

## Origins of Stowupland Local History Group

In 2005 the Parish Council was concerned to know the opinions and needs of residents and a group of volunteers set about the task of producing a Parish Plan, based on the results of a questionnaire which was sent to each village household. An extremely thorough Plan was produced. There were difficulties in dealing with many of the points raised, particularly concerning traffic, but two very positive outcomes were the revitalisation of the village magazine, Telstar, and the founding of the Good Neighbours scheme.

Five years later it was felt to be time to produce an update to the Plan. Again a group of volunteers was formed, with some members from the original group. Christine Williams was one of those; her knowledge and skills had been crucial in the setting-up Good Neighbours. Marion Harris, another member, was relatively new to the village. The volunteers wrote and circulated a questionnaire, one section of which concerned social activities, each of which could be feasible. Analysis of the returned questionnaires indicated interest in a number of these and a drop-in evening at the Village Hall gave residents a chance to offer help with anything that interested them. Local history and family history received good support. Christine Williams, Cheryl Taylor and Marion Harris then met to plan the next step.

As the Stowmarket Local History Group had been active for some years it was agreed to invite Sue and Steve Williams, of that group, to an informal chat. At this they agreed to address an inaugural meeting in the village, to give advice about setting-up a local history group and to suggest useful initial projects. This took place on 5 July 2011 in the Small Meeting Room of the Village Hall. It was funded by the Parish Council and chaired by Christine Williams. Sue and Steve's talk was as inspirational as expected and nine people volunteered to form a steering committee to set up a group in the village.

The Steering Committee, with Marion Harris as Chair and Judy Clarke as Secretary, began regular meetings at Judy Clarke's home and began to tackle the priorities. Public Liability insurance was essential for public meetings and membership of the British Association for Local History (BALH) would include that. Committee members agreed that the group should be called 'Stowupland Local History Group' in order to be able to join the BALH but that talks on family history would be included in future programmes. The Parish Council provided the funding for BALH membership.

Christine Williams drafted a constitution for the Group, setting it up as a charity. It was adopted on 1 August 2011 and signed by the nine members of the Steering Committee, making them the first members of the Group and its trustees until an AGM was held within one year. The roles of the trustees were as follows: Marion Harris, Chair; Judy Clarke, Secretary; Karen Hamilton, Treasurer; Christine Williams, Membership Secretary; Neil Langridge, Programme Organiser; Cheryl Taylor (later Clarke) and Kelvin Clarke, Archivists.

Fund-raising began with a yard sale held at Karen Hamilton's home in late August. On 1 November, a drop-in event and exhibition in the Church Hall proved to be a good way of meeting people and learning about their particular interests or research. The Group joined the Suffolk Local History Council, an important source of ideas and contact with similar organisations. 30 November brought the official launch of the Group, with a well-attended evening of archive films provided by Geoff Clarke.

With a varied programme, planned by Neil Langridge, for February to December 2012, Stowupland Local History Group took its first steps with only one set-back: the first meeting had to be cancelled because of freezing conditions! Since then, with supportive members (some from outside the village) and an attractive programme of talks and events, it has flourished despite a reduced number of trustees and fulfilled many of the initial objectives set out in the Constitution, all of which have been documented in the Telstar magazine.

Marion Harris, September 2019