Woodchester Historical Society – *Katherine McNealey, Secretary*

Woodchester Historical Society meets approximately four times a year, mainly in the Undercroft of St Mary's Church. We are a small group of people and would be happy to welcome new members. It is not necessary to know anything about the history of Woodchester to join us.

In the last year, we have had a tour of Woodchester Mansion, an hilarious talk on the 'Fighting 40s' by Gillian Morss and Virginia Adsett and 'Old Paths of Gloucestershire' by Alan Pilbeam. At our AGM in November we celebrated our 20th birthday with a talk by Ray Wilson on 'Stroud's Other Industries'.

Alongside the Produce Show in September we held an exhibition of old photographs in St Mary's Church. This was mainly from Bill Brunt's collection but contained several others donated as a

result of an appeal. If anyone has other old pictures of the village that they are happy for us to copy and preserve, please get in touch.

This year started with a talk by Barry Harrison on the apothecary and surgeon Thomas Hughes and will continue with a visit to the timber yard for a talk on vintage traction engines, a guided tour of Gloucester Docks, and talks on 'Life in a Roman villa' and 'A Woodchester house and its people'.

We have prepared leaflets of self-guided walks around both North and South Woodchester with an historical theme (both general and WW1) which can be purchased for a nominal sum.

We continue to write articles for Woodchester Word with the current emphasis on remembering our Great War fallen as well as other topics of historical interest including our new series on old tracks and paths.

The parish registers and censuses on the village website have been recently updated to cover a wider date range and area. Other records will follow when time allows.

For further information contact Barbara Warnes:- barbara.warnes1@gmail.com or 01453 872181

Woodchester Village Shop – *Christian Dannemann*

The Volunteer Village Shop is now in its third year of running, with 50 volunteers taking regular shifts and working on the administration side of things. With close to 6000 hours contributed so far, the shop is a labour intensive project, but enjoyed by all contributing.

As usual, special thanks to Pauline, who is not only our very capable postmistress, but also helps the volunteers along. Without her, we wouldn't have been able to keep the shop and post office open.

The shop turned over close to £100,000 in the last financial year which just ended, making a healthy profit. We were able to donate to St. Mary's to fix the heating, to both our primary schools, and to Stroud Foodbank. On top of that, we had a nice Christmas do at The Old Fleece as a small thank you to all our volunteers. Last but not least, we paid a 2% dividend to our shareholders, which is more than you can get on most savings accounts in the UK, so we are quite proud of that as well. Talking of shares - we still have 140 shares at £50 each for sale, if anyone wants a decent return on their savings! On top of that, you will get a say about what to do with this year's profits at the AGM.

Everyone contributing can be very proud of what has been achieved, and it also looks as we have found a way to make this a sustainable feature of our village, able to not only contribute to the social fabric, but also capable of supporting village projects financially.

A huge thank you to all our volunteers and customers!

Girlguiding – Jackie Hayes

Although we have had a fall in numbers of Brownies, both Brownies and Guides have enjoyed regular meetings with games, singing, craft, cooking and other activities.

The Brownies spent much of the summer term working on their out and about badge, learning about the Green Cross Code, the Countryside Code and Water safety whilst enjoying the outdoors. The Guides meanwhile took part in various activities including a sports/agility evening, a fruit & vegetable themed evening and a couple of campfires with outdoor cooking (once they had found the ingredients that had been well-hidden by the Brownies!). The term ended with a joint meeting of Brownies and Guides at a Hawaiian themed party evening, organised by the Guides.

In September the Brownies welcomed another Guide, who has become a Young Leader, to the Leadership team, who they decided to call Robin. The Brownies worked towards their cooks badge and their craft badge whilst the Guides participated in a craft evening and organised and hosted a disco for Nailsworth Guides. As part of their music zone badge the Guides also learnt some new campfire songs which led to an indoor campfire themed evening, singing songs by candlelight. A colour party from Brownies and from Guides took part in the Nailsworth Remembrance Sunday parade and Church service. The term ended with a Christmas party.

In January we were delighted to welcome a new helper at Brownies, who the girls decided should be called Swan. The girls worked towards their Communicator badge, learning sign language, the phonetic alphabet and some Spanish phrases. The Guides meanwhile had lots fun and enjoyed new experiences working towards their Cooks badge. The term ended with Easter activities for both groups.

Anyone interested in joining Girlguiding, either as a Brownie, Guide or Leader, please visit www.girlguiding.org.uk, or www.ggwoodchester.wordpress.com or contact Jackie on 01453 821258.

Stroud Beekeepers – Buzz Club – Peter Lead

Stroud Beekeepers have a membership of some 60/70. Last year we attended several shows and visited many schools and organisations promoting the importance of bees in our environment and food chain. A portable observation hive and a variety of power-point presentations allow us to talk to all ages.

Each year we run a Taster Day and Beginners Course that is attended by an average of 25 people, most of whom will take up keeping bees. We also have monthly winter meetings.

BuzzClub this year is re-locating to Stroud Museum where we will have a hive in their new walled garden and use of the fantastic pavilion. We will meet on alternate Saturday mornings, 10-12 for any children and parents to attend and alternate Friday afternoons for Home-schooled children.

Our Charity BuzzClub Ghana is in its second year and whilst the first year has been challenging, we have gone from 2 schools to 6 and varied how we operate so that now there is a wider overall benefit. A short film showing my visit in February and how the BuzzClub will now work will be shown at the meeting.

Woodchester Football Club – James Collins, Secretary and Treasurer

The last year has been a very positive one at the football club. We finished the 2015/16 season with a tremendous 2-1 win in the "Bill Bick" cup final against Stonehouse Town 4ths, our first silverware for many years. The 2016/17 season has been merely steady by comparison, but with four wins and a strong finish we successfully avoided the "wooden spoon".

As a small community club we remain ever grateful to our sponsors, especially Phil at The Ram and Renishaw. We continue to look for opportunities to gain funding to develop our modest facilities, especially as a significant proportion of club funds had to be utilised this year to make repairs following some mindless vandalism.

We would warmly welcome any new players from the area, whether young (minimum 16) or more "experienced" (our oldest is currently 48).

SWALT – South Woodchester Amenity Land Trust – Bert Cossins

Yet another year – it was mid 2009 that SWALT was founded and August that the land was acquired – time flies and our early successes have been maintained – two sets of allotments, an ever maturing orchard of donated trees, our 'fruit cage', Buss Club's Bees and potential for a new generation of chickens. We've still not decided what to do with the ever thickening bramble jungle on the north side of the plot; partial use as a 'play area', endorsed by SWALT members, is it seems 'on-hold'.

There was hearting singing during our January wassailing; was it however, sufficiently hearty to nullify the hard frost toward the end of April; fingers crossed for this autumn's fruit crop! There were casualties with plots suffering damage to courgettes, runner beans and potatoes being the principal casualties.

At present, like all gardeners, we're experiencing a particularly dry period; we're pleased that our water is spring sourced and, fingers crossed plentiful thanks to a SWALT member for access to this splendid resource. Similarly, we're especially thankful to Anita and Peter Brown for their sustained deliveries of 'muck'.

There are lots available; contact details via our website; again readers are cordially welcome to visit our stall at the Village Produce Show this coming September, attend our annual apple juicing in the autumn and heartily contribute to the wassailing in January '18 – watch the Woodchester Word and posters for details.

Woodchester Mansion Trust – *Rhiannon Wigzell, Chair*

During 2017 the Mansion is open to visitors from 11.00a.m. to 5.00p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays. The Mansion could not open without its team of dedicated, committed, knowledgeable and versatile volunteers. There are guided or unaccompanied tours. Children under fourteen may enter free with paying adults.

The catering has been outsourced to Berry Blue, a local catering company who run weddings and other events and own a café in Cam. The walkers in Woodchester Park may also stop for refreshments without paying an entrance fee to the Mansion.

The Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats are returning and Roger Ransome, who has studied the bats continuously since 1959, started his weekly counts of the bats this year on 23 April. Five bat walks are planned, when visitors learn about the bats and watch them leaving the building to forage at dusk.

The Festival Players will again perform outside the Mansion, this year *The Merry Wives of Windsor* on 24th August. The Mansion will participate in Heritage open day on 8th September.

Holes in the roof of the South Range have been repaired. Taking advantage of the scaffolding needed to access the roof, the gutters were also cleared as a necessary piece of maintenance. Improvements to the electricity supply were made over the winter so there are now fewer problems with running electrical appliances.

The stonemasonry students from Bath College and the Princes' Foundation paid their usual working visits in October and February respectively. The first group worked on a buttress and the latter started replacing damaged treads on an internal spiral staircase.

The next projects, funded by grants, are to erect the Masons' Lodge and reduce the scaffolding in the chapel. The former will provide somewhere dry to work and the latter will enable visitors to see the chapel in its full glory. A more mundane future project is to block holes with wire mesh to keep birds, and all the mess they create, out of the main rooms, without impeding air flow.

The weeks of filming *The Crown* in November and December were interesting. The gatekeeper was particularly appreciated! Another highlight was some of the cast of *Poldark* turning up at the Mansion by mistake. More recently *Countryfile* paid another visit, this time focusing on the Mansion's rare bats. The episode of *Escape to the Country* filmed last year, was shown in December and had some good pictures and commentary about the Mansion. Radio Gloucester visited at the start of the new season to cover Evelyn Waugh's connection with the Mansion, as part of the Historic Houses Association's Literary Trail.

At a recent general meeting of the Mansion Trust, there was agreement to modernize the Trust's constitution. A significant change is to amalgamate Friends and Members. The new arrangement will be more democratic and easier to administer. Anyone who would like to help the Mansion, visit as often as they wish for no extra charge, and participate in its governance by attending meetings and being able to vote, may apply to become a Member in return for a modest fee.

There will be a discount for regular volunteering. The local community of Woodchester is especially encouraged to support its Mansion by becoming Members.

If anyone would like to know more about the Mansion, find out about volunteering or Membership please contact Woodchester Mansion: telephone 01453 861541; email info@woodchestermansion.org.uk or speak to Rhiannon Wigzell.

www.woodchestermansion.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook

Woodchester Village Hall – *Alan Boulton, Chairman*

In October last year I took over as chairman of our village hall. In the past year the hall has been very successful in bookings and remains a popular venue for villagers and other groups.

The problem with the damp rear wall has been rectified with new special plasterwork. The electric power points in the hall were modernised at the same time which has received favourable comments from various groups. The main hall has been redecorated along with plastic skirting in the toilets being replaced with tiles for easier cleaning.

In the kitchen a new automatic water boiler has been fitted making life easier and less steam floating about.

I would like to thank all members of the committee and various villagers for their efforts and contributions in keeping our village hall a popular venue for all concerned.

Seys & Bridges Educational Foundation – *Diana Fowler, Trustee and Clerk*

Meetings

The trustees met twice last year. As is usual following the end of the financial year, the annual accounts were presented to the May meeting and subsequently reviewed by an outside examiner.

Grants awarded

The annual grant of £100 was made to the Governors of Woodchester Endowed School

Six grants were awarded to individuals to assist with music and drama lessons and after school activities. A grant was also given to St Dominic's School for discretionary use by the Headteacher.

Applications from eligible individuals are welcomed at any time and should be sent to the Clerk.

I submit this report on behalf of Mrs. Liz Ewart-James and myself, the two trustees appointed by the Parish Council.

St Loe's Exhibition Fund – *George Bastin, Chair*

St Loe's Trust was founded by Nathaniel Cambridge in 1697 to provide financial assistance to pupils attending the maintained primary schools in Woodchester and Amberley who seek further education. The trust now provides beneficiaries grants to assist funding students at universities, training colleges and those entering a trade or profession.

Although the Trust makes contributions to both Woodchester Endowed and Amberley schools' libraries and also gives each leaver a book of their choice the Trust only supports two students at University. The Trustees are therefore meeting to review their criteria for giving in view of the national move towards apprenticeships.

The Trust meets twice a year to provide grants to students who can demonstrate a financial need for assistance in pursuing their personal goals in further education. Sometimes the requirement to demonstrate this need discourages some applicants. The funds have grown slightly this year because of the lack of take-up. One of the grants has been made so that a student is able to pursue a dance training course which has resulted in him being selected for a national theatre group. If there are any parishioners who wish to apply for grants they are urged to apply as early as possible after the award of a place at university and by 1st September at the latest to the Chairman or Secretary at the address below. Any application is dealt with in the strictest confidence.

Charity No. 311753

c/o Goring House
North Woodchester
Stroud
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GL5 5NG
Telephone 01453 872526

Woodchester Quarterly Report

Warden: Dominic Everiss

(07753725185)

Month: March, 2017

Incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour:

Fly Tipping:

Fly tipping reported to me and found when I'm on patrol, has been removed from Bath Road and Southfield Road.

Abandoned Vehicles:

An abandoned vehicle was reported to me in Frogmarsh Lane. On checking the vehicle it was parked legally and it was taxed and insured and of no interest to the Police. This was a call with good intent and I updated the complainant.

Graffiti Removal: Nil.

Dog fouling:

I have carried out regular dog fouling patrols in Church Lane, Selsley Road, Paul's Rise and the car park at St. Dominic's. Unfortunately I have not caught any offenders but will carry on and pay passing attention, as will the SDC Dog Wardens.

Any Other Business:

Concerns were expressed about a 'guard dog' at Rooksmoor Mill. The site has been visited by SDC Dog Wardens and the RSPCA. The dog was in a healthy condition and being fed, so no further action is being taken.

I have patrolled the Parish on foot and by vehicle on numerous occasions and it has all been quiet.