

This is the gist of the talk I gave on the Book Launch Evening 25.08.2011.

Thanks to all who've helped with tonight and to all who've helped with this project in any way, and most of all to Marjorie, without whose patience and attention to detail, it would not be as good as it is.

Sometimes people wonder how this project came to be. So do I! We came here from Poole in Aug 1996 - just 15 years ago. I probably started asking questions about the village and its past fairly soon, because I'm like that; anywhere that we've ever lived, or anywhere that we go on holiday – I have to find out something about the background.

I'm not sure whether I set out intending to write a book or not, but by 2004 when the Parish Plan was launched I had decided there would be a book and I had coined the name The Charlton Marshall History Project; I remember thinking that if I included the word 'village' that excluded the more distant areas of the parish, and if I included the word 'parish' people might think it was restricted to the church, because lots of us don't realise there are two parishes – the C of E parish and the political one – although in our case as in many others the boundaries are the same.

One of the things that gave me an incentive quite early on was Gilbert Bennett's memoir of the village, written I guess in the 1950s or early 60s; there were still a few copies on sale in this room at the time, it really is great - being written by someone who had lived here from 1904 and was very much involved in the life of the village at many levels. I hope some copies might be printed again some time.

Material has come from many sources as you will have realised. At one period I followed up quite a few names from the church visitors' book - former Clayesmore pupils and former residents or their descendants come for visits, often looking for family history.

More recently the village website has also been a good source of contacts. Earlier this year a lady from Kentucky made contact to say that she'd come across some snapshots that her father had taken when he was stationed here during the war; would I like to see them? Would I?? Two of them are in the book.

I suppose really there are 3 main types of material:-

1. People's reminiscences which can be fascinating, difficult to record, and sometimes contradicted by other people's. I was aware of the ideal of oral history – high quality recording and permanent retention of the spoken word (especially important where local accent/dialect was involved) but I decided that I had neither the skill, the equipment nor the time to do that. I used a small Dictaphone type recorder, played it back at home and typed it out – very time consuming in itself and sometimes extremely difficult due to the voice or accent of the person I had interviewed, but very worthwhile; the recording was then deleted and the typed version retained.
2. Original material such as property deeds, minute books, marriage settlements, photographs, monuments, gravestones, account books. Local people kindly loaned me material, and much more was found elsewhere, mainly in the Dorset History Centre (the Record Office).

3. Secondary material such as books, newspaper reports and magazine articles. These are extremely useful but accuracy cannot always be guaranteed. I had two main sources for newspapers; some years ago, The Times newspaper was digitized and available on the internet for a few weeks on a trial basis and I also found that Poole Local History Centre had 19th century copies of The Blandford Express and The Blandford Weekly News on microfilm; for over 2 years I was working part time about 5 minutes walk away and was able to arrange my days so that I had long lunch hours which I spent squinting at microfilm.

The book that eventually emerged is not the one I originally wanted to produce – hopefully it's a lot better. So how did we get to 'Charlton Marshall. Aspects of our Story.'? I think that was always my chosen title, cautious and all-embracing. I knew that I'd never have all the loose ends tied up but I wanted the story to be as complete as possible. Anyway, there came a point when I thought 'If I don't soon stop researching and begin writing, I'll never produce anything. There's enough material now to produce something worthwhile; I really must start writing next year.' That was 2007 and halfway through 2008 I hadn't started so I said 'Definitely next year.' Which would be 2009; so on New Year's Day 2009 I sat down and typed a paragraph to make sure I got started; according to the computer record it was 29 minutes past six that evening! And the rest, as they say, is history.

I knew the first version had to be shortened and sharpened so I set a target of at least 25% reduction. In fact I achieved only about 10% and then it grew again for various reasons and is now over 80,000 words.

In September 2009 a lady in her 80s, who used to live in Spetisbury, came back on a visit; she said she had a lot of old parish magazines and would they be of interest to anyone; fortunately she was speaking to someone who was 'on the ball' and they were sent down when she got back home. I found that they covered the 1930s and 1940s – a significant time for which I had very little information, so I stopped writing for several weeks and worked through them.

So how did I come to publish this myself? I always wanted to produce something for the village at a price that people would be happy to pay – especially those who don't normally buy books – and I thought I was not likely to do that if I had to go to a publisher – even supposing I could find one who was interested. Also, being me, I wanted control of what I produced. I looked into the possibilities of self-publishing (often called Vanity Publishing – maybe for obvious reasons) and I didn't like a lot of what I found. Then Marjorie found a book reviewed in the Blackmore Vale that she wanted to buy and it was published by Brimstone Press at Shaftesbury; we'd never heard of them, and nor had many other people either, but when I looked at their website they described themselves as having 'a co-operative approach to self-publishing'. For various reasons I decided not to use them but what I did get from them was the recommendation of the printer that I've used. After working out various things on the printer's website I came up with a list of questions and arranged to meet their Sales Manager in Chippenham; he gave me lots of useful advice and information and a quote that made sense because I was planning to do all the typesetting and picture layout myself – foolish person!

I still didn't know how I was going to produce the text and pictures for the printer. I eventually decided to use Open Office software – like they have on the computers here in the Church Room. After a while, I found it didn't really seem stable enough for a document of my size, but I had got so far that I was unwilling to start again and decided to persevere with it; it has had its moments, not least when it seemed to move graphics and text around of its own accord, but that may well be due to my own failure to understand sufficiently how it works.

As recently as spring this year, when anybody asked me about the book, I would say 'Oh that's a long way down the line yet.' And all of a sudden, one day, it hit me that it wasn't really very far down the line at all; I knew exactly how much material I had, most of it was already typed and pictures pasted in, and I knew exactly how many pages I had still to go. I reasoned that if I didn't stop for a while and plan the publishing, I'd have a long space of wasted time when the book was finished but I couldn't print it because I had no idea how much interest there would be and therefore how many to print. So I took stock and came up with August 22nd as a viable publication date, and it was then no longer a distant vision but a concrete reality with a live date that I had to meet, and while that is an excellent thing to have, it meant that I had now moved from a leisurely, if time-consuming, hobby, to a business commitment where I couldn't let people down – and that gave it a very different feel.

There were a few scary moments in the last couple of months. I had sent small test files to the printer months ago and they were fine but just needed me to change the colour definitions; that didn't sound like a problem, and so I just put it aside until – you've guessed – a couple of months ago. For the main text and 'black and white' pictures the file was required as '100% grey'; I could find nowhere to deal with that. The person I was now dealing with at the printer suggested I sent him a full file and he'd run it and send me the output. When it came back some of the pictures looked awful – just like bad photocopies; then I discovered that although all my pictures looked like 'black and white' and I had used Photoshop software to remove the colour, some were still recorded as RGB (which stands for Red Green Blue i.e. colour) whereas some others were recorded as Greyscale; so I made them all Greyscale and reloaded them into the text – a hairy operation as it had the potential to disrupt all sorts of things! That went OK and when I got a new set of proofs back the pictures looked much more consistent and as I was going through them, I noticed something I'd not seen before – I could have changed them to Greyscale in the text without reloading them. Such is life!

There have been a few other scary moments. Marjorie noticed a missing word and I found that I had somehow accidentally deleted every occurrence of the word 'large'; fortunately I still had an early enough version on file to do a search and put them all back! Marjorie and I have both read the text and the captions so many times and made corrections and improvements, but there came a time when I knew I had to take the plunge – stop checking, create a final version, pay the money, send it off, and trust. If I didn't, I was in danger of missing August 22nd although I'd allowed plenty of time initially. The morning after I did that we were eating breakfast and I remembered an amendment I'd forgotten to make! Fortunately not an important one.

We had delivered leaflets for the pre-publication offer to Charlton, Spetisbury, and parts of Blandford St Mary. Several people helped us but Marjorie and I did the lion's share and by the time Marjorie got back home on the Friday afternoon, the first two people had brought

their forms back, and from then on over that weekend there was a steady trickle of people through our front gate; then the postal ones came steadily too.

You may remember that I said I needed about 200 pre-publication orders; I got an amazing 320+. I had kept a list of contacts – mostly by email – anyone who had shown the remotest interest over about 5 years and that brought in quite a few but of course most were local. Some of you rustled up orders from your families and previous residents – thank you very much. The largest single order was for 8 although another family comes to 11, I think, if you count them all up. The most distant are Australia and New Zealand. So, there we are. Would I do it again? Possibly, but not for a while, and I'd try to make sure next time that I knew what I was doing.

Mark Churchill.