

THE VILLAGE ECHO

*The News Letter of The Pavey Group
Of the village of Charmouth*

Newsletter No2

February 2000

TO BEGIN WITH....

I think it's still early enough in the year to wish everyone a happy and healthy remaining eleven months. Time does fly. What with Christmas, New Year, indigestion and influenza, it only seems a few weeks since we last met. Now our next meeting is due on 24th February at 7.30 at the Elms. One of the more important tasks is to find out just how many folk are behind the project as we have to come up with a firm membership list. To that end, Keith Wiscombe has given his time most generously to knock on all the doors to deliver your copy of the Village Echo and the agenda for the General Meeting. We hope you can make it.

I should point out that the 24th February is not an open meeting. It is still for the "core group" of Charmuthians - the old village families. If you've received the first issue of the Village Echo and the other publicity so far, then you are on the list. There is nothing secretive or exclusive about the meeting or our organisation. The committee want to be sure that we have all the traditional families on board before the Pavey Group is opened to anyone who has an interest and is prepared to contribute to reclaiming the village's lost past. Please let this fact be known, some folk might not appreciate the situation.

**The date of the next Pavey Group General Meeting is on
Thursday 24th February at 7.30pm at The Elms**

Theme : "The War Years"



PROGRESS!

The most obvious signs of progress are Roy Aldworth's efforts in the Pavey Room. There are only a few pictures to be hung, then we are done. You should see the curtains! The room is a monument to Roy's industry and enthusiasm. I doubt if we could ever have achieved so much without his efforts. Well done Roy and thank you so very much.

Most of the equipment that we requested from the Help The Aged Grant is now bought. The furniture is in place; cupboards and display cases gleam. The Parish has fitted a new window, then there's Roy's curtains. All of the computer stuff is now complete and functional. We now have a scanner that will enable photographs to be copied for the records and for the originals to be returned.

A less glamorous aspect of the progress to date has been the paperwork. Correspondence is constant, applications for more support to many agencies have been made and then progress reports seem endless. Applications for funding have been sent to any organisation that looks as though they have a few bob for old folk. I am going to apply for knee-pad money for all this begging. It's not the greatest fun but at least it improves the spelling.

Your committee is highly functional; we've had several meetings to date. Pauline Hayter has compiled a comprehensive shopping list for office papery goods, Jill Matthews has helped with extremely tedious copying. Sarah Edwards is drawing up a constitution for the Pavey Group and Keith Wiscombe has been on his walk about. Thank you all!

At the time of writing, the second edition of the Echo is being compiled. On my computer there are two articles on the stuff you are reading at the moment. There is an article from Malcolm Bowditch and another of mine. I have a bit of guilt in that mine is longer than I'd wished, it had originally been the basis of two articles, but because of deadlines. I had to fill the space. You will read between the lines here and realise that I am asking for reports, biographies, anecdotes, articles etc. I would really appreciate your input, as you are the source of your history. If you have only a little information on any aspect of village history, please let me know and I would be very pleased

to help with any research that might be needed. Here's an example, what about the "*The Whittington School*"? This would make an excellent article. Those who attended the school will have recall of the sisters and of a kind of school that no longer exists. What was it like? Who was in the class with you? Tell about ink-wells, or slates, of school dress, of school fees, of discipline and in what form. Also any anecdotal tale of the sisters or of your peers, would be a fascinating prospect. For those who attended the school, it would not be too hard to scribble down a few memories, arrange a meeting to gather the strands and produce a collective article for the May edition of the Village Echo. I've already done a bit of groundwork - on the building at least. I have met the present owner of the Limes/Charmouth Lodge who kindly showed me over the building and allowed me to copy the old plans and the newspaper reports of the resident ghost. (How's that for yet another project - The Ghosts of Old Charmouth). I am about to write to the nephew of the sisters who is believed to be the last of the Whittington line. It would be interesting to find the true story.

HELP WANTED

Now that the Pavey Room is fitted out and most of the organisational business is done, we enter a new phase of "busy work." We would be very pleased to have help on a variety of small tasks. The greatest time-consumer is in delivering things. The next time we have to deliver paper stuff, we would be most grateful if a couple of kind souls could give us a hand. The task will not be great. just to post a few bits of paper near your home. It will really help.

Another need in the near future will be for help in the Pavey Room. The demands will be for really "high tech" labour. It will involve labelling, listing, copying, folding, filing, and finding papers and re-losing them. If anyone has such talent it would be of great help.

Yet another request will be for volunteers to help in preparing fund-raising projects in the Pavey Room. This will not begin until after the February meeting however. A notice will be circulated nearer the time.

MEMORABILIA

Now that the Pavey Room is approaching its opening day, we have to ask yet another favour. So far, most of our records are in the form of photographs and papers. So I am about to ask, with infinite tact, if anyone has any historical items that they would allow to be displayed in the Pavey Room? We would ensure the safety of any item, lent or donated. You could make any condition for the loan that you might prefer. The item could be for “temporary display,” “short term loan”, “permanent loan” or simply as a donation.

Loan articles that are to be displayed will acknowledge the lender. Having made such a delicate request, I have to qualify it immediately; we would need smaller items please, as there is the size of the room and the display cases to consider. The committee was very quick to react on your behalf when I offered to donate my Ojibwa snowshoes and my mother's old flat iron. Their response was that such Canadian ethnic footwear would be of too great a size and of too little relevance in downtown Charmouth. The same attitude prevailed regarding my old mum's iron, the qualification being that it was a Hampshire flat iron.

If there were to be any questions regarding the suitability of an item, then please ask. It is an important request - we need more items to keep the two stone axes company in the display case.

In closing I would like to restate the importance of the February 24th meeting. The future of the project depends upon your support. The greater the number of members, the greater contribution to the village and its future. In May we introduce our own millennium project to the public. Our future is geared to that date.

FOR THE FUTURE

- If you have additional information on any aspect of the Charmouth Battery article please let me know.
- If there are errors within any article that appears in The Village Echo, please let me know.
- Remember, we are trying to recover the past. New information, negative or positive, will be very welcome. Put the information on a bit of paper and put it through my door or leave it at The Elms. It will be recorded and put on file as reference for the next time the subject arises.

SOURCES.

It is always nice to know where the author's information came from. (It is insisted upon in academic writings.) However, in our little Newsletter it would occupy too much space. If you want to know the sources of information for this issue I will be pleased to provide them.

THE PAVEY GROUP

The following members were elected to form the administration of The Pavey Group for the year 1999 - 2000 at the September meeting.

Chairman: Peter M Press.

Treasurer: Pat Stapleton.

Secretary: Pauline Hayter.

Clerk of the Works: Roy Aldworth

The Committee: Sarah Edwards, Martin Farrant, Pal Hansford. Jill Matthews, Keith Wiscombe.

The Committee is empowered to co-opt members for special roles when necessary.

The Charmouth Battery

A century ago the mighty Char wove a far different course on its way to the sea than it does today. From old maps and photographs, it can be seen that the shape of the estuary has undergone dramatic changes over the last hundred years. A century ago the river cut a sharp westerly meander just south of the modern footbridge. In doing so it cut a course across what is now the gravel car park, through the marsh, then taking a tight, 180 degree hairpin in front of the Old Cement Factory before sweeping away to the east. It ran parallel with the tide-line for over 200 metres before flowing into the bay. The reason for this remarkable change of direction is that Lower Sea Lane is on a fault line and the strata, being of resistant lias beds, caused the river to find an easier course and that involved flowing almost back on itself quite dramatically. The 1903 wall map in the Paveway Room (see map) illustrates the river's change of course as do the photographs 1 and 2. No 1 is taken at the factory looking east and No 2 is from the east looking back towards the factory. There is no doubt that the estuary would have been modified every winter by SE and SW gales but there is much evidence to show that the great meander persisted for nearly two centuries and perhaps even longer.



Photo 1

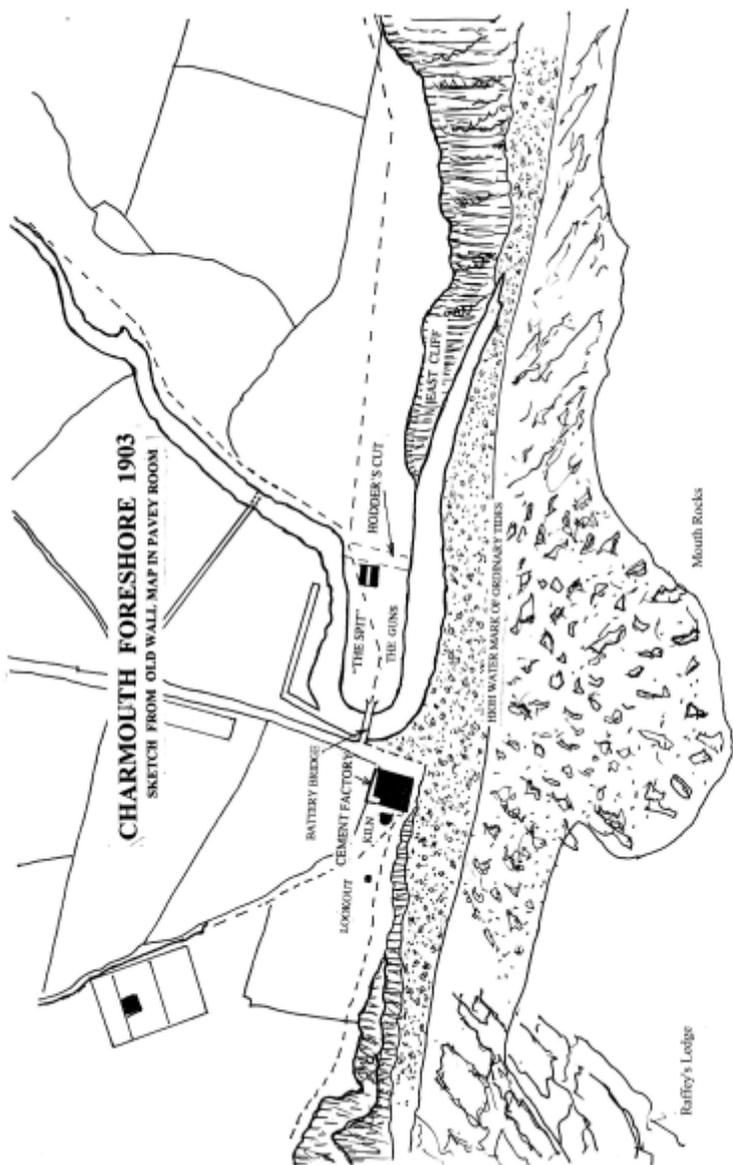




Photo 2 Looking West



Photo 3 Battery Field

The point of this introduction is to try to recreate a picture of the Charmouth foreshore as it was before the river was cut to follow its present course. From the map, you will notice that within the tight loop of river, a narrow spit was created. It extended from the foot of the East Cliff on Stonebarrow side, right across the estuary to Lower Sea Lane just outside the factory. There was a bridge over the river onto the spit by the north end of the factory, called the Battery Bridge. This gave access to the spit. It seems to have been a popular recreational area for "taking the sea air" and for family picnics a century ago. The position of Charmouth's Jubilee shelter can be seen. The shelter was built upon the site of the magazine for the guns in 1897, celebrating the 60th year of Queen Victoria's reign. An appreciation of the size of the field can be seen in Photo No.3 where a family, all in their "Sunday Best" are enjoying a pleasant day at the beach. There is an element that disturbs this idyllic scene however, it's those guns.

For nearly a thousand years the English have had misgivings about their neighbours across the channel. There have been grounds. The term "The French Scare" was a constantly recurring theme in our history. Long after the great victories over Napoleonic France the apprehension remained. Palmerston fortified Portsmouth and Plymouth from attack from the land. Who else could pose such a threat? By 1859 the antics of Napoleon III. Prussian ambition. the mounting threat of the industrial might of continental powers and their quests for empire, were examples of the perceived threat. This scare led to a massive defensive programme that echoed throughout the Empire. In Britain the immediate concern was to raise men and provide coastal defences. It even reached Charmouth. In 1859 the government authorised the formation of volunteer corps throughout the country. The Charmouth lads were ready. Pavey reports that the first official record of the Charmouth battery was in 1866 and refers to the formation of the 5th Charmouth (battery) of the 1st Dorset Artillery Corps, Royal Garrison Artillery. The battery was to last for thirty years and over that time was to drill and practice assiduously even though they rarely had a professional commanding officer.

The 1860s was a period of revolutionary technological change that had a profound impact on the business of war. It was a time of the Royal Navy's abandonment of wood and sail for the construction of steam and iron warships. Britain was the first in this great race. However the British, were less forward looking in the great changes that were occurring in the matter of firearms. But the Admiralty, was composed of officers of the Nelsonian Age. If it was good enough for Lord Nelson ...

It took a very long time to make up their mind about the Armstrong gun. This weapon had the advantage of being a breach-loading, rifled-barrelled quick-firing weapon, that fired exploding shells. But the conviction persisted that muzzle loading weapons were superior. This was perhaps due in part to some teething problems with the Armstrong gun, but it was more likely to have been that the Admiralty, being composed of officers of the Nelsonian Age, were secure in what they knew.

There was no shortage of guns. There was an enormous stock pile of old muzzle loaders from decommissioned ships left over since Trafalgar. The 32 pounder for example, was a muzzle-loading smooth-bore cannon, that could throw a cannon ball of that weight for about three miles. (The poundage was the weight of the shot). It had been the standard heavy gun in the Royal Navy since the Seven Years War. In 1863, a Major William Palliser invented a method of converting the old smooth bore muzzle loaders into a far more efficient weapon with greatly improved range, accuracy and projectile weight. The conversion was also cheap. It earned the major a knighthood. The procedure was simple enough, the cannons were drilled out to accept a wrought iron. rifled sleeve. All that was then required was for a heavy gunpowder charge to be fired which effectively jammed the sleeve within the cannon barrel. This innovation allowed for a 100% increase in the weight of the projectile. The old 32pdr became a 64pdr, the projectile was now a



Photo 4 The Championship Crew

Pointed, explosive iron cylinder - a shell. The projectile had leaden lugs on the casing or was sheathed in lead to pick up the helical groove of the rifling. Upon the charge being fired, the grooves provided the shell with a spinning action that allowed for far greater range, accuracy and penetrative power. This development had an even greater virtue in that it was cheap. However, it was still a muzzle-loading weapon.

Our battery comprised one 32pdr and two 24pdr guns. The gun in photo 4 is a Palliser conversion of the old 32pdr, the largest of the Charmouth battery's guns. It shows the volunteer gun crew following their victory, at the annual competition of 1891. The gun is mounted upon a military carriage, this was identical to the mounting of ship's guns, the only difference being that "our gun" is the military version, having iron wheels. It was also equipped with yet another bit of advanced technology, the "Allen Brake". This was a chock or wedge fixed behind the front wheels. It was a simple and suitably cheap means of reducing what must have been a massive recoil of the gun when fired. Alongside the gun are the 'Side Arms' for a 64pdr. From left to right are the worm, the rammer, sponge and wooden bucket. The two men on the right of the gun are posing with one of the oldest tools in the history of armies - the handspike. These were 8ft ash poles that were put to every conceivable use. Their application in the photograph is obvious. Keith Waterson found the last of these great ash poles in the village some years ago. He gave it to Roger Dodd, the proprietor of the antique shop at the east end of the Street. Roger in turn presented it to the Pavey Collection at the Elms where it is on display.

Mr Pavey tells a story recalled by the son of another of Charmouth's successful business men William Holly. He was the owner of the Axminster bus and it was he who carted the three cannon from Axminster Station in 1886. The term "horse power" is used completely out of context nowadays. Few people appreciate the literal meaning of the term. When one considers that each gun, weighing five tons, was slung under a timber carriage and hauled by a team of horses along the six hilly miles from Axminster to Charmouth beach it gives a far clearer impression of the true meaning of the term.

It is known that exercises and gun drill were taken very seriously. The success of the battery is born out by the 1891 competition at Swanage. The story is that the floating barrel targets were blown apart, with the Charmouth team scoring 45 out of a possible 46 points, thereby winning the competition. The trophy is proudly displayed in front of the gun. The Volunteers were smartly turned out; a drill hall was built and an excellent band was formed.

It all came to an end in 1896 when the government came to the conclusion that the Marshwood Vale no longer needed defending, so the battery was disbanded. The guns remained on the battery spit mellowing with rust for several years. The history of the Charmouth volunteers is another subject for another day.

There is a post script to "our dav, in the front line" however. In 1904 there are a number of cryptic entries in the Charmouth Parish Minutes that are just sufficient to cast light on other great changes that were about to occur. Under the heading RIVER CHAR the following entries are to be noted:

In 1903-1904 the subject of the diversion of the river first appears in the council proceedings. There is a file of correspondence addressing the possibility of a diversion of the "River Char" in order to prevent damage to Lower Sea Lane. There is correspondence between the parish and Alfred Capper Pass Esq., of Wootton Fitzpaine whose land it was. His estate included the Char estuary and the beach from Black Ven to a point on the east beach below Cain's Folly. There was a matter of a "right of way" that was to be resolved by a deed of covenant, whereby Mrs Maria Martha Schalk,



Photo 5 Estuary after the cut. From Stonebarrow

On whose land the Battery Bridge was located, "agrees not to interfere with the diverted course of the river." Finally a figure of £92. 12. 0 was recorded. in the minutes for the actual diversion of the river. John Hodder a general contractor was named in association with this entry, so it can be assumed that he undertook the task. All the business and the actual cutting of the new course of the river were evidently accomplished in the one year.

The logic of John Hodder's cut can be seen from the gravel car park looking across the river to the east bank. He cut through the easterly neck of the spit at the base of the East Cliff. The land is perceptively higher on the far side and it cuts through well-bedded material as distinct from the alluvium and beach material of the actual estuary. By this means a straight north/south river course was achieved. He did a good job.

But the Battery Spit was cut off. As a result it was only a matter of time before wind and tide swept away the protecting seaward shingle bank of the old river course. It would not have taken long for the battery field to be transformed into the unstable shingle bank that exists to this day. The undated photo 5 shows this transition. The new course flows directly south. (There are indicators the river would still have liked to flow to the east). The really significant observation from this photo is that the old course of the river can still be seen quite clearly. It illustrates perfectly how the old course helped to maintain a massive shingle bank on the seaward side, large enough to provide a defence of the estuary. Inevitably it is all gone - the bridge, the field, the band-stand, (wherever that was), the Jubilee Shelter, the magazine --- and the guns.

What of the guns? Well, I have it from an unimpeachable source, or at least up to this time it has been a dependable one, that the guns are still there. They rest in a place where they still defend the Charmouth foreshore, if not from the French, then as a bulwark against a far greater threat -- the elements. They are under the parish car park just outside the Heritage Centre.

Peter M. Press

THE DANCING BEARS

The illustration is a reproduction of a colour washed, pen and ink sketch of a performing bear and its handler. The sketch was made and signed by A. D. Pass in 1901 and the original spent much of its life on a wall in the public bar of the New Inn at Charmouth. The picture eventually passed into my possession when Maisie Marshall finally left and the pub was closed in the eighties.

A.D. Pass was almost certainly Alfred Douglas Pass, son of Alfred Capper Pass who purchased the manor at Wootton Fitzpaine at the turn of the century. A.D. Pass subsequently succeeded his father as Squire of Wootton. His wife, Katherine Olive Pass, was a founder member of the Charmouth Women's Institute in 1917 and famous throughout world needlework circles for her skills and book on Dorset Feather Stitchery. Olive Pass was a remarkable woman in many ways and did much to help wives and families of British prisoners of war in World War I and Belgian refugees billeted in the area. In World War II she was billeting officer for the district and took six families into her own home, some of who returned subsequently to visit her over a number of years. Although living in Wootton as the Squire's wife, she had a sister, Mrs Gaynor, who lived for many years in 'The Dolphin House' immediately west of The Stone House on the north side of The Street almost opposite 'Charmouth House'. Mrs Pass died in 1973, surviving her husband who died in 1970 by some three years.

Curiously, it was quite some time after I had acquired the little sketch that I came upon the pamphlet, "A few things that we can remember when we were young" - Reminiscences of Charmouth in the 1880's and early 1890's by two residents who remember those days". The residents concerned were Reggie Pavey, our famous local historian after whom our Group is named, and another well known Charmouth character, Annie Pidgeon. Featured amongst these recollections was a brief reference to dancing bears. Their conversation went like this:

R.P. `Then the Russian Bears. Do you remember them?

A.P, `Yes. I never liked them. They were muzzled and made to dance up the Street and then on to Lyme. I didn't like to go there for a few days, as I always thought they might be in the pine trees on Timber Hill.'

That was all there was but it was pleasing to find evidence of dancing bears in Charmouth appearing in print and thus strengthening the circumstantial evidence that the Pass sketch was made in Charmouth - or after seeing bears in Charmouth.

Malcolm Bowditch



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The Pavey Group
Peter M. Press February 2000
Design and print by Peter Miles
The Queens Armes Hotel