

Woodchester Village Report 2022

The Parish Council Chairman's report. Peter Lead

After a couple of difficult years, we are now facing the issues of inflation, war and a rapid climate change.

We are so fortunate to live where we do in a small Parish, nestling in a valley and surrounded by beautiful countryside.

We need to value this and ensure we do all we can to protect our environment, health and safety.

To this end our Parish Councillors work tirelessly, without remuneration, to maintain and improve our Parish. Sadly, we are often faced with frustrations from higher authorities, poor communication and all too often an apparent lack of respect for each other and our environment that makes our job more difficult than it need be. None the less, we and several willing Parishioners seek to achieve and maintain high standards, to all of whom I would like to say a big thank you.

Our APM this year includes various written reports, presentations on the proposed play area, plans for the Jubilee celebrations and an open discussion on the review of our Parish Plan.

Whilst we have had some interaction and support from various Parishioners, we would like to ask that more involve themselves in Parish affairs. This would enable decisions made to be a better representation of our Parishes wishes. To this end we have introduced an open forum for public discussion at the beginning of each PC meeting so that it is not necessary for you to sit through all the formal matters until you can speak.

I do not intend to say too much as we have Iain presenting an update on the play area and access from the A46 to the cycle path and Caroline updating you on the Jubilee Celebrations. Our Parish Council minutes recording our meetings and decisions made are always published on our website and therefore I am not going to summarise them. If you or any one you know needs printed copies, we are happy to supply them.

I have said that I would include an update on St Dominic's School. We have put forward a proposal to the Catholic Diocese to allow the school hall to be available for the Parishes of the Catholic Church and Woodchester Parish. This involves the sale of the garages to the owner of St Mary's Hill House and the classrooms to a local business for office use. This leaves the Hall for community use. This offer is subject to planning and price being agreed, but it is being considered. Frustratingly the Trustees of the Diocese move very slowly, however we are hopeful of a positive outcome.

The Ram Inn, sadly there has been no response to my email to the owners as to its future .

Likewise The Convent, despite trying to communicate with representatives of the owners.

St Mary's Church. Andrew Pemberton; member of the Parochial Church Council.

During the recent months there has been a gradual easing of restrictions on social contact imposed to control the Covid-19 pandemic, especially indoors, which was reflected in the life of the Church, and we are now for all practical purposes “back to normal”.

The Church endeavoured to maintain contact with the community throughout the year. The church building has been open each day for private prayer. The Church Guide leaflet for visitors which gives information about the building was revised. Easter and Christmas cards with details of services were produced and delivered to every household in the parish. On 23rd March 2021, a year on from the first lockdown, a service was held via ZOOM to remember those lives lost during the pandemic, and a lavender bed was established in the churchyard in their memory, planted by the children of Woodchester School.

Both Lunch-with-Friends for older parishioners, and Messy Church for children held monthly after school, has continued in some form throughout the year. The first in-person get together in the year was a tea party in August, held outside in the churchyard to reduce the Covid-19 risk. After this the monthly lunches resumed in church, including a much-enjoyed Christmas meal, but sadly without a visit from the schoolchildren. Similarly Messy Church took the form of craft activities in bags, collected from church by families and enjoyed at home. As the summer brought better weather Messy Church was held in the churchyard and then in church when socialising indoors was permitted by the government. The Little Stars toddler group started to meet again after lockdown, on a Monday morning, initially in the churchyard and then in church. Lasers, the group for school years 7 and 8, were meeting online at the beginning of 2021 and then made the most of the outdoors with activities such as ‘Woodchester (not the) Olympic Games and ‘Bashers & Whackers’! A new youth group called ‘Rooted’ for school year 6 was started. The close link with Woodchester Endowed School has continued. Within the school, children had been kept in groups or ‘bubbles’ due to the pandemic and so worship in the school hall was not possible, but Open the Book, the ministry team and lay leaders still contributed to worship via Microsoft Teams.

Apart from our usual giving arrangements, money was raised for other organisations: The Children's Society through a Messy Church Christingle Session; Christian Aid and TEAR Fund through on-line quizzes. Harvest Gifts were collected for the local Food Bank. Many boxes were filled with gifts for the T4U shoebox campaign for people in poverty in Eastern Europe.

Wild Worship, a new monthly outdoor session to explore and enjoy the natural world and what it says about its creator, was of its nature held outside, at the beginning of 2021 in family groups only, but meeting together by September. Activities included litter-picking, bird-spotting and a nativity trail in December.

In early 2021 we commissioned stage 2 of the ‘A Building for Everyone’ project inside the church. The existing structure at the back was replaced by two new toilets (one of which is designed as “accessible”), a utility room and a storage room. The new structure was faced with the rood screen which was relocated from the front of the church, thereby opening up the chancel in line with the architect's original design. Please take a look if you haven't been in recently!

As always, we strive to be a welcoming church for everyone.

Woodchester Events Committee. Katharine McNealey

There were no village wide events in 2020 due to the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus Pandemic. Following the easing of restrictions in Summer 2021 we were able to organise an end of summer picnic in September. This was held outside on the church green and included the ever popular fun dog show followed by tea, cakes, and music from Rodborough Folk Orchestra. A childrens entertainer provided lots of fun things to juggle, and some lovely bubbles to chase and pop. The event was well attended and residents were pleased to be able to sit and chat to each other in a relaxed way.

In December we held the annual Carolling round the village with Nailsworth Silver Band. The torchlit walk from Frogmarsh to St Marys Church was followed by mulled wine and mince pies on the Church Green and was attended by over 80 people. Thanks to everyone who donated to help cover the costs.

Committee member George Brooks is taking the lead on organising the village Jubilee celebrations for the first weekend in June. At the time of writing, lots of good ideas are taking shape including a village picnic, Traditional Sports Day and decorating the village with bunting.

The Committee is now planning the Village Produce Show which will be held in the Endowed School on September 10th with all the usual fruit, vegetable, flower and baking classes. There will also be another Fun Dog show, music and refreshments.

The village events committee exists to plan and organise events which bring the whole village together. There are currently only four members on the committee and we welcome offers of help and new ideas. If you have new ideas for future events or would be happy to help out at the Produce Show please contact Katharine McNealey on 873814.

Committee members: Katharine McNealey, Andrew Pemberton, Richard Butler, George Brooks

Woodchester Playgroup. Beverley Fowler, Playgroup Leader

We have had a very successful and fun year at playgroup. We continue to provide a wide variety of opportunities for the children to explore, be creative and develop their own ideas to help them flourish and grow. The children have all taken part in our Sponsored Easter Fun Run which is raising money to make some improvements to the top part of our playgroup garden. We have celebrated world book day, with the children and staff dressing up as a favourite book character and sharing favourite books. At Christmas we enjoyed a magical time with a visit from Magic Marie. We are looking forward to having lots more fun over the summer and creating many more happy playgroup memories

Woodchester Historical Society. Barbara Warnes

Woodchester Historical Society meets approximately four times a year, currently in 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.

Over the last two years we have had a restricted programme but we have at least managed to do something! 2020 started with a 'New Look at Woodchester through Old Photographs and ended with a load of cancellations. 2021 fared better with a walk around South Woodchester, a very successful tour of Tewkesbury Battlefield and a Victorian walk around North Woodchester – all outdoor to break us in gently. We then started our indoor season with 'Making a Living on the River Severn' and 'The Royal Progress through Gloucestershire 1536.

Hopefully, 2022 will be more normal, we have started with 'Windsor Castle – Its History, Monarchs and Ceremonies' and we will continue with 'Wool and Water, the Gloucestershire Woollen Industry in the Industrial Revolution', A Guided Walk around Malmesbury, another Woodchester Old Tracks and Trails, 'The Medieval Towns of Gloucestershire and finishing with the AGM and 'Margaret Hills – from Suffrage to Citizenship'.

We will have a display about a Woodchester pub (Royal Oak) at Stroud Local History Society's Summer Exhibition but most of our planned activities were cancelled.

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. These are available from the Society or the Village Shop.

We continue to write articles for Woodchester Word on topics of historical interest.

The parish registers and censuses are available on the village website. Other records will follow when time allows. The village site also has a link to our own website which contains several articles.

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

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

Woodchester Endowed Church of England Primary School – Lynn Pennington, Headteacher

The last two years have been extraordinary, presenting all members of our school community with an abundance of unforeseen and unique challenges to overcome. There have been many steep learning curves to climb, difficult decisions to be made at speed, new systems such as 'remote learning', 'Teams' and 'bubbles' to create, introduce and establish. Learning from our experience during the first national lockdown, we made changes and improvements to our remote learning offer during the second lockdown. In addition to the remote learning provided for children at home, our small in number but dedicated staff also supported almost half of our children with either full time or part time places in school. Our children and

families have been remarkable, resilient, optimistic and courageous on this journey and deserve enormous praise and recognition for their stoicism.

Despite the demands and challenges of the pandemic, during the last three years we have been going through the process of improving our school building to make the entrance safer as well as creating larger and more suitable learning spaces within the existing school. The vast majority of building work was completed during the summer term and holiday, with children and staff benefitting from the improvements since the beginning of this academic year. As Woodchester is a voluntary aided school, the governing body have to contribute ten percent of the cost. We are enormously grateful to those who have made a donation including individuals from the village and beyond, our PTA, the Parish Council, Garfield Weston, Renishaw, Coln Residential and the village shop. Fundraising in the current climate is not easy but we remain motivated to do so knowing the positive difference these improvements have made to our school environment and to teaching and learning.

During the last two years there have also been lovely moments of togetherness and opportunities to give back to our community, for children to grow both spiritually and personally whilst living out our school motto: Love, Learn and Flourish Together. Taking part in the Archbishop of York's 'Young Leaders' initiative demonstrated on a practical level that working together makes us stronger and helps us achieve more. The children combined forces to make a positive difference to the lives of others whether that be donating books to children in a school in the Gambia, creating a lavender bed in the church yard, growing a kindness trees by recognising acts of kindness, creating cards and messages for 'Friends who Lunch' or organising a collection of good quality clothes for a local charity 'Bundles for All'.

During this spring term, restrictions gradually eased and there has been an increasing sense of 'normality' beginning to return. Our children are once again taking part in whole school worship, inter school sporting events, afterschool clubs, school trips and enrichment opportunities including ukulele playing. Our whole school Easter service in church was made all the more special by being able to welcome parents and just a few days later we opened our grounds to local families who took part in our PTA Woodchester Lion Hunt.

We hope and pray for more of the same as the year continues!

Cotswold Voluntary Wardens -Julian Foxon

I represent the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, the volunteer arm of the Cotswolds National Landscape (previously the Cotswolds AONB), and am the Parish Warden for the parish of Woodchester. The Wardens undertake 3 main roles:

1. Parish Wardening – where we monitor the state of the Public Rights of Way across a parish, and carry out any simple remedial work needed (eg waymarking, simple stile fixes, vegetation clearance), or pass any more major work needed on to our Work Parties
2. Work Parties – groups of Wardens who perform more major remedial work (eg stile replacement, installing kissing gates, installing steps/bridges/revetment, dry-stone walling), typically on Tuesday and Thursday mornings

3. Guided walk programme – Wardens lead guided walks around the South District (roughly from Badminton up to Stroud), typically every fortnight.

Woodchester parish has 24 Public Rights of Way (all footpaths), covering a distance of just over 6 miles; this is below average for parishes in this part of the Cotswolds. But the footpaths provide a vital way of getting around the parish, from South to North, and into the gorgeous countryside we have around us, and of course increasingly so as many re-discovered during lockdown, and now continue to do so.

I have been doing this role since Spring 2021, and have now met most landowners, a necessary first step as any work we carry out needs discussion with them before we can start. Generally speaking the rights of way are in a very good condition, so work has primarily focused on improving waymarking (the small round discs that highlight the footpath status of the path, a yellow arrow pointing in the direction of the path), trimming back brambles and nettles (and this activity is of course already well underway!), liaising with National Trust on the paths through Boundary Court, and improving the steps coming up from the Retirement Village towards the vineyard.

It's a never ending job though, maintenance and repair will always be needed. So please do advise if there are any further issues you are aware of - wherever we can help we will, albeit the primary responsibility for maintenance lies with the landowner. I also keep up with the Woodchester Share, Swap and Support group on Facebook, and regularly post into there, so that can be a quick way of alerting me to any issues.

Woodchester WI- Sally Bull

The local WI has risen to the challenges of the last two years, getting to grips with Zoom, extending use of email in addition to use of the more familiar letter and telephone call to stay in touch with all our members. Members were delighted to return to face-to-face meetings, however, and have been enjoying a more traditional monthly programme since last July when we had our first full gathering, a tea party in the Secretary's garden.

We have enjoyed a varied programme over the last two years with talks on Zoom and in person including: the *SS Great Britain*, the history of a Shropshire hotel, a food tour of Bath, the Butterfly Garden project, Neal's Yard. As soon as circumstances permitted, we planned meals together with August fish and chips and our Christmas party. The programme for 2022 includes a pudding night and talks about the Long Table, Hilarious Hats and Aromatherapy.

Despite the difficulties of the last two years, we have been excited by the opportunity to devise new ways of working together. We marked Christmas 2020 with delivery of gift bags full of small treats from chocolates to seeds. We celebrated Spring 2021 with the creation of knitted wreaths and colourful bunting, both assembled from contributions from WI members, which we used to decorate our community shop where it was much admired. Progress on our banner, underway since the Gloucestershire WI Centenary in 2019, was slowed by the pandemic but we are happy to report that it is now complete and will take pride of place at our meeting and at any events with which we are involved.

The return of the Made in Woodchester craft event in July provided us with an opportunity to take part in a village event once again. On a beautiful day in a lovely setting, we sold out of

cake, despite substantial baking contributions from members and friends. We were proud to contribute to the raffle and auction prizes and to be able to donate from our profits to the Cobalt Charity at the heart of the occasion.

Where possible, we have continued to run our successful sub-groups. The walking group enjoys regular short outings in the area, always finishing in a café for hot drink and chat. The craft group, open to non WI members too, meets on the first Thursday afternoon of the month in the village hall. The book group has become steadily more ambitious in the choice of books, working well on Zoom before we were able to meet in person again once more.

It was very sad in 2019 to hear of the closure of the WI's college, Denman, an early casualty of the pandemic. Some members continue to enjoy the Zoom substitute, Denman online, which offers craft and cooking courses and a range of talks. Our county organisers have also worked hard to keep activities alive with online talks and craft activities. A full programme of craft days at Gloucester and walks across the county, always finishing with a home-made lunch, is now available once more. Three of us chose to attend the Annual Council Meeting in Cheltenham, listening to talks on sustainable fashion, and the career success of Mary-Jess Leaverland, Gloucestershire Winner of the Chinese version of *X Factor* and enjoying an impromptu speech by special guest, Princess Anne.

It has been a joy to be joined by a number of new members. We encourage anyone interested in joining us to come along to a meeting to see what we have to offer before committing to membership. You are guaranteed a warm welcome. The third Thursday of the month at 7.30 is the usual meeting time and our venue is the Woodchester Village Hall.

Girlguiding Woodchester – Jackie Hayes

Brownie and Guide meetings continued to be held over Zoom in the summer of 2021. Girls played games, earned badges, learnt new skills, participated in cooking activities, completed various challenges and generally had lots of fun.

We started meeting back face to face in September 2021 with lots of covid-secure measures in place to keep both the girls and leaders safe. Both Brownies and Guides completed their Influence Skill Builder badge, as well as enjoying a firework themed evening and a sweet making session.

Last term the girls worked towards their Adventures in the Dark badge. This involved a range of activities from bug/insect hunting in the dark, to walking safely in the dark, from games in the dark to learning about astronomy and nocturnal animals. We ended the term with an Easter egg hunt.

We are very low on numbers of Brownies and Guides and would love to welcome new members, girls aged between 7 and 9 (Brownies) and 10 and 13 (Guides). Please email: woodchesterbrowniesandguides@gmail.com or 'phone Jackie on 01453 821258.

Orchard Pastures (SWALT) – Bert Cossins

It is pleasing to report that Orchard Pastures, the area of land, to south of Station Road which was purchased by thirty villagers in 2009, known as the ‘South Woodchester Amenity Land Trust’ continues to thrive. We were able to celebrate our annual wassailing in late January; the weather was fine, it was very well attended, well supported by The Rodborough Folk Orchestra, our spontaneous choir and all contributing folk. Our joint efforts of toasting the fruit trees, replenishing them with cider, driving off sprites with a cacophony of noise and enticing the birds to adopt the trees by decking them with toasted bread. We were appreciative of the generous hospitality of The Royal Oak that allowed our celebrations to continue.

Last year’s harvest both in the orchard and on the allotments was indeed plentiful – many gallons of juice as pressed from the apples with ample veg and greens throughout the seasons. Since our last update, prior to the endemic, there has been a considerable increase in our deer proofed growing areas which indicates an increase in plot holders. The two chickens are in both pens are laying well but regrettably we lost the bees last summer. At present allotment plots are taken but keep an eye on Orchard Pasture updates in Woodchester Word.

Woodchester Mansion- Rhiannon Wigzell

Woodchester Mansion is a Grade I listed, unfinished Neo Gothic building in Woodchester Park. It is open in 2022 from the 1st April to the 30th October, from 11.00am to 5.00pm on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays. Tickets are £8.50, and accompanied children aged 16 and under are free. When the Mansion is open there is a cafe, run by the Nelson Trust (www.nelsontrust.com), and a shop, neither of which requires tickets for the Mansion, so available for all visitors to the Park. There is also a bat observatory where the world famous rare Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats can be seen live on CCTV in their maternity roosts.

During the two years of Covid, the Mansion was only allowed to be fully open for 20% of the time, so income was badly hit in 2020 and 2021, especially as the summer months usually generate about 90% of the annual income. Various support grants, including funding for a business consultant, helped bridge the shortfall, so the Mansion has survived. In complete contrast, the conservation advanced spectacularly thanks to two grants for substantial roof repairs, courtesy of the Government’s Heritage Stimulus Fund, the Historic Houses Foundation, and Historic England. These repairs have made more of the Mansion watertight and will last for at least 100 years.

Last year the curtailed open season got off to a great start with the Circus Notre Dame de Paris and the local School of Larks, working all over the Mansion, running circus skills workshops, and rehearsing, culminating in three magnificent performances of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. This was an outreach project involving several charities. The Mansion absorbs apparatus such as trapeze towers, has good acoustics, and many performance spaces. Nothing detracts from its stunning architecture. The Festival Players returned to perform *Henry V*, with the Mansion as the backdrop and the valley resounding to the ringing speeches, with added atmosphere from the Park wildlife. The theatrical performances culminated with the Downpour Theatre’s *Dracula* in October.

There was an exhibition of stonemasonry by the resident trainee masons over the August bank holiday weekend, giving visitors a chance to find out about an ancient craft and see the high level of skill attained. Later, two artists, a painter and a sculptor, displayed their work at the Mansion, as part of the Stroud Open Studios. The Mansion also participated in the Heritage Open day when the admission charge was waived.

The grand finale for 2021 was the half term Halloween *Spooky Cellars* when the Mansion's extensive cellars were dressed to thrill. One of the Mansion's bats obligingly made several popular appearances during the week.

For details of this year's programme of events see the Mansion's social media and the website: www.woodchestermansion.org.uk. A particular highlight will be the chance to carve a stone plaque under expert tuition, at a series of Stone Days. These have been popular when run previously. There are also bat experience evenings, when people can watch the bats preparing to leave the roosts, meet the bats flying around the Mansion, and listen to them via bat detectors.

This year's Heritage Open Day is on the 9th September. The usual Halloween week is planned for the end of the season, possibly in an expanded form.

We are so lucky that somewhere the size of our village has the Orpheus Pavement and Woodchester Mansion. The latter, however, can be seen and enjoyed. What makes it unique is its unfinished condition, which is different from being a ruin. Despite being considered to be of international architectural significance, the Mansion is underappreciated in the local area. It is not unusual for people to say things such as, "I've lived around Stroud my whole life and never visited until now, and it's stunning!"

The Mansion always needs volunteers. There is no required commitment, but once a month is a considerable help. Trustees with skills that complement the existing Board are also sought, as are people with relevant skills to join the various Committees. Anyone interested email: info@woodchestermansion.org.uk; or rhiannon.wigzell@woodchestermansion.org.uk; or phone the Mansion Office: 01453 872353. Another way to support Woodchester Mansion is by joining the Membership scheme. As well as helping safeguard it for the future, members enjoy repeat visits, an informative Journal several times a year, voting rights at the AGM and other benefits (see the website).

St Loe's, Seys and Bridges Foundation – George Bastin, Chairman

St Loe's School Exhibition Fund and Seys and Bridges Educational Foundation merged last year and became *The St Loes, Seys and Bridges Foundation*. However it has taken a further nine months for the Charity Commission to confirm the merger. Both charities were founded at about the same time around 1697 and both charities had the same objectives which are to support local children in Woodchester and Amberley in education. Both charities have strong links with the primary schools and gave financial support where needed. Now the combined charity will be able to do more when we can. It is our wish to support both schools with more than just financial support and we are looking at ways to achieve this objective. We also have tried to support local apprenticeships now that many universities have not provided the level of tuition that many students have expected and paid for. This is proving more difficult.

The pandemic has created some problems with those supported in further education at university. We now financially support nine students at university, training college or those entering a trade or profession. The Foundation will continue to meet 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. It shouldn't!

The Foundation also provides £300 each to the Woodchester and Amberley schools for books for their library and a book to each school leaver in both schools.

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.

St Loe's, Seys and Bridges Foundation.
Charity No. 311753
c/o Goring House
North Woodchester Stroud
Gloucestershire
GL5 5NG

Woodchester Priory Church of the Annunciation. Angela Middleditch

(Church letter, reproduced from Nailsworth Newsletter with permission from the Church)

By the time you read this our Easter services will be over and we now look forward to summer and the warmer weather. Some of our children are preparing for their first Holy Communion which will take place in June, on the feast of Pentecost. Meanwhile it is lovely to see all the younger children enjoying their special Liturgy at our 11am Sunday Mass. They go upstairs and do activities like drawing or listening to stories, usually based on the Gospel of the day. They then come down and join the congregation again, after telling us all about their activities and showing us their pictures, and getting a big round of applause.

Fr Gary is now our Parish priest although with looking after Stroud parish, Stonehouse and us, he is a very busy man. We are so glad that despite being retired, Fr Bill travels back to help the situation by saying Sunday Masses in Stonehouse and Woodchester, ably assisted by Deacon Bogdan.

Some of our Parishioners recently took part in CAFODS sponsored walk and were amazed to raise nearly £600 for the work they do across the world. As a member of the CARITAS organization, CAFOD can reach those in need through disaster, famine, and conflict across the world including in Ukraine. They have been on the border with Caritas Ukraine, helping refugees in the awful situation they find themselves in. CAFOD is a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee so are always prepared to act fast when needed.

Summer is the peak time for weddings and we are so glad that these are happening again after so many were postponed during the last two years. We wish many blessings to the couples getting married in our beautiful church during the next few months.

We have a Facebook page which you can see at <https://www.facebook.com/woodchesterpriory> and our website which is being updated is at <https://www.woodchesterpriory.org.uk/>