

October Meeting

For our October meeting invited Sandford Heritage Group to come and join us for an overview of the research projects that are progressing in the two villages.

Sadly with the change in date to 4th Oct (to be able to use the big hall) many of our regular attendees missed an excellent evening. Jim King of Sandford began by explaining how Sandford Heritage Group was set up in response to the need for a grant to adapt St Swithun's Church. Tea facilities and toilets were desirable. A small project team was set up in 2002

with architect's drawings and an estimated cost. The Heritage Lottery advisors were approached and their suggestion of visiting successful projects followed. They stressed that being able to fulfil the criteria of conservation, participation and learning were most important in qualifying for a grant. We heard how in Sandford village there was a huge response to a 'flyer' with an open meeting in the Church that resulted in lots of expertise coming together. Together the local community raised £33,000 of the estimated cost of £99,000.

A second lottery application was successful and smaller grants received from other bodies including DCC. Part of the deal was that the Heritage group should research;

Local farms and farming

The history of the carved church bench ends

The use old photographs for educational purposes.

Building work proceeded successfully during 2009. Much of the labouring was done by volunteers and Sandford now has very pleasant under gallery facilities, and an active Heritage group.

Chris Southcott kicked off for Newton with a description of the Court Barton water power scheme that adapted an old leat system in 1840 to run a water powered threshing machine .

Mary Rose Somerville told us of the huge amount of work that has been done to describe, date and find the story behind the 81 St Swithun's Church bench ends. They are beautifully carved in free flowing Renaissance style, possibly in the late 16th century. The Group has photographed them all. The heads are in left facing profile and many show New World characteristics. They are not religious. They have been repaired on the backs and borders suggesting possible reuse.

A search for possible documentation has



so far been unsuccessful although a 1779 description of St Swithun's by Polwhele suggests nothing notable. Six bench ends were sent for a dendrochronological assessment (dating by tree rings). The conclusion was that the wood was English oak but that the tree rings were too even to be useful for dating. This put an end to the theory that perhaps they derived from Spanish galleons. Comparisons have been made with other churches and they have been found to be unique in the SW. Their probable date is 1580-1620.

The current theory of Sandford's researchers is that these exquisite carvings were originally in the Church of the Holy Cross in Crediton but were removed to Sandford (then a Chapel of Ease) during a Georgian Church refit. They now intend to start searching the records of Holy Cross. A new bench end designed by the children of Sandford school has been commissioned and carving is well under way.

We alternated items with Sandford, speaking briefly about our projects to photograph old sites and our photographic collection of 'old finds'. Lynette gave a most interesting summary of her research into the miners of Newton St Cyres.

Pamela Tilney Ellis from Sandford gave us an amusing account of their quest for information about WW2 from older members of the village. Certain memories do not always coincide but

sometimes there is a reason as seemed to be the case in the location of a searchlight and radar installation on a Sandford farm.

Mike Brett described their farms project which involves the 20th century history of the major farms of the Parish. One booklet has already been published and a second is under way. Again oral history has played a major part. Mike explained how a very full glossary of agricultural words soon became a necessity.

Mike also spoke to us about communication within the group and storage of material. This is basically by electronic 'cloud'.

The research summaries ended with tea and refreshments when we had time to talk with others and to see their photographs and exhibits. SHG had brought along their collection of laminated photographs produced for the school. Photographs of their village from the early twentieth century had been matched with their equivalents today and a map and useful information included on the reverse side. Also some questions for the children to think about and answer.

We were lucky to have a visit from our Sandford neighbours who are a vital and enthusiastic group generous with their time and in using their equipment. They film all our meetings for us so we have a complete record of them. We thank them.