

## BAS visit to Charterville and Northleach: Local history in the Cotswolds

Peter and Diana Gulland took us by coach to three sites in the high Cotswolds on a pleasantly sunny day. Our first visit was in Minster Lovell parish (between Witney and Burford) at Charterville, the nineteenth century planned village built at a turning off the Oxford-Cheltenham road, the A40. The Chartist movement of working class radicalism grew in the late 1830s and, while some branches of the movement sought confrontation with the establishment, others sought to give former industrial workers a fresh lease of life by moving them on to marginal agricultural land where they could grow their own food in clean country air.

The Chartist Land Company was formed in 1845 to acquire sites and build dwellings. The project only lasted for six years but, in that time, six communities were built in the south-west midlands and the home counties. At Charterville, work progressed with remarkable speed. Nearly 300 acres of land in Minster Lovell parish were purchased in June 1847 and 78 plots were laid out in three sizes, mainly along Brize Norton road, in September 1847. By February 1848, 78 modestly sized single storey dwellings had been built, and by August of that year, most had been occupied.

As built, the Chartists' cottages (see picture below) were so small that all have been subsequently extended to meet the needs of modern living. Peter and Diana guided the party past a representative selection of the 51 which survive in a recognizable form, pointing out the subtle variations in original design, and explaining how the Chartists' variation in plot size have led to post war infilling of



Photograph by Philip Wilkinson, [englishbuildings.blogspot.com](http://englishbuildings.blogspot.com)

bungalows which are generally sympathetic in design. We saw the rather austere Chartist school, and noted that chapels in the settlement post-dated the Chartist era; the only pub at Charterville stands, of course, just outside the community's perimeter!

A short drive westward took us past Burford and over the Gloucestershire border to Lodge Park in Sherborne parish, the only surviving deer-coursing grandstand in England. Here the one mile deer-course was laid out southwards from its start against the A40 in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As we arrived along a lane laid out in the 1880s beside the course, our coach gave us the extra height needed to see over

hedges and pick out the course's boundaries. One mile on, we came to the two-storied grandstand, built in 1634 by sporting and gaming enthusiast John "Crump" Dutton of Sherborne Park. It stands beside the finishing line and has a viewing platform on its roof to enable guests to see the end of a chase after dining and betting on the outcome in an elegant room on the first floor.

Westwards again to Northleach, a "new town" laid out in 1220 by Gloucester Abbey on 43 acres of fields cut out of the parish of Eastington. We took lunch at the Old Gaol (built in the 1790s and now a visitor centre) and, after eating, members made self-guided tours of the building. Peter then led a walking tour to identify the 33ft. x 330ft. building plots of the thirteenth century town, the market place at its centre, and the extensive mediaeval encroachments which have reduced a large triangular trading centre into the irregular car park that we see today. The site of the hamlet of Eastington adjoins the new town, with its parish church between the two so as to serve both. The church, which was first recorded in 1100, was rebuilt by fifteenth century wool merchants into the magnificent "wool church" that we see today. Waiting in it were three members of the Northleach Local History Society who kindly gave us guided tours of the church and its monuments before we headed back to the town for our coach.

**Peter and Diana Gulland.**

