

Some Memories of Lockdown, 2020-21

On 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister addressed the nation and urged us 'at this moment of national emergency to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives'. Little did we know that 12 months later we would still be in lockdown, though with a road map in place hopefully leading us back to normality. So, what has been happening in our villages during this period of national emergency?

On 20 February 2020, HEMLOCS members met in the Pavilion for our usual monthly talk. We could not have anticipated that we would be unable to meet again as a group for the foreseeable future and possibly not until September 2021. With the beginning of the first lockdown, we had to cancel our programme for the rest of our 2019-20 series of talks and also our Summer outings.

Our local historian Bridget Flanagan came up with the idea of producing some articles on different aspects of the history of our villages, with a strong emphasis on photographs, for distribution to members by email and in hard copy for those not on email. Eventually, Bridget wrote ten articles to such acclaim that we decided to compile them in book form, with some of the articles being enlarged and enhanced. Many copies of the book have been sold, despite some of our normal outlets being closed because of the lockdown.



Sketches of Hemingfords' History

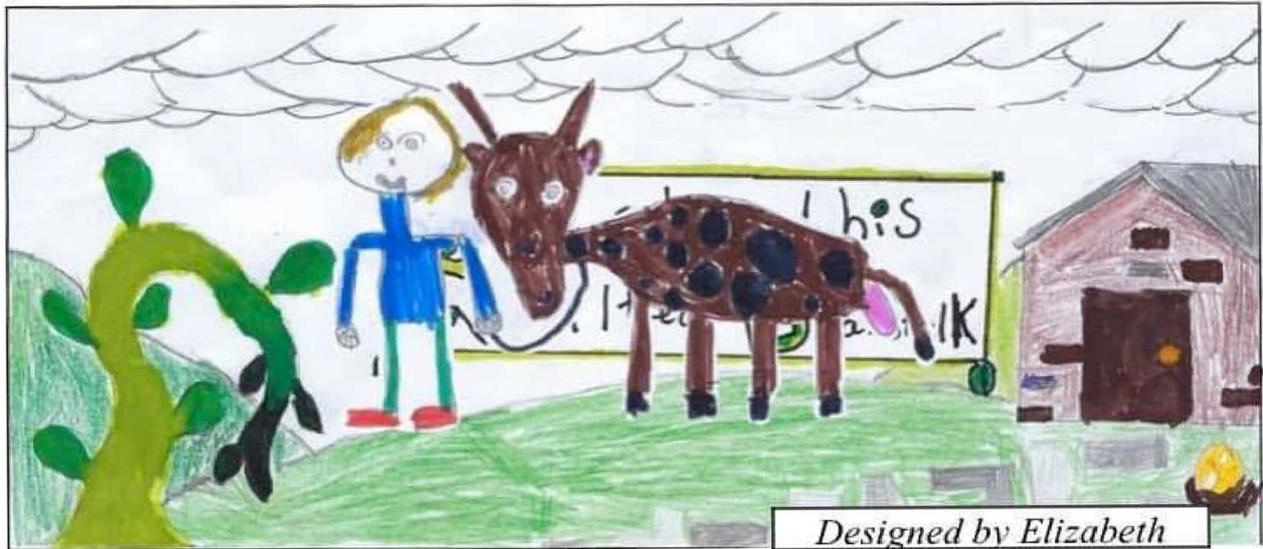
Articles for HEMLOCS, Spring 2020

BRIDGET FLANAGAN



Monthly talks recommenced in October through the medium of Zoom and have been very well attended. The usual Christmas Party was replaced by an online quiz evening, which proved to be both popular and successful.

The first casualty of lockdown was the long-awaited Hemingford Abbots pantomime.



*Designed by Elizabeth
and Sophie*

Jack and the Wilted Beanstalk

The script had been specially written and incorporated topical subjects and parodies relevant to the village. The three-night run in the Village Hall was scheduled to finish on 20 March 2020 and was eagerly anticipated; all seats had been sold well in advance. Caution and good sense prevailed, however, and the performances were cancelled.

Schools were closed and our children and grandchildren suddenly had to be educated and entertained at home by parents who were still still trying to do their own jobs.



Home PE



Home Schooling

Three days after the commencement of lockdown, Derek Clifton sadly died. Derek was a staunch supporter of HEMLOCS and a stalwart of our villages. His passing was felt by many, and the residents of Hemingford Grey in particular owe him a huge debt of gratitude for everything he did and achieved during his lifetime. He was born on Dockseys Farm on Hemingford Road in 1935 and during his long life he served for 53 years as a parish councillor (including 12 as its chair) and was a tireless supporter of the Regatta, winning the Vicar's Sculls on eight occasions and chairing the Regatta Committee five times. He was also committed to the Pavilion and many of the other activities and events that now form the bedrock of the village calendar. There is a riverside bench dedicated to Derek's first 40 years on the council and a plaque in the Pavilion celebrating 50 years and his lifetime of service to the village. We have all benefited in some way from Derek's involvement in our community.



Flowers for Derek

In accordance with Government guidelines, the 75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe was celebrated around the villages on 8 May. Bunting appeared across the streets, sandwiches and cakes were prepared and people gathered to commemorate a momentous day in our nation's history. Wartime spirit was engendered in its new guise of lockdown.



VE Day celebrations in Madeley Court

One of the features of the first lockdown was the absence of traffic. Even the perpetually busy A14 and the A1307 (the former A14) took on a ghostly silence.



Fortunately for our health and well-being, there were some things that lockdown could not hinder or prevent.



After a couple of false starts as a result of Storms Ciara and Dennis, the residents of Hemingford Abbots managed to complete their annual litter pick



A new family took to the water



The ladies were able to play their tennis doubles tournament (and spectate suitably distanced!)

Spring 2020 was one of the sunniest on record, enabling us to enjoy our lockdown walks and discover trails and footpaths that we never knew existed. The blossom was stunning throughout the villages and the Manor House garden was a perfect delight, with irises and roses in bloom at the same time.



Also noteworthy in the Manor House garden was the display of Southern Marsh orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*). This patch came about some years ago when a small clump of these quite rare plants (there are only four known sites in Huntingdonshire) were spotted and a 'cordon' put round them to prevent them being mown. The following year there were about 50 and they have been counted every year since. In 2014, there were 109 flowering plants and by last year in excess of 300. Fritillaries were planted in order to give a bit of Spring interest before the orchids came into bloom.



In common with the rest of the country, villagers turned out in large numbers to show their support for the staff of the NHS, by clapping on Thursday evenings and by more permanent shows of appreciation.



A call went out for volunteers to help cut and sew scrubs, bags for laundering and masks for the NHS and local care facilities; there was a desperate need for these once the pandemic grew and hospital materials became scarce. Many people (mainly ladies!) from both Hemingford villages joined forces and liaised with those in St Ives to gather materials and produce vast numbers of scrubs. Lofts were emptied of old sheets and duvet covers, resulting in an inventive array of garments. Rolls of material were donated and cutting out became quite a production line, resulting in large numbers of scrubs being contributed to the cause. The rainbow material designed as a result of the fund-raising efforts of Noah, the 11-year-old son of DJ Chris Evans, was also used for a range of colourful items.



Eventually, the need subsided and the sewing machines were put away once more.

Villagers turned out in force in the sunshine on 5 September for the fifth annual classic car display. Over 200 classic cars and 50 motorbikes were on view and £2,780 was raised for the Magpas air ambulance.



On 21 September 2020, three workmen installing a patio and driveway in Hemingford Abbots uncovered an unexploded artillery shell. Police were called and a cordon established. Along with police, an Explosive Ordnance Disposal team rushed to the scene to help dispose of the bomb. A controlled explosion was carried out shortly after midday.



Early in December, a lorry crashed into a wall right by the Esso garage on London Road and burst into flames. Thick clouds of smoke poured into the night sky and it was some days before the lorry and its load were removed, leaving an ugly hole in the road surface.



Just as we approached Christmas, it rained and rained and rained. Fortunately for the villages, our flood defences were up to the task; some St Ives residents were sadly not so lucky! On Christmas Eve, the Great Ouse at the Hemingfords peaked at 7.45m AOD, about 0.55m below the height of our flood defences. AOD stands for Above Ordnance Datum, with the datum usually being mean sea level.



Can we, can't we? As Christmas approached, we were led to believe that Covid rules would be relaxed for the duration of the holiday period. Then, on 23 December, the Government announced that the relaxation period would be cut from five days to one and indoor mixing limited to individual households and support bubbles. Nevertheless, villagers refused to be daunted and set about devising novel ways to foster the festive spirit. In Hemingford Abbots the Parochial Church Council initiated a scheme to transform the village into a living Advent Calendar. A special Christmas Carol Window was installed somewhere in the village each day during December and remained on display until the New Year. The final window was opened for viewing in St Margaret's on Christmas Day – a floral display in front of the stained glass window of the Nativity.



In Hemingford Grey, a resident came up with the idea of a Snowman Trail, inviting villagers to make a snowman somewhere visible from the path or road and get it on the trail map. About 50 snowmen suddenly appeared around the village, displaying astonishing ingenuity and inventiveness.



For many of us, Christmas Day was spent at home, with family contact provided by the all-too-familiar online Zoom meeting.



And finally, one family decided to leave their Christmas tree and lights, surrounded by presents, in place until their grandchildren could visit and open them. Fingers crossed that this will happen very soon (and it looks as though it might do)!



Stuart Harrison
April 2021

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