

The Preston Trust Chairman's Report

Parish Council AGM 6 May 2020

The true wealth of The Preston Trust is in the time, skill and energy of our community and its members. This was demonstrated at Village Day 2019 with:

- The largest number of scarecrows exhibited to date – over 30 – all of which showed the imagination, skill and wit of their creators.
- New stalls and games – created within the parish.
- An army of volunteers who helped set up, run stalls, create new attractions, cook, bake, serve food and then tidy it all away.

Liz then continued our programme of free activities with the “Beating the Bounds of our parish” walks. This time split up in to three separate walks, rather than the tradition of marking the boundary in a single day.

As the evenings drew in The Preston Trust hosted ‘Old Hitchin in film’ a showing of various short films presented by Sam Hallas – featuring archive and more recent footage.

The Trust's year was once again rounded off with the Christmas Tree and Carols at the Red Lion. We discovered the old barrel for the tree was in pieces and that there were no barrels of sufficient size to be had. Jane and David Clark came to the rescue – after a hunt round the farm we came up with a tractor wheel rim which looks very good and is totally appropriate for our rural setting.

Just as we were getting geared up for the spring/summer events of The Wine Evening , The Great Easter Egg Hunt and Village Day the world went in to lockdown. The Trust has only postponed these events until better days. We have secured about £400 of Easter themed confectionary – for about £150 thanks to careful shopping before Easter and “helping out” Waitrose get rid of stock after. Waitrose management kindly donated some of the chocolate when they discovered our plans.

Before everything came to a halt PHC and The Trust were planning a joint community fun day to celebrate Village Day and their Bicentenary. We are looking forward to restarting those preparations as circumstances allow.

There have been trials and tribulations for the Trust. Changing our Bank Mandate as signatories change proved even more painful this year than last. (Note - last year we had to file a complaint under GDPR when they lost photocopies of the Chairman's passport and our application forms). It took over six months to finally get the situation sorted this year and wasted days of the trustees' time.

Google also seemed to have changed the rules that check behaviour of Gmail users sending e-mails. PNS messages started getting blocked on sending shortly before Christmas. I also discovered that the old free service had a maximum daily sending limit which is why sending three PNS in a day (a rare occurrence then) would cause slow delivery.

The solution was to switch to Google's commercial offering – which was as many of you may have noticed hardly smooth or trouble free. The PNS finally achieved stability just in time for the messaging to go from 2 or 3 PNS a week to 3 or 4 a day. It has become an integral part of our community's response to the Coronavirus Situation.

The parish newsletter The Church and Village News, is produced and delivered by volunteers within Preston. When PHC decided they could no longer undertake the printing side of the newsletter The Trust took on that commitment. The Trust has also taken care of some additional printing of public information notices.

The Trust continues to develop the Preston website encouraging content from new contributors. A number of residents have recently commented to us that they spend a fair amount of time on the site at the moment to look at the photos, do jigsaw puzzles, etc. This is great encouragement to do more work – please let us have your feedback, ideas and requests!

Finally the committee would like to pay tribute, once again, to the band of litter pickers. Many did "their rounds" before or after the Rugby last autumn and over thirty came out for the Spring Litter pick. As always, it is not just the organised litter pick pickers but also those who pick up rubbish whenever they see it when out walking. This spring we continued the practice of a dedicated team clearing up the fallen branches on the Green and raking the grass – the tree debris was used to construct an eco habit. NHDC again supplied litter picking equipment and collected the rubbish we picked up. Thank you everyone.

The Chairman's Report to the Preston Parish Council is usually expanded to become the report at The Preston Trust AGM. Due to the COVID pandemic, since an online meeting would have excluded many members from attending, the committee opted to follow the Charity Commission advice and postpone (subsequently cancel) the 2020 AGM. Hence this is the report for 2020.