

NIBCHG Annual Report December 2020 – November 2021

My report is a little longer than previously but I hope you will find it interesting. You may remember twelve months ago that in view of the pandemic, our Annual General Meeting was held via a Zoom Video Conference. This is an area of technology that I know many of us are now more familiar with than we were then. Although I know there are concerns for some people because the coronavirus is still around and could be with us for some time, I am glad we are able to meet in person this evening.

In June of this year we were sad to receive the resignation of our secretary, Carol, who had been a valued member of the committee since the group was formed in 2013. Carol had contributed greatly to the group and to all its events which included the 2018 WW1 Poppy Trail. This will be on display at the Farmers' Market this Saturday for Remembrance.

I am also saddened today to be saying 'goodbye' to Gareth, who is stepping down as Treasurer, having also been a very valued member of the committee since 2013. He has ensured the groups' finances have been kept in order, that 'Friends' paid their subscriptions, completing grant request forms and has been the voice of reason when we had grand ideas on which to spend money! Thank you Gareth.

This past year it was unfortunate that we were not to be able to arrange regular presentations and in view of this we put the collection of 'Friends' subscriptions on hold for a year (actually at Gareth's suggestion!).

On a more positive note, we were very pleased when the Saturday Farmers' Markets were allowed to resume and we were able to re-start our displays in August in the New Victory Hall.

Last year I reported that the group had signed up to be part of a Community Archive Project run by the Norfolk Record Office following a successful bid for a Heritage Lottery Grant. Because of the COVID restrictions our meetings with an archivist from the Record Office had to be undertaken via Zoom but the sessions were excellently presented and covered the two areas that we had signed up for - (1) Recording Interviews – for which we received training on how to use audio recording equipment, conducting interviews, and preserving and editing recordings. We were also given two sets of stereo headphones for use with our laptops. The second area was (2) Creating an Archive for which we received training in preservation, cataloguing and digitisation and were given a laptop and four hard drives on which to safely store our digital records. The main objective for the Group of this project is for us to produce an electronic catalogue of historic documents and photographs for the three villages, a catalogue which in future

will enable people to search for a particular place or person or an event. I am pleased to say we have created a structure for the catalogue using a standard template provided by the Norfolk Record Office, but it is going to take considerably more work to process our information before it is ready for the community to access.

In our three villages we have some very old buildings, our three parish churches for example. One small building that is nearly 200 years old, and which some of you may be aware of, is the Black Shed at Barton Staithe. Michael has done a considerable amount of research into the history of this building that was used as a warehouse for a variety of goods and agricultural produce. As you may remember from last year, the Group have researched the history of the staithes in Barton, Irstead and Neatishead, and this has been submitted to the Waterside Heritage Project which is part of the Broads Hidden Heritage programme funded by a Heritage Lottery Grant. There are actually very few buildings across the Broads, such as the Black Shed, that remain in the hands of the Parish Council. Currently the building needs some repairs and the group have been able to provide important historical information which will help the Parish Council in their endeavours to obtain the funds for the repairs. Anne Wilson, who sadly died earlier this year, was the organiser of a campaign in the 1980s to save the Black Shed when the Parish Council were forced to take legal action against someone who claimed to own this important local parish building. Anne also published a collection of memories of life in Barton Turf which have been a most valuable source of information.

The initiative of the NIB Wildlife Friendly Villages began earlier this year. They started a survey of The Common at Barton Turf and asked us for any historical information about it. Research has established that actually the area of common land, known as The Great Common, was land close to Barton Fen and Berry Hall Farm. What we now know as The Common was called The Claypits, a parcel of land described in the 1810 Enclosure Award as a public clay pit for the use of the parishioners of Barton Turf.

A grant from the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant (part of the Norfolk Community Foundation) that we had obtained for our VE Day 75th Anniversary Event in 2020, which as you will remember had to be cancelled, was able to be put towards a special event in September, our WW2 Memories Day at the New Victory Hall. This was the perfect opportunity to display the unique Wartime Incidents Map created and drawn by John Yaxley for the VE Day 50th Anniversary Event back in 1995. Since then the map has been stored in the Black Shed at Barton Staithe. Part of the grant we obtained was to enable us to make a copy of this map and we are really pleased to be able to display it here this evening. I would like to thank Jim Clinch for the extraordinary amount of time he spent on the difficult task of photographing the map and creating an electronic image of it from which the full size copy could be made. The original map will be returned to The Black Shed and the Group will keep the copy.

Our WW2 Memories Day was the ideal occasion to display the map and enabled us to link our research with the wartime incidents and their locations. The Group researched those from our villages who served during the war, rationing, the Land Army, evacuees, local invasion defences, the Auxiliary Home Guard, and discovered what life was like on the Home Front in Neatishead from those who lived through it. I would particularly like to thank Duncan for the very detailed research he undertook in order to put the display together that we can see here tonight about the local aircraft crashes and aerial attacks that appear on John's map. Many of the visitors to the exhibition commented on the high standard of the research and the displays, and you will see a small part of it here this evening. I cannot let mention of our WW2 Memories Day pass without saying a huge thank you to Jackie who took on the task of working with members of NABS to produce a wonderful WW2 evening of memories, music, songs, poems and much flag waving. Thank you Jackie.

Many of you know I lost someone very special this year. When I first met Alan Cox in 2011 I realised that in him I had discovered an absolute goldmine of local information and a lasting friend. Alan was inspirational in his love of Irstead and much of my passion for the history of our three villages I owe to him. Some of you who came to our WW2 Memories Day will have heard a recording of Alan talking about his early life in Irstead and about those he remembered from Irstead who served during WW2. We also had recordings of Geoffrey Neave and David Drake speaking in 2011 of their wartime memories too. We owe so much to people like Geoffrey, David, Alan, John and Anne - without their help much of what we know about the history of our villages would have been lost forever. Tonight pay tribute to John who was described in NIB as 'a real Norfolk Broadman with the broadest of Norfolk accents and a legend in his lifetime'. The small display will illustrate his varying talents and sense of humour.

During this past year many of us have spent more time at home than normal and completed tasks that previously we might have said, "We can do that tomorrow". How often have you heard people in the media during the last few months say, "The lockdown gave me the opportunity to write a book, bring out an album or explore where I live". These last two weeks we have seen COP26 splashed over the news and been told that we must act now in order to save our beautiful planet for future generations.

None of us have a crystal ball, but I wonder how our villages will look in 100 years. Of course we won't be here to find out, but I hope I have been able to illustrate some of the ways in which our Community Heritage Group are helping to preserve the heritage of our three villages. Hopefully the research we have undertaken over the last 10 years will stand the test of time and will be available in some form for those who come after us.

Claire Penstone-Smith, Chairman, 11th November 2021