

It has been a while since the first TCHT Newsletter and for that I would ask you reader to forgive me. Last year seemed to slip by in a series of torrential storms and accompanying floods. In the 25 years that I have lived on the hill I have never seen the extremes of weather that I have in the last few years. Our brook-side cottage has seen 5 flood events in the last two years. The damage limited to driveways and garden, others I know have not been so fortunate, Increasingly it seems that climate change is beginning to impact even on our remote hill. However though not as visible in 2008 as in 2007 TCHT has survived and pressed forward. For that the trustees must thank all of those individuals who have generously given their time and energy.

TCHT was created in 2006 following a conversation between two enthusiasts for the rich heritage of Clee, Alf Jenkins, born on the hill and Glynn Barratt, a newcomer of 25 years. Alf and Glynn shared a vision for the future of the Hill and with a small grant from the District Council they set up the registered charity of TCHT recruiting along the way John Hughes and Margorie Hammond as fellow trustees. The aims of the Trust being to:

Research, record and protect the archaeological and cultural heritage of Titterstone Clee Hill for the benefit of future generations.

Conserve and enhance the environmental and ecological heritage of Titterstone Clee Hill for the benefit of future Generations.

Encourage the Local Community to proudly appreciate and respect the heritage of Titterstone Clee Hill and become involved in future Heritage Projects.

Make known and promote the Heritage of Titterstone Clee Hill to the General Public.

TCHT TIMELINE:

- October 2006 TCHT registered as a charitable trust
- Spring 2007 TCHT committee established
- Summer of 2007, series of guided walks around the hill
- Community meetings at Knowbury and Clee Hill Village Halls
- October 2007 Mahorall Farm Autumn Fayre run by Trust
- November 2007 community seminar in collaboration with Ironbridge Institute
- Spring 2008 'Big Lottery' Awards For All grant for Oral History of Hill
- Summer 2008, collaboration with Bitterley School in archaeological Investigation of Horse Hide Field, Medieval landscape
- Summer 2008, District Council Grant towards Novers Project
- Winter 2008 completion of Oral History Project
- Winter 2008 launch of TCHT website (www.thecleehilltrust.co.uk)
- July 2009 creation of TCHT Management Committee
- Spring 2009 community meetings at Bitterley and Doddington Village Halls
- May 2009 Trust Office at The Broadspace Rooms Clee Hill Village established.
- May Benson Brook Hydroelectric dam volunteer work group, tree clearance.
- May TCHT initiated trans-national co-operation between schools in Slovenia with the local schools at Bitterley and Hopton.

I hope dear reader that you will agree that TCHT has in the short time it has existed achieved something tangible for what is a small and still young organisation.

THE ORAL HISTORY 2007-2008:

TCHT was created out of a concern to conserve and promote the rich and diverse landscape of Titterstone Cleve. It has also been very much a part of TCHT thinking from the start to look forward to the future sustainability of the communities on the hill as we move into what seems an increasingly uncertain future. The past experience and expertise of earlier generations, coping with often arduous conditions, is a valuable knowledge base to inform the future. It was in the belief that this resource was a very finite one, that the first major project undertaken by TCHT was an 'Oral History', to capture the memories of older community members. The Trust applied to 'The Big Lottery' 'Awards for All' scheme for the funds to undertake the 'Oral History' and was awarded £8,264. The work was undertaken by Alf Jenkins and John Hughes, both of whom had considerable experience in such work, and perhaps more importantly were individuals known and trusted within the hill communities.

TCHT is greatly indebted to Alf and John who spent many long hours through 2008 interviewing and recording over 50 senior residents from Dhustone, Clee Hill, Bitterley, Bedlam, Knowbury, Fardon, Corely, Doddington, Cleeton, Farlow and Oretton. Once collected this information was transcribed, for which work TCHT thanks Jenny Bradford and Judith Prosser. John worked long hours into many nights editing the video material. The project was completed by October 6th 2008 and a series of DVDs and CDs produced. These are available from newsagents and bookshops around the hill at a price of £12 per set.

The TCHT Management Committee would like to thank Alf and John for all their work, Judith and Jenny, Marina, Stella and Ann among many others for their help and support. Also the members of the AONB who kindly gave their support in the early planning of the project, HLF for funding it and last but not least all of the individuals who very kindly shared their memories with TCHT and through us with future generations on the Hill.

BITTERLEY SCHOOL BATS

A second much smaller collaborative project, not funded but powered by the enthusiasm of June Buckard and the Children of Bitterley School was the 2008 work of BATS (Bitterley Archaeological Team). In the Spring and summer of 2008 they undertook a small archaeological project to investigate Horse Hide Field at Middleton, below the western side of Titterstone. I was fortunate enough to be able to help out a little with advice. But all of the work evidenced in the recent excellent display in Ludlow Library and at the TCHT community event at Bitterley Village hall, was the work of the students and June. They plan to continue the investigation of this medieval ridge and furrow open field system this year. Hopefully assisted a little by the Wolverhampton Archaeological Group (WAG) who plan a little geophysical survey. So watch out Time Team BATS are coming.



Members of BAT excavating a possible wall



The BAT Horse Hide Field Exhibition

The two projects outlined above reach across generations *'Going Past to the Future'*. A theme which underpins all of TCHT's work. That future is one of increasing uncertainty for rural communities in a world where change is accelerating.

We are constantly bombarded with news of carbon driven climate change, economic collapse and future fuel shortages. Some of you may have seen the recent thought provoking BBC2 documentary *'A Farm For The Future'*. This programme, a study of the return of Rebecca Hoskins to her family farm in Devon presented several very inconvenient facts.

Fundamentally that our post war dependence on oil for food production is such that it requires “10 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce a single calory of food”. **While such statistics must be treated with caution**, it is indisputable that our reliance on oil does present a very real problem as we approach ‘Peak Oil’. This is the moment when we meet maximum oil production, after which the resource will decline. Today we are using four barrels of oil for every one discovered. Rebecca continued to quote the International Energy Agency: “The threat to the world’s energy security, especially on oil and gas will reach serious dimensions in the next ten years”. It is not hard to imagine what effect a falling availability of fuel will have on our small rural communities over what is an alarmingly short period of time

The above does not make for easy reading but to be warned is to be prepared. From a positive perspective such problems can present opportunities. Anyone driving through Cleobury today cannot help but notice the large wind generator slowly turning over Hobson’s Brewery. Some may see it as a blot on the landscape. I prefer to see it as a symbol of hope for a future of small scale renewable energy production in our rural world. Titterstone Cleve has been in the past at the fore of renewable energy with two hydro electric generating plants, one of which survives today largely intact.

THE BENSON BROOK HYDRO-ELECTRIC DAM

Titterstone Cleve has a history which includes not only the iron, coal and stone of the industrial revolution but also, hidden away in the bluebell lined valley of Benson’s Brook, one of the earliest ‘clean energy’ hydro-electric generating schemes in the world. A low volume, high head system, the complex was built sometime between 1881 and 1885, making it one of the earliest such schemes in the country and possibly in the world. Today it survives largely intact providing a wonderful example of a small scale hydro-electric generating scheme. Built by John Mackay junior to supply power to the Titterstone Quarry, it seems possible that he conceived the idea while studying at Edinburgh University in the late 1800s and initiated the scheme on his return.



The Benson Brook Hydro Dam

This hydro-electric complex was certainly in the fore of this expanding industry and as such is an extremely valuable monument of its period. Its isolation has meant that it has survived largely intact and in an excellent state of preservation. The dam itself is built with a concrete core faced on both sides with basalt (dhustone) sett walls.

Constructed across the deep valley of Benson's Brook with a total length of 53.5m. The dam wall is a substantial structure 0.9m thick standing to a height of 7.2m above the stream bed. Central along the dam is an overflow sluice. This would have had a wooden sluice gate, the control mechanism for which remains in situ. Towards the dam base is a small drainage sluice, now blocked by silt. Below the dam the stream sides are revetted against erosion, again using dhustone setts and the cast iron water pipe supplying water to the turbines (*the penstock*) survives intact from the dam down to Bitterley Junction, where it crosses the stream supported on stone pillars.



Penstock crossing the brook at Bitterley Junction and inset water still flowing

Up until the mid 1970s the reservoir was water filled, creating a rich habitat for a wide range of plants and water creatures, including a healthy population of brown trout and kingfishers. Both species are now rare on the hill streams. Today the pond is completely silted and only the odd clump of kingcups and a blank 'No Fishing' sign testify to its former wealth and beauty.

In the Spring of 2009 a small group of volunteers from TCHT spent a day clearing young trees from the face of the dam, where they were causing damage to the inner face of the dhustone wall. It is hoped and planned that this is the first step in a project to protect and enhance this important survival of former days. Perhaps also this innovative use of water to provide power can point the way forward towards future use of such technology.



Tree damage to dam wall



TCHT volunteers removing samplings from dam

For a more detailed description of the Benson Brook Hydro scheme see the www.thecleehilltrust.co.uk

TCHT website (www.thecleehilltrust.co.uk)

The TCHT web site was created by Bob Scott a member of the TCHT management committee during 2008 and it is planned to develop this site as the principal source of information relating to the hill. It will also provide a means for schools upon the hill to participate in cultural exchange with partner schools in Slovenia. This embryonic trans-national co-operation at grass roots level will be a subject for a grant bid to the recently launched South Shropshire LEADER European grant scheme administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB.

FUTURE EVENTS

The Trust plans a series of events through 2009, culminating in a second Autumn Fayre in the latter part of the year. The first such event at Mahorall Farm on the 20th of October 2007 was a very successful event. Many of you have expressed their enjoyment of this event and have asked the Trust to repeat it. **So watch out for it being advertised around the hill or check the web site for a list of future events.**

It only remains for me to sign off, both from this Newsletter and from the Hill. In company with many others I have become a victim of the economic recession and have had to look further afield for work. In my case further afield is the island of St Kilda in the Atlantic, beyond the Outer Hebrides. I join the National Trust for Scotland as archaeologist for the world heritage site of St Kilda. I hope to be able to return to our Hill sometime in the future. TCHT will continue in the capable hands of my fellow trustees and the Management Committee and I will continue to be involved, though rather more remotely. I hope to see you all at the Autumn Fayre, Glynn.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FRIENDS GROUP

TCHT Management Committee is very conscious that those Friends who made contributions to the Trust have received little in direct return. So a Free Quiz evening is being held at the Royal Oak on the evening of the 29th of May. You will have received invites to this event and we hope you can make it.

Purpose of Friends Group:-

- To encourage community commitment to and engagement in the achievement of Trust Aims.
- To provide support to Trust Projects, Activities and Events.

You can assist by choosing to be involved in:-

- Finding information/making comments on proposed Trust Projects.
- Suggesting and/or helping to identify Trust Projects.
- Providing Volunteer labour in the implementation of Trust Projects.

- Providing administrative and other support to the day-to-day operation of the Management Committee.
- Providing volunteer support to trust Events and Activities.
- Providing specialist support to Trust Projects, Events and Activities if you have particular knowledge, skills or expertise in relevant areas.

Membership of Friends Group :-

- Open to all.
- Annual membership.
- Two categories of membership - Single and Family.
- Annual Fee - £5 Single £10 Family

Benefits of Friends Group Membership:-

- Newsletter (minimum 2 per annum)
 - 50% discount on entry fees to Trust Events and Activities
 - Information on forthcoming Trust Events and Activities
 - Information on Trust Products
 - Invitation to Friends Events
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I/We wish to become (a) member(s) of “Friends of Titterstone Clee”

Name(s):.....

Address:

Telephone no:..... **Email:**.....

I enclose fee/wish to contribute the sum of £ **Date:**.....

Return to: TCHT, 22a, High St., Clee Hill, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 3LZ
Email: friends@thecleehilltrust