

## **Chedham's Yard Supporters' Newsletter** **May 2016**

### **Welcome to the First Newsletter for 2016 from Chedham's Yard.**

#### **10 Years on at Chedham's Yard**

In 2006 Chedham's Yard entered and won the BBC Restoration Village Programme. This was hosted by Griff Reece-Jones. The Yard was up against many other properties, all hoping to win the series. The winner would have access to a one million pound prize fund, administered jointly by the BBC and The Heritage Lottery Fund.

Chedham's Yard had been operated by the Chedham family for around 150years. When Bill Chedham decided to retire completely in 2002, he offered the property to the Parish Council. This site was unique, in so much that it was both a blacksmiths and a wheelwrights yard in the one location, part way along Church Walk in Wellesbourne. In reality, the yard had not been used since the mid 1960s, when, due to the downturn in business, Bill decided to close the yard and work away from the village.



**The whole site was overgrown.**



After so many years of neglect, the vegetation had taken hold. The Council was faced with a mammoth task of clearing away the ivy etc. This was before any assessment and restoration could start. It was quickly established, that it required a large sum of money to be spent, to bring the building to a stable condition. After all the archaeological work had been done, much more money was required than the Parish Council could afford. The entry into the BBC programme was a possible way forward. The public response exceeded all expectations. The end result was that Chedham's Yard won the £1,000,000 prize.

It was not until 2012 that most of the restoration work had been completed and the yard opened to the public. All the 4,000 artefacts found in the yard had been cleaned, photographed and replaced in their original position. The yard is run entirely by a group of enthusiastic volunteers.



**The Forge**



**The Yard today**



The yard now has a purpose built visitor centre, where light refreshments are always available along with a small selection of books, pictures and souvenirs. There is now a working blacksmiths forge and wheelwrights. Each Saturday through 2016 there will be a themed event, something for everyone.

In recognition of the ten year journey from winning the prize, the trustees and volunteers, have decided to offer **free entry to all Saturday visitors** throughout 2016.

The Yard open for the 2016 season on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

### **A final glance back at 2015**

The year ended on 12<sup>th</sup> December with our Christmas Event which was one of our best days in terms of visitor numbers. There was pomander making with Tracy and carols by Margaret and Jeff Sayer, mince pies, chestnuts and much more. .



### **What we have been doing – A brief overview**

The café area layout has been changed very slightly. This will enable visitors to view the many small items, now displayed in the two multi drawer cabinets. In addition we will have a model of a sliding bed saw bench on display, which can be used to illustrate how the large saw bench near the entrance operated when in use.

The Blacksmith volunteers have been working in the forge, to make it more visitor friendly and a safer working environment. Some larger items have been repositioned. A workbench, with a vice, has been added, this has blended seamlessly into the area. We have also managed to obtain some useful blacksmith tools for the team to use.



A minor clean up of the Wheelwrights has created more space for working. We hope to have someone working there occasionally during this season, who will demonstrate some of the wheel building skills and techniques.

### **Looking Forward to the 2016 Season**

Over the winter period work has continued cataloguing the remainder of the artifacts, most have been put on display. Items which cannot be identified or have little visual value will be stacked in the yard much as it would have been kept by the family in the belief that 'it may be useful sometime'. The Chedhams were not renowned for throwing things away, most things can be reused or modified to have a new purpose.

At present we have no definite plans for the wheelwright's shed but we would like to see this area used by someone making wooden items which could be offered for sale. There are many tools in the workshop that will be brought to the fore for visitors to see and handle. One of the many treadle machines has been restored to a working condition.

It is clear that treadle power was important to the yard. A technique that does not come easily and has to be learned from experience, developed over time. We have a small treadle machine which we hope to site in the wheelwright's for visitors to try their skills in getting it working smoothly.

During 2015 the garden theme was WW1, this year it will revert to a typical country garden with a mixture of vegetables and flowers.

A copy of the events programme accompanies this newsletter. We are currently in discussion with Compton Verney to develop ways of drawing in more visitors and improving what's on offer for visitors to our area.

## Open Studios

We are participating in the “**Open Studios**” event this year on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Several ‘artists’ have already committed to attend, what should be an exciting day.

This is classed as a “**Special Event**” and consequently the Yard will be open until **4pm**.

## ‘Live and Local’

The ‘**Discover Chedham’s Stories**’ project is funded by Warwickshire County Council’s Tourism Event Funding Scheme. The project aims to present stories and songs about the Yard the family and the village, culminating in a performance in the village in September.

So far several of the Chedham’s team have been interviewed, the musicians are finding the stories and history of the yard fascinating and providing much valuable information for the songs..

During their visits to the Yard, the musicians have taken lots of photographs, most recently a series of hidden details which are really beautiful and even mysterious. That’s what is so magical about the place, says Kelly. There is so much to see and every part of it has a history and story. There is so much hidden depth. It will be really interesting to hear how they fit it all into a musical show.



Two pictures taken by Kelly, capture the magic of these simple objects and textures which we may start to take for granted.

Link up and join in the discussion on Discover Chedham’s Stories Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DiscoverChedhams>

## John Constable and Chedham's Yard

What is the connection between Chedhams Yard and John Constable's famous picture The Haywain?



The simple answer is **wheels!**

If you study the picture the farm hand appears to be leaning against the front of the cart, suggesting that it has stopped. Wheels were once made of shaped stone slabs and logs. When the materials changed and wheels were fabricated from timber, a new problem arose during long hot summers. The wooden wheels dried up, shrunk, came loose and wobbled. A wobbly wheel was weak and likely to break. With no local Quick-Fit store to provide a replacement, a broken wheel meant the cart was liable to be out of service for a long time.

Most villages were built close to a water source, such as a stream or pond. It was not uncommon for carts to be wheeled through the water to moisten the wood, causing it to swell and tighten all the joints. The pond was not there just to provide swimming facilities for the ducks, but served a real purpose for the agricultural industry.

Was Constable recording something from real life or was it just an imaginary idyllic country scene? I suggest, he had seen a wagon in a pond or a stream and based the picture upon his experience.

### **A time to panic?**

During the rains of 2007 the yard was badly flooded and we feared that this may have been repeated due to the heavy rain on the night of 8<sup>th</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> March when, the water level in the River Dene rose rapidly to the top of the arch under the bridge and the fields around the village and the airfield were flooded. We kept a close eye on what was happening throughout the day and evening, in case the river spilled over

and then potentially flooded the yard. Luckily at about 9pm the water levels started to fall. By 8am on 10<sup>th</sup> the risk had passed - but it was a close call.



**Picture from the monitoring camera in the village**

## **A fall at the Yard**

Some of the trees at the yard are old. The Ash tree that was outside the wheelwrights succumbed to the wind and fell down and snapped into two pieces.



The remains of the tree have been moved to one side and they will probably be placed along the fence line, to become home for a myriad of insects.

## **Working with Schools**



Amy Lewis has joined the team in March to develop the schools/young persons programme, which will enable us to interact with the schools and youth groups in a positive way.

## **Volunteers**

We still need new volunteers to take the Yard in to the future. It is a unique site and it deserves to be preserved for future generations to enjoy. There are a wide range of tasks and opportunities, if you know of anyone who may be interested, bring them along and get them involved.

We are particularly keen to encourage younger people who can gain experience from a voluntary role and enhance their CV.

**Please watch the web site for Event announcements.**

**With pre-booking no longer a requirement - feel free to drop in and see how the Yard is moving on**

**Please contact us via the e-mail address below.**

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