

Village Recorder report for Levington and Stratton Hall Annual Parishes Meeting
April 21st 2021.

Levington and Stratton Hall May 2019 – March 2021:

The inevitable cancellation of the 2020 Annual Parishes Meeting, did not give me (nor indeed anyone else) a chance to report on their part in the life of the village for the previous year. Therefore, I have decided to produce a report covering the period from May 2019 to March 2021. Due to the various lockdowns and restrictions prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, I have split the report into two parts – the beginning of May 2019 to March 22nd 2020, and March 23rd 2020 to the end of March 2021. I believe that it is clear as to why these particular dates have been chosen.

May 2019 – March 22nd 2020:

A brief review of some of what has taken place in our Parishes is as follows:

- May: District and Parish Council elections held; death of Derek Ely; European Elections held; upgrade work on Stratton Hall level crossing barriers.
- June: Pat Pryke retires as editor of Parish Council Newsletter – Daniel Garner takes over.
- July: repair work commenced on ‘The Ship’; Levington War Memorial given Grade II Listing by Historic England; Levington Flower Show held.
- August: charity hog roast at ‘Elm Bank’; Bridge Road re-surfaced; village meeting regarding Sizewell C construction.
- September: Deben Inns take over lease of ‘The Ship’; death of James Ramsay.
- October: Harvest Supper held; Harvest Festival held; thatching commences on ‘The Ship’.
- November: vandalism of bus shelter on old A45; Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day services held; death of Mike Barker.
- December: annual film show held; ‘The Ship’ re-opened; General Election held; carols by candlelight and Midnight Mass held.
- January: 100th edition of Parish Council Newsletter published; Brexit took place.
- February: first meeting of the year for Levington Gardening Club; planning application for lorry park lodged with East Suffolk Council.
- March: village meeting held to discuss lorry park planning application; by middle of month Covid-19 situation is getting very serious with various measures being put in place by Government.

March 23rd 2020 – March 2021:

Monday the 23rd of March 2020 saw the Government declare a National Emergency. No-one was to leave their home except under certain circumstances (e.g. buying food, collecting prescriptions). Prior to this announcement, nationwide panic buying of food and, for some reason, toilet rolls, had taken place. Within the village, many events and meetings had already been cancelled. Having just re-opened after the devastating fire, ‘The Ship’ had to close again.

Fortunately, Levington and Stratton Hall have a good community spirit, which led to a number of initiatives taking place. Ian Angus set up a volunteer group to help those in need of assistance. Ole Henriksen produced a village Coronavirus information website. Robert Fisher created a WhatsApp group for villagers to keep in contact. Friends made use of phone calls and online services to keep in touch.

The lack of events to note in the village diary, made some months' entries rather sparse. However, there was always something to write about, even if it was only the weather! A brief review follows:

- Late March: village hall, St. Peter's church, and 'The Ship' all closed.
- April: Parish Magazine, Parish Council Newsletter, WI Newsletter, church services go online.
- May: VE75 exhibition and events cancelled, but villagers put up Union Flags and bunting, and socially distanced get-together held in Red House Walk.
- June: 'The Ship' restarted its takeaway service; water supply pipes replaced in Red House Walk.
- July: Parish Council meeting held *via* Zoom; 'The Ship' re-opens for socially distanced dining; online Flower Show and scarecrow exhibition.
- August: visit of Sizewell C information bus; death of David Hoult.
- September: new route 78 bus service from Levington to Ipswich starts.
- October: village litter pick; reduction of 'High Trees' beech due to fungal infestation.
- November: due to latest lockdown 'The Ship' closes once more; socially distanced Remembrance Day service takes place around war memorial; Eastern Structures planning application lodged with East Suffolk Council.
- December: snow fell early in the month but did not lay; online village meeting regarding Eastern Structures planning application; 'inside out' Christmas at St. Peter's church.
- January: water leak under lay-by opposite Alms Houses; online village meeting regarding 'Quiet Lanes'.
- February: storm 'Darcy' leads to snowy conditions; death of Barrie Hawtin.
- March: funeral of Barrie Hawtin; death and funeral of Nicky Yeo; well attended village litter pick.

What has the Village Recorder been doing?

During the period from May 2019 to March 2021, I have carried out the following:

- maintained the village diary;
- made daily weather observations (temperature, precipitation, wind speed and direction, snow depth, general observations);
- taken photographic images around the village;
- received and stored items for the village archives;
- kept an eye on various online auction sites for items relating to Levington and Stratton Hall;
- produced weather graphs and information for the annual Levington Film Show;
- started cataloguing the village archive;
- prepared displays for the 65th Levington Flower Show;
- carried out research and prepared displays for the VE75 exhibition;
- written a yearly report for the Village Recorder scheme;
- submitted a report to the Suffolk Local History Council regarding life in Levington and Stratton Hall during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With regard to the cataloguing of the village archive, I have dealt with the Parish Magazine, the Parish Council Newsletter, and have begun going through the previous Recorder's (Derek Girling) photographic prints. This work will continue, but will mean that I have less time to spend on researching village history.

Future plans:

At the moment it's quite difficult to make any firm future plans regarding exhibitions and events. It is hoped that what would have been the VE75 exhibition may take place later this year. However, this depends on the state of pandemic restrictions, and safety aspects of having potentially lots of people in close proximity in the village hall. I understand that the flower show has been tentatively scheduled for the 21st of August. If this goes ahead, then I hope to be able to display some information regarding past shows.

One task that can continue regardless of pandemic restrictions is that of cataloguing the village archive. It is now clear to me that any type of digital solution is fraught with problems. Issues regarding storage methods, their longevity and compatibility are difficult to resolve (remember the BBC Domesday 1986 project with the Laserdiscs). Online storage means either having a village archive server and large amounts of storage, or paying to use an online service which could disappear without warning taking all the data with it. As things stand I do not favour either of these solutions.

Limited numbers of documents and photographic images will need to be scanned, in order to preserve the originals. However, mass scanning of everything is not desirable due to the amount of storage space required, the associated costs, and the projected lifespan of any type of digital storage. At the moment, what I intend to do is to create a catalogue so that the contents of the village archive are known. This will obviously require an amount of categorisation into various subject areas or themes, which will come to the fore as I sort through the archive. Once this is done (it will not be a fast process) I will be better placed to explore the options regarding access to the archive, should anyone wish to carry out research into village history.

Concluding comments:

I have no need to dwell upon what has happened to us during the various lockdowns and restrictions put in place by the Government, as part of their response to the pandemic. Each one of us has had limitations put upon our lives that we probably thought would never happen. Whether life will ever fully return to pre-pandemic conditions is impossible to ascertain at the present time. It is likely that we will all have to decide how we want to live our lives within the parameters of the 'new normal' (whatever that turns out to be).

Louise Mann 1st April 2021.