

ANNUAL REPORT

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BLHS Publications

- Four newsletters 'Blagdon Life and Times'
- Five Volumes of *A History of Blagdon*
- Volume 1 revised and republished as Edition 2
- Double CD of *Blagdon and Mendip Voices*
- Double DVD *Blagdon on Film*
- Reprinting WW1 Parish Magazines as inserts in contemporary magazines
- Village Trail leaflet *Stroll around the village and step back in time ...*

2020 — SOME SILVER LININGS

The AGM provides an opportunity to reflect on and record the events of the last year – a year that has brought major changes to the operation of the Society as well as to many aspects of our daily life.

The Covid-19 pandemic soon brought restrictions and we were forced to cancel meetings in the Lodge. The income from lettings (which helps to fund our running costs) also ceased, leaving us in a potentially worrying financial situation. However, March brought news of a £10,000 government grant to organisations in receipt of council tax relief – and we qualified! Whilst we felt there are more worthy causes, running costs for Court Lodge are over £1,000 per annum, and without the grant we would have soon found ourselves struggling to pay bills. As mentioned in last year's report we aim to carry out some community archaeology projects once restrictions are lifted and the grant will also help to fund these activities.

Also in March we were sorry to hear the news that the Charterhouse Environs Research Team (CHERT) had agreed to disband. Over the last 20 years CHERT had generated hundreds of surveys of sites on Mendip – their survey of the old Roman town at Charterhouse showed it was at least twice as big as previously thought. CHERT raised awareness, both locally and regionally of the importance of Mendip and it directly inspired the then English Heritage to run a major survey of the Mendip AONB. CHERT's residual funds were transferred to BLHS and we welcomed some ex members to BLHS.

The membership stands at 34. Covid restrictions led the Society into organising online talks using Zoom, and these have proved popular, enabling us to reach a wider audience. The talks and newsletters have attracted new members and our membership is increasing. In view of the disruption to the normal operation of the Society the Committee unanimously agreed to give a year's free membership for 2021/22 to current members.

(Continued overleaf)



CHERT at the Time Team Big Roman Dig 2005

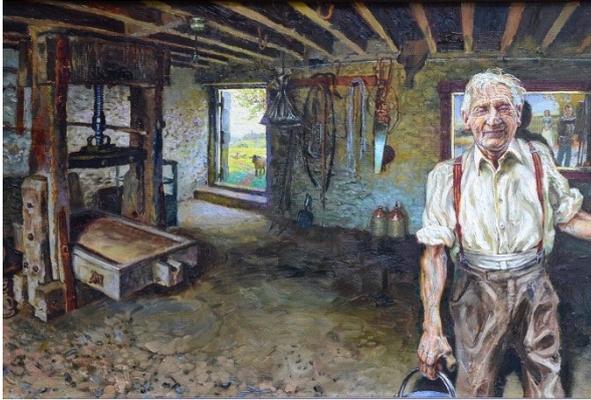


BLAGDON LIFE AND TIMES

We have published four newsletters, edited by Peter May, which have received some very positive feedback. These publications have given us the opportunity to publish short articles covering a broad spectrum of our research and will be a valuable record of our activities in the future. A number of non-members have signed up to view the newsletters. We are conscious that not all members use the internet and have distributed paper copies to those who are 'offline'.

2020 - SOME SILVER LININGS (CONTINUED)

The year came to an end with some surprising news. Roger and Melloney Kaye bought Fir Tree Farm, a late 17th century Grade II listed farmhouse in the High Street, from the Coombe Lodge and Langford Court Estate in 1994 and proceeded to carry out a sympathetic renovation, retaining many old features.



'Stewardship' by Martin Bentham RWA
Edwin Carpenter (1899 - 1993)

Our late founder and chairman Dr Neil Bentham ARIBA was the architect for the project. His son Martin produced a series of paintings of the farm and its occupant between 1989 – 1993 including the one shown depicting Edwin Carpenter, the last tenant, who spent his whole life on the farm. The Kayes purchased this painting and suggested that it should be entitled 'Stewardship' referencing 'one looks after' or is the 'steward' of a building in one's lifetime, eventually to pass it on to future generations.

The house was sold in 2020 and Roger and Melloney have very generously handed over the photographs taken during the renovations, an aerial view of the property and this wonderful painting which is now hanging in Court Lodge. We are very grateful for their generosity and really pleased that Edwin will watch over our future meetings!

As I write this AGM report the news is full of daily statistical reports on the spread of the latest variant of Covid-19, the horrifying numbers of admissions to hospitals and deaths. It's been a year of profound change in all aspects of our lives, and no doubt its impact will be studied by academics for many years to come – there is certainly a wealth of information to support any research. In spite of the challenges the Society has had a successful year, it's finances are in good shape and membership is growing – some silver linings to be grateful for amidst the gloom!

PROGRAMME 2020-21

The year began with *A history of brass making* with Tony Coverdale, expert and guide at the Salford brass mill who described the historic production of brass. We had planned a trip to the brass mill following this talk but this had to be postponed due to Covid restrictions.

The next four meetings were cancelled due to lockdown restrictions, and we published newsletters to keep in touch with the membership. By then it was clear that the restrictions were going to be in place for some time and we began to hold our committee meetings via Zoom and to plan the delivery of online talks also using Zoom. Our annual programme changed in 2020 to include a talk in July but not in September which had proved to be a popular holiday month.



Lisbon pan (Salford Mill))

In October Ken Parsons pioneered our first Zoom talk exploring the Monmouth rebellion in *Somerset against the King*, a topic which generated a lot of interest.

Local resident Roger Francis had a long career as a Captain and deep sea pilot. He played a key role in maritime safety issues and now in new sail technologies. In November Roger talked about his life at sea and the changes he has witnessed in *Deep Sea Pilotage, a 25 year Apprenticeship*.

In January archaeologist Steve Tofts, a former member of CHERT, talked about *Roman and Victorian mining activity around Charterhouse* – a very popular event which attracted 85 households to participate via Zoom.

I would like to thank Jacky Kerly for putting together such an interesting programme – It's not an easy task especially with lockdown restrictions. I think you will find the programme for next year is even better! We will continue to use Zoom until restrictions are eased but we do miss the opportunity to chat to our members over a cup of coffee in the Lodge ... let us hope we can get together again soon.

ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVE

As mentioned on the previous page Roger and Melloney Kaye have very generously handed over photographs, an aerial view and the wonderful painting of Edwin Carpenter. We have also been given a most unusual artefact from Fir Tree Farm – a piece of reed and plaster ceiling measuring 2ft x 3ft. Many of us are familiar with lath and plaster. Long coarse water reeds (like those used by thatchers) were sometimes used instead of wooden lath, particularly in areas where the reeds could be grown locally. These were clamped to the underside of the joists to a depth of approximately 12mm (½") using laths. We are awaiting advice from the Conservation officer at Somerset Heritage Centre as to the best way of preserving it.



Reed and plaster ceiling section

We had some family history enquiries re the Hurlston family and an email contact from the son of a Hungarian refugee who's father stayed in Nordrach in 1956 – he kindly supplied a copy of his father's memories of his stay. The son of the late Margaret Cadman (who lived in Rose Cottage in Street End Lane and Fallowfield) donated an aerial view of Street End c1970s and some deeds relating to the acquisition of land and development of Fallowfield from 1933 – very useful for our Street End Project. Jacky Kerly has continued with Sladacre Lane research and we ordered a number of wills of local residents to support this study. Jane Strong and Anne King kindly let us borrow the deeds of The Barn and other documents from Anne's extensive research. Local resident Pete Croker let us scan his comprehensive collection of local postcards. Chris Burton, Marion Ball and Winnie Gould shared history and photographs of Blagdon Brownies.

SLADACRE LANE PROJECT

This year has provided the perfect opportunity for armchair research and the Sladacre area (named after the field Slade Acre on the right as you go up the lane) proved fertile ground. Thanks to Anne King (née Baker) who was brought up in The Barn at the top of Sladacre Lane, we have had access to the fruits of her past research into her family history, including her hand written notes and legal documents.

The small plots of land between Sladacre Lane and Street End, known as the Hill Gardens, all numbered on the 1842 tithe, were rented or owned by local farmers and small holders. There were only eight dwellings with a Sladacre address with another four by 1921. As well as agricultural labourers there were stone masons of the Main family and a shoemaker, James Caple.

We have also discovered that cottages were occupied by descendants of the same families for several generations. Most properties were very small with 3 or 4 rooms. The area provides interest for more general social history. For example a widow Baker, was housed by her father-in-law, probably in Tansy Cottage, after she was forced to move back to her late husband's village of settlement. She was a pauper in receipt of poor relief. Another rich source of interest was emigration – a chance link on Ancestry to a member's public family tree indicated that James Caple and his wife Martha had taken ship for New York in 1849. Neither of them were young, having had 11 children, but circumstances must have made the upheaval preferable to remaining in Blagdon. We were able to access the shipping record which shows them arriving in New York on the *Elizabeth* in April 1849, and on closer examination the passenger list contained other local family names – Brunt and Simmons and possibly Thomas Baker and another Caple. The area remains a fascinating corner of old Blagdon and there is plenty more to discover!

(report by Jacky Kerly)

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note members from 2020 – 21 have qualified for free membership this year. If you are not sure if you are a member, please contact the Membership Secretary Andrew Barnes. Subscription charges remain at £12 for single membership, £20 per couple and the casual visitor's entrance fee is £2.50 to include tea or coffee.

For new members, subscriptions are now due. Cheques should be made payable to Blagdon Local History Society. For those of you wishing to use internet banking the details are: BLHS sort code: 20-94-74, a/c no: 40640751 and please include your name in the reference field.

We would like to communicate with you via email, so when you join we would be grateful if you would let us have your email address and/or check that the contact details that we have are up to date.

BLAGDON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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'The big difference today from then, is that there used to be a lot of small farms. They might have just a few cattle, 20 or 30 milkers, and the milk would be picked up at the gate, wouldn't it? It all changed when these big milk tankers came along, then they paid the small farmers to get rid of their cows, and to stick with the big farms. But what I used to call a farmer in the old days, he had a few cows, he had a few sheep, he had a few pigs and hens and that sort of thing. But you call them farmers now, they'm only milk producers or beef producers or corn producers ... In the old days they were more or less self-supporting...'

*(memories of Ike Smart
of Street End
recorded by Tony Staveacre)*

I thank the members of the Committee for their services to the Society.

The Committee comprises:

<i>President</i>	<i>Mrs Mary Mead OBE</i>
<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Sheila Johnson</i>
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Andrew Barnes</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Pip Riley</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Ken Parsons</i>
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	<i>Andrew Barnes</i>
<i>Archivist</i>	<i>Sheila Johnson</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Mike Adams</i>
<i>Programme co-ordinator</i>	<i>Jacky Kerly</i>
<i>Street End Research</i>	<i>John Burton, Peter May and others</i>
<i>Website, Newsletter editor</i>	<i>Peter May</i>

The Society's thanks are due to John and Naomi Lyons for checking our accounts. We are grateful for the support we have received from Graham and Johanna Brown and staff at Blagdon Stores in selling our Village Trail leaflets and journals.

We thank our President Mary Mead for her continuing generosity in allowing BLHS to use Court Lodge as the headquarters and archive store for the Society, and I would like to thank the members for their continuing support.

Sheila Johnson

WHAT'S NEXT?

We will continue with the research into the Street End area, and Sladacre Lane — there is still more to discover and several more residents have offered to let us look at their deeds. Research on Street End slowed down this year due to work on the newsletters.

We plan to publish Volume 6 of *A History of Blagdon* this year with a focus on our photographic archive, looking at changes in the village.

We aim to carry out some archaeology and field walks once Covid-19 restrictions are eased. In Volume 2 of *A History of Blagdon* we published an article entitled *Romano-British settlement in the Yeo Valley North Somerset* written by local resident Siobhan Watson in which she explored the presence of Romano-British homesteads in the area.

The Rev John Skinner, Rector of Camerton, took a great interest in antiquarian subjects and travelled widely throughout the country, recording his observations, often accompanied by sketches, in more than 130 journals. CHERT carried out a magnificent job in creating an index for these journals, most of which are held in the British library.



Rev John Skinner (1771 - 1839)

On a visit to Blagdon, Skinner spoke to a local farmer who lived near the Church (Park House?) who informed him *he had dug up quantities of building stones when clearing the lower end of the field where the earth was very black ...* Unfortunately the coins also discovered by the farmer had been given to his children as playthings and none of them remained, but Rev Skinner did find a small piece of Samian ware in the field.

It is over fifteen years since Siobhan surveyed this area. Subject to the landowner's permission we would very much like to carry out further investigations, using up to date equipment, and building on Siobhan's earlier research.