

Supporters' Newsletter - January 2014

We would like to thank you for registering to receive news about the Yard. It is our intention to issue newsletters on a quarterly basis and to include the programme of events so that you can plan your visits more easily.

We are also redesigning and improving the web site to provide yet more information.

Our First Full Year at Chedham's Yard

Re-opening Easter 2013 after the winter break when more renovation work had been made including changes to the garden area.

We faced many challenges not least being the pending loss of our full time Heritage Project Officer, Emma Banks, who had been working with the Trustees and volunteers for circa three years. We were fearful of her loss and how it was going to affect the smooth running of the Yard. Some discontinuity was expected but her role has been well filled by Debs Hext. Debs has picked up the reins and has become a significant member of the team.



The Visitor Centre

The team have been working hard all year to make the exhibits in the Yard more interesting and where possible to bring new exhibits into the complex including a two wheeled, horse drawn wooden farm cart.

We mounted an active advertising campaign during 2013 to spread the word and attract more visitors and during the year we have had a steady stream of people on Saturdays and a significant number of group visits during week days and in most respects, have met our expectations and targets. Some members of the team have also been involved in lecture events at various venues and clubs in the area taking some interesting artefacts to supplement the talks.

Despite the numbers of visitors the traffic disruption, feared by the residents of Church Walk, never materialised and the marshalling of the cars in Chestnut Square by the

Supporters' Newsletter - January 2014

Chedham's Yard volunteers directing visitor traffic to the lay-by at Mountford Sports Field, Loxley Close, avoided any congestion problems in the Square.

Throughout the year we had a series of special events when specific rural skills were demonstrated by blacksmiths, wood turners, wheelwrights, beekeepers plus other experts.

The Visitor Centre has been a great success serving tea, coffee & soft drinks plus a range of delicious, locally-made cakes. During the year we have increased the range of merchandise items – with a selected range of home-made preserves, chutneys & honey, information books and souvenirs at the Centre and we will be carrying more stock in 2014. We have already commissioned some specialist booklets for our third year of opening.

At our Victorian Christmas Day event on Saturday 14th December, there were chestnuts roasting on the open coke fire – where an expert blacksmith, demonstrated his trade in the historic forge - plus mulled wine, mince pies and live accordion music, together with pomander-making taking place in the Visitor Centre – creating a wonderful festive atmosphere.



Sam at the forge

There are only a few genuine forges left and the Yard Trustees are delighted and proud to have found such a practical application for the ancient smithy and wheelwrights.

Sam Johnson is one of several young crafts-people who have trained as farriers or blacksmiths at Moreton Morrell Agricultural College. The Yard provides an excellent facility for Sam and his colleagues to practice and demonstrate their skills using traditional equipment.

Sam is now a fully-qualified farrier, working all over the Midlands but he is always ready to come back and share his skills with visitors to Chedham's Yard and to produce gifts and samples of his skills in hand-beaten metalwork.

Supporters' Newsletter - January 2014

"It's an amazing place" he said; "an absolutely authentic forge with all the old-fashioned elements, just as you'd have seen in Victorian times and before, so it's the perfect place for trainee farriers and blacksmiths to carry out these traditional skills."



The Christmas Event

Not many people realise that tucked away behind cottages beside the River Dene in Wellesbourne, Chedham's Yard is a time capsule of our agricultural past, a blacksmith's and wheelwright's workshop dating from the early 19th century. The Yard was run by five generations of the Chedham family, the last of whom, Bill, died last year. The Yard is still crammed with original tools and implements, equipment and items made on site along with the materials to make them and was then left virtually untouched when Bill Chedham closed the gates in 1965.

It has been authentically restored thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and BBC Restoration after, it beat churches, chapels and an art gallery to win the BBC2 Restoration Village TV programme series in 2006. We have received many comments along the lines of "*It does not look like a restored building but more as if the workers have just gone home*" - a compliment indeed and supports the aim of the original team to restore it authentically.

The Yard will open again at Easter time 2014 – **Saturday, April 12** - for our pre-Easter event [and fully open again on **May 10 until September 27**], and we will have an active programme throughout the year plus our now legendary Christmas event will take place on **December 13**. Special Event days will be announced in the local press, via social media and on selected local web sites and via these on-going newsletters.

We hope to be able to operate without the need for pre-booking, although that is still our preferred route. An application has been made to relax the visitor admission process to allow passers-by to drop in and visit. The Yard will open every Saturday throughout the season with the option of group bookings midweek. Forms are available for downloading on the web site for these arrangements.

The Winter Programme

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3



Supporters' Newsletter - January 2014

During the closed winter period we will be working on restoring more exhibits including the cart. The renovation on the cart work will start during January 2014 and it is planned for it to be back on display for the opening in 2014. The aim is to carry out some restoration of the cart's bodywork on site during the 2014 season. Some significant parts such as the wheels in particular, will have to be remade whilst it is hoped that other parts can be saved.



The Cart

The Drying Shed will also undergo a facelift returning it to its former status. The 'planking' saw bench will have its blade reinstated and, probably be moved outside where it will be easier to see how it worked, the bench will be uncovered for the open days but will be protected against the weather during the week.

For 2014 we are introducing audio guides which will supplement the talks given by the willing group of guides who navigate visitors around the Yard – colouring the picture of its working past.

Chedham's Yard is an interesting project and the Trustees and volunteers have worked hard to bring it to the current stage and will continue working positively over the winter in preparation for the 2014 season

We always need volunteer support and new volunteers are welcome to join at anytime.

If you have some specific craft, public speaking, organisational or literary skills that you can bring to the group or if you would just like to be involved in keeping the Yard alive please contact the team on 01789 842 770.

Note - the programme for 2014 will be sent out when finalised.

Our new web site at will be up and running very soon, go to
- www.chedhamsyard.org.uk and give us your feedback.

We like to thank you for your support during 2013 and look forward to welcoming you back at the Yard in 2014 to see for yourself how the renovation and conservation project is continually developing.

John McKenzie, Chairman Trustees

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4

