

Restoration of 'The Stockwell' in Chearsley Village



[Postcard showing 'The Stockwell' c.1925]

Background:

Following the opening of the new Village Hall in the spring of 2018, Chearsley Parish Council (CPC) identified a role in sponsoring initiatives to reconnect our community with its village heritage.

These included the restoration of 'The Stockwell' area, as well as other possible events and activities celebrating other traditional areas of village life – for example, a 'Chearsley School Reunion Party', a 'Chearsley Pub Revival Day' and celebration of the centenary of the formation of Chearsley Cricket Club in 1922.

'The Stockwell'

'The Stockwell' (also known as 'Cherdsley Well') in Church Lane is a site of major historical significance in the village.

The 'holy well' or sacred spring, located close to St Nicholas Church, was visited by religious pilgrims in early medieval years.

In his book 'Chearsley – Living Through History', author Ted Hooton's research revealed that, in 1538, during the years of The Reformation, King Henry V111 dissolved Notley Abbey and its valuables and possessions were gifted to Christ Church Oxford. This royal largesse included our village 'parsonage' and 'Cherdsley-well'.

The date of construction of the original 'stone bath' with a pump, which is fed by waters from a spring located on higher ground, is not known, but the structure has benefitted from some restoration works over the years.

Currently the infrastructure of The Stockwell - namely the pump and base, the upper reservoir and the pond itself with its retaining walls – has fallen into disrepair and has been overwhelmed by vegetation from the bank and the immediate vicinity. This significantly diminishes its appearance and indeed presents some safety risks to those visiting or inspecting the site more closely.



‘The Stockwell Restoration’ project:

Some months ago, a ‘project group’ was established to manage the ‘The Stockwell Restoration’.

The work of the group is led by Derek Allen, supported by Ian Houseman, John Cragg, John Lewis and John Howard.

The primary aim of the project is to restore the infrastructure of the pond and its supporting works and to manage the surrounding area, so that its historical significance can be properly celebrated by our local community and visitors to the site.

The work of the group covers several different areas – all essential to the overall success of the project.

These key areas have been identified as follows:

- 1. Clearing the bank of brambles and establishing a wild flower meadow bank**
- 2. Clearing the silt from of the Stockwell**
- 3. Clearing the ditch draining into the back of the Stockwell**
- 4. Restoring the brick work and concrete around the pump**
- 5. Laying kerbing in Church Lane**
- 6. Restoration of the pump**
- 7. Historical research**

The following paragraphs give more details of each area of activity, including a brief progress report.

1. Clearing the bank of brambles and establishing a ‘wildflower meadow’ bank

Ian Houseman has undertaken an environmental survey of the bank and it is an ideal site for a ‘wildflower meadow’ in the village.

The brambles will be cleared, turf laid with wildflowers and gabions (cages holding stones) will be set along the back of the pond to hold back the soil. The ‘Vegetation Plan’ will conform to good environmental practice and Ian is happy to share details with any interested parties

2. Clearing the silt from of the Stockwell

The removal of silt from the pond will involve a suction lorry to be provided by Buckinghamshire Council or an appointed contractor.

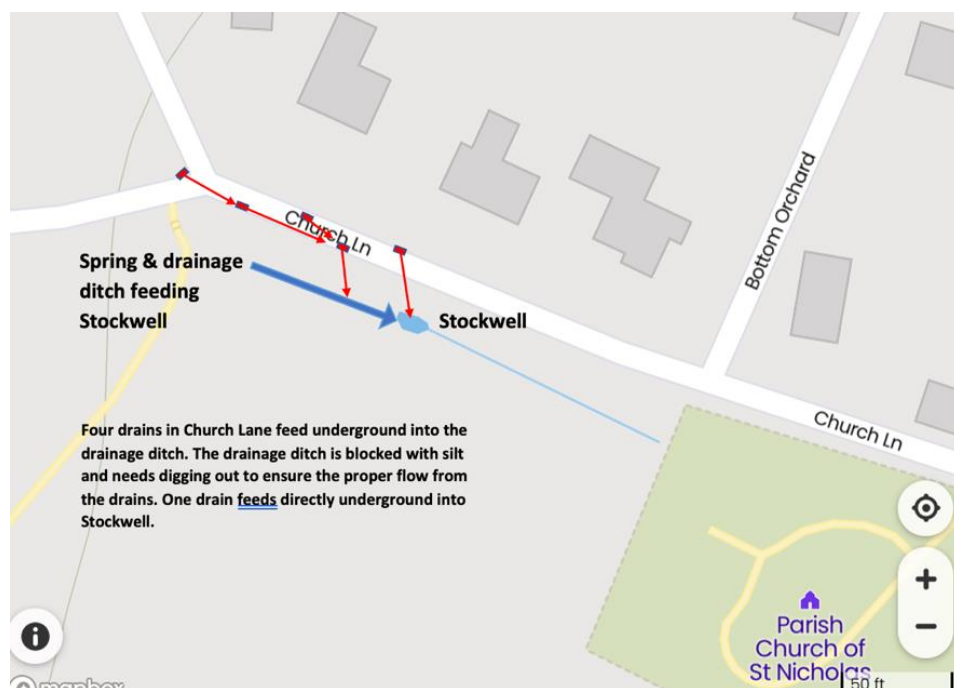
Plants will be removed from the Stockwell before clearance takes place and will be re-planted when the work is complete.

3. Clearing the ditch draining into the back of the Stockwell

Buckinghamshire Council, who have responsibility for clearance of blocked drains and their ongoing maintenance, has committed to undertaking this package of work in the months ahead.

A digger will be used to clear the ditch so that water from the drains in Church Lane flow freely into the Stockwell as intended.

Lack of regular maintenance has meant that the intended drainage and run-off of water at the lower end of Church Lane has not happened for very many years and, as local residents are aware, this has resulted in a build up of silt on the road surface and edges through the winter months.



4. Restoring the brick work and concrete around the pump

Derek Allen has been in discussions and negotiation with several contractors and surveyors to ensure that an optimum solution is found to achieve the desired outcomes.

The appointed contractor will carry out the following works:

- a) Repair the concrete slab to the left of the pump and replacing the manhole cover.
- b) Repair the brick work holding up the slab.
- c) Repair the perimeter of the Stockwell that has been damaged in several places.
- d) Repair the top brick work in the underground reservoir.



5. Laying kerbing in Church Lane

This will take place later in the 2021 and new kerbing will be laid at the foot of the bank opposite Bottom Orchard up to the junction with Shupps Lane.

As many will know, this bank has suffered extensive damage from larger vehicles over very many years, especially during the winter months.

All the works described in Para's 1 – 5 will involve some temporary disruption to normal traffic flows in Church Lane. This applies in particular to the use of a suction lorry removing silt from the pond. CPC plan to give adequate notice to all residents of both the dates and the extent of works being undertaken and will work with the contractors involved to ensure that any disruption to normal traffic flows is kept to a minimum

6. Restoration of the pump

The group now have in its possession what is believed to be an earlier pump used at The Stockwell. This follows its discovery in the gardens of a property recently purchased by Chearsley resident, Ian Alamghir.

When it has been restored, It is hoped that this will replace the existing pump, which was a relatively recent addition to the site some 15 years ago

Markings on the pump suggest it was manufactured by a traditional supplier of antique pumps, Joseph Evans & Sons of Wolverhampton, who had been producing pumps since 1810 until the business was sold during the 1960s. Further research on the date and origins of the pump is being undertaken.



7. Historical research

John Cragg and John Howard are undertaking additional historical research to add to the information carried in Ted Hooton's book. This will include information on the site itself as well as the role of 'holy wells' in early medieval times in general, with their purported 'miraculous' experiences for visiting pilgrims.

The research will also include interviews with older members of our community who still have clear memories of obtaining supplies of fresh water from The Stockwell pump as recently as the early 1960s, before a mains water supply was available to all homes in the village.

Project Funding:

At this stage, detailed schedule of costs is being prepared for the various areas of the project.

An application for support funding has already been submitted to the 'Haddenham & Waddesdon Community Board – Community Area Priorities Fund' and a response is expected shortly.

It is inevitable that some project funding will be required from CPC. This will be properly debated by councillors as the project progresses.

It is intended to keep the requirement for CPC funding as reasonable as possible by ensuring that competitive quotes are obtained for all significant areas of works undertaken, seeking additional funding from external sources and using local volunteers where appropriate.

The Future:

It is hoped that the completion of the restoration works at The Stockwell will lead to other 'Historical Chearsley' projects, which will enable the establishment of a 'heritage trail' through the village, with significant educational benefits both for our own community and other interested parties – for example, local schools and other academic interests.

A Chearsley Village Historical Society has already been registered with the Buckinghamshire Council Heritage Portal and plans to establish a regular programme of meetings for all interested parties within our village.

For more information, please contact:

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A copy of 'Cheersley – Living Through History' by Ted Hooton can be downloaded from the homepage of Cheersley BlogSpot - <https://cheersley.blogspot.com/>

