

Working Together for a Better Community

NEROCHE VILLAGES

Newsletter

For the parishes of Staple Fitzpaine, Bickenhall, Curland
and Orchard Portman with Thurlbear

Issue 50 - Winter 2023



Welcome to the Neroche Villages' Newsletter, a quarterly publication delivered free to every household in Neroche Parish, helping the community to stay connected and up-to-date on local issues.



SAVE THE DATE

ST PETER'S FETE AND DOG SHOW

15 JUNE 2024

WINTERWELL

Please contact Rebecca George at rebecca@indinet.net if you would like to get involved – we need lots of people!

Also contact Rebecca if you have something you could offer for the raffle, which is very important for the success of the day



Neroche Autumn Craft Fair

By Karen Learoyd

Slightly earlier than last year, the Craft Fair was held on October 21st, to make sure we didn't clash with other local craft fairs, and to entice those early Christmas shoppers! Luckily, the weather wasn't too bad early in the day, and the trusty carpark team did a great job of unloading the stallholder's vehicles and helping them move their stock into the Hall. It's surprising how long it can take to set up a 6ft x 3ft stall, although when you see how many boxes some people have, maybe it's not after all.

Doors opened at 10.30am, although a couple of keen customers were already 'viewing', including the stallholders – this being their only opportunity to get out from behind their tables for the next few hours. As many of them know each other from other events, there was already a lovely buzz in the room. Some of our sellers are very local indeed – Jill Perrior (Animal Country), Annabel White (Speckled Earth) and Sharon Bradford (pottery) are all Neroche residents, while others travelled from a little further afield. A wide variety of crafts were available – jewellery, natural soaps, cards and stationery, turned goods, preserves, needle felting, pyrography, art and Christmas goodies. We even had a herd of rustic reindeers, all with their own names and backstories (not to be missed). Personally, I couldn't resist the



Pyrography



Jones and the Star



Rustic Reindeer



Ram's Head

needle felted ram's head which found its way home with me! More than 75% of stalls were new to our fair as we are determined to ensure there is always something new to tempt you.

Trade was brisk at the refreshment area as people took the opportunity to rest their legs and enjoy a brew and a slice (or two) of delicious cake supplied by the lovely bakers in our community. With a wide variety of cake on offer, there was something for everyone, and a cake or two was even sold whole! It's a great opportunity to catch up with friends for a chat and a 'show and tell' of your recent purchases. I think some people only came to eat cake (no names mentioned). The kitchen team were kept very busy making teas and coffees and serving the throng of people.

Before we knew it was 3pm and time for the fair to close – the cycle of reloading the vehicles started all over, and we said goodbye to a happy bunch of stallholders for this year. Everyone remarks on how this seems like a lovely community event – which is how we want it to be.

Thanks to everyone who makes the day such a success, in particular the members of the Hall committee and our lovely cake makers. And thank you for coming!

Helping Nature in Neroche Parish

By Jane Hole

The recently conducted Neroche Community Review showed that many parishioners were concerned by climate change, our carbon footprint and the importance of biodiversity. It can seem such an overwhelming subject it is hard for us to think about some of the changes we all need to make.

If nobody does anything - nothing changes

Carbon Footprint – have a look at yours. The World Wildlife Fund has a very informative UK based website with a series of simple questions to help you measure your carbon footprint. It will also give some hints on how to reduce your footprint.

[WWF Footprint Calculator - WWF-UK https://footprint.wwf.org.uk](https://footprint.wwf.org.uk)

We installed photovoltaic panels on our roof in 2012. Over the years we have generated over 38,000kWhs (kilowatt hours) of electricity. This is the equivalent to over 200,000 kettles worth! All excess electricity generated goes directly to the grid.

Biodiversity. Britain has lost more of its natural biodiversity than most countries in Western Europe and is at the bottom end of the global scale in biodiversity. In Neroche we are surrounded by green – why is there a problem? If you want to know why, see the 2020 report by the Natural History Museum.

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2020/september/uk-has-led-the-world-in-destroying-the-natural-environment.html>

The 2023 State of the Nature Report by over 60 research and conservation organisations shows one in six of all the 10,000 wildlife species in Great Britain are at risk of extinction. Among those at danger are some of the country's most well known birds, animals and plants, including turtle doves, water voles, lady's slipper orchids, hazel dormice and European eels. The future is particularly bleak for birds, with about 43% of species facing the risk of extinction.

It's not too late to do something about it. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has managed to increase the breeding bird population on a farm it owns by 177% while still producing food and turning a profit.

<https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/29/state-of-nature/>

The Good News is we can all help to make a difference and improve biodiversity in our own parish. Starting in your own back garden - there are easy steps to take.



Birdsfoot Trefoil



Golden-Ringed Dragonfly

Left “less managed” nature isn't tidy, she likes to sprawl around a bit. If you can leave a space in your garden or on your land for wildflowers and grasses to grow it will attract invertebrates. They attract other invertebrates, small mammals, amphibians, which in turn attract birds. I can vouch for this having over the years left areas of our garden uncut from spring to late summer. It isn't tidy although there is a tapestry of wildflowers with colours of yellow, purple, pink, and cream. The wildflowers include celandine, cowslips, bugle, common spotted orchids, clover, bird's foot trefoil, knapweed and a variety of grasses. Bumble bees, honey bees, butterflies and many insects now abound. Baby frogs nestle under the grass, I've even learned to love and leave the dandelions and my reward has been goldfinches coming into the garden to feed off the dandelion seeds.



Goldfinch

I've learnt it is easier to grow wildflowers local to the area, which are suited to our heavy clay soils and if possible grow from plant plugs rather than just scattering a handful of seeds.



Bugle



Common Knapweed

The following websites are very useful starting points on gardening for more biodiversity.

The Natural History Museum

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/seven-ways-to-create-a-wildlife-friendly-garden.html>

The Wildlife Trusts

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-start-wildlife-garden-scratch>

Come and join our new Neroche Environment Group. Amongst other projects highlighted in the recent Neroche Community Review (<https://www.nerochevillages.org.uk/news>), we hope to develop a collection of local wildflowers suitable for our heavy clay soils for planting in and around the parish. We would love volunteers to help us grow wildflower “plugs” - cowslips, common orchid, etc.

Several of us in the new environment group are happy to run some ‘come and see’ sessions to show you what we have achieved by leaving parts of our gardens and fields to nature. More information about this in the Spring issue of the newsletter.

If you are interested or need more information contact

Jane.hole@outlook.com

My CBE Day – Rebecca George

As soon as your name appears in the papers on New Year's Day you can start using the letters after your name, or title for more senior honours. Although you don't know when you will be called for your Investiture. Awarding ceremonies are spread throughout the year and each ceremony has a mixture of people attending, usually including at least one famous name.

I received my letter in August, inviting me to attend Windsor Castle on October 4th. I had been thinking about my outfit and had decided to wear a dress and coat I already owned, with a hat kindly lent by Nicky Baxter. So, I didn't have to worry about that, although I did spend some time agonising over shoes. Could I find a pair with heels (not much present in my life post-Covid) that I could actually walk in and wear for most of a day? I did manage to find some, although heels are not making a big come back in my wardrobe.

I had tickets for three guests and took my mother, who was 89, Mark and our eldest son Fin. Men wear suits and ties which was easy for Mark and Fin who scrub up well although don't have a lot of choice. Mum and I had a few chats about what she would wear and in the end she very sensibly said, 'If I were a clergyman I would wear a clerical outfit, so that's what I will do'. She was one of the first women ordained priests nearly 30 years ago. She also decided she would go in a wheelchair as she expected (rightly) there would be some standing around. She got a couple of envious looks at the Castle. It was lovely that she/mum could come, as she was also at Buckingham Palace when Prince Charles awarded my OBE in 2006.



We spent the night at a local hotel and drove to Windsor Castle on a bright sunny day. We drove up the famous long drive we have seen for Royal Weddings and were met by a friendly police team at the gates of the castle to have our papers and car checked. Because we had mum and her wheelchair we were then directed through the gates, whilst everyone else walked, and right into the heart of the castle. They are extremely well set up for wheelchairs and we went straight up a ramp and lift and into a series of gorgeous rooms with collections of china, swords, portraits, and furniture. The castle was closed to the public for our Investiture so there were very few people around and each room had a smiling member of staff happy to answer any questions.

Eventually we were ushered into a room for a briefing. They separated off the MBEs and OBEs who went to another room and had a separate ceremony. That only left 12 recipients for CBEs, Knights and various other Orders and Garters. We waited in the room where we had been briefed and then each family group went separately into the room where the awarding would take place. A few members of the Royal Family can award Honours, and you don't know until the day who it is going to be. I was delighted that it was going to be Prince William for us.



The ceremony is very intimate – just the recipient and their family, the Royal, and various members of the household and armed forces on duty, along with a string quartet! Prince William, who is very tall, was charming and chatty. You curtsy as you approach, and I have to say my new shoes weren't helpful, and I didn't fall over which wouldn't have been a good look. He pinned on my badge – they put a clip onto your jacket beforehand so it's easy to attach. We had two or three minutes of conversation, discussed his Earthshot prize, women in IT and STEM, the fact that his great grandmother had awarded my mother her degree in 1956, his mission to help homeless people and my work with apprentices and the Further Education system. Then he shook my hand, I backed off and did another pretty awkward curtsy, and we filed out. In the room next door there was a line of photographers, and we had

our official photos taken. We went to a pub near Basingstoke for lunch and 10 members of the family joined us including Mark's father who is 91 and was at my OBE lunch.

On October 4th, Leah Williamson was receiving her OBE- she is the captain of our national football team and plays for Arsenal. Lisa Way was also there – she is a nurse who bravely intervened in a knife attack in Wales.

It was a delightful, well organised, happy and sunny day and I really do feel honoured.

I have a video of the day, email me rebecca@indinet.net if you want to see it.



Neroche Thursday Lunch Club

**Neroche Hall
12.30pm for 1pm**

**7th December Christmas Lunch (all the trimmings) -
£10 per head**

4th January, 1st February—£8 per head

Come along to Neroche Hall and enjoy a superb home-cooked lunch in wonderful company (transport and special diets can be arranged). Meet old friends and make new acquaintances - ideal for both long term residents and those who have recently arrived in the community. A wonderful way to spend a weekday lunchtime.

**Advance booking is essential by the Monday prior to the lunch to book for catering purposes. Contact Alison Brown
01823 480441 or aabrown.battens@gmail.com**





Neroche Hall Fish 'n' Chip Quiz

Friday, 24th November

Doors open 7pm for prompt start 7.30pm

Maximum of 6 per team -
£4 per person entry
(Food extra)

BYO beer / wine and a glass!

Advance booking essential from 1st November
on 01823 480286

Email: r.davies507@btinternet.com



Macmillan Coffee Morning – St Peter's Church

September 29th

Once again, our Macmillan Coffee Morning held at the Pop-up Café was well attended and hugely successful. A delicious array of cakes, all baked by the Café ladies, was enjoyed by all. As ever, our lovely visitors were more than generous with their donations, helping us to send **£560** to Macmillan to help with their excellent work.

Thank you to all who came and made our fundraising such a huge success, it was, as ever, good to see you all.

Remember that the Café is open every Friday from 10am to 12 noon. Come along, enjoy good company, delicious cakes and a cuppa.

Community and friendship are what we do best!

Pauline Phelps and Tricia Dryden



Parish Council Update

By Mark Palmer, Chair

Blackdown Hills Parish Network (BHPN) AGM

In early November, I attended the annual general meeting of the Blackdown Hills Parish Network (BHPN) and was pleasantly surprised by the amount of good work they are doing on our behalf. On the agenda were items such as water quality monitoring, "Hunt the Heat", and the idea of an Uberbus. Many people will be familiar with the ride-sharing scheme called Uber; well, Uberbus is an idea that could run alongside regular bus services. The idea has yet to be fully thought through, although it could help with transportation in the rural environment. "Hunt the Heat" is a scheme that would help homeowners locate areas of heat loss in their homes and offer advice on available ways of improving home insulation. When this service is available, notices will be posted on the village website.

One item on the agenda was an introduction to the Blackdown Hills AONB Resilience Group, a group of volunteers whose aim (among others) is to help return small areas of land back to healthy and productive quality by using biochar from hedgerow trimmings and other woodland waste to improve structure and lock carbon back into the soil. I feel that has merit regarding the current climate change and would like to pursue this matter with other councillors.

Local Community Network (LCN)

There have now been two meetings of the new LCN, and a format is taking shape with the aim of creating sub-committees on issues that the group feel need addressing. The chair is Mr Keith Reid of West Hatch PC and Cllr Sarah Wakefield, our county councillor, as vice-chair. I'm sure there will be great things to come from this group, however time is needed to get these things off the ground and at the time of writing time Somerset Council is facing some difficult times ahead.

Community review

I am aware that Councillor Jane Hole is writing an article for this publication, and I do not wish to replicate any of her good words, although I would like to once again thank her and the members of the group who took on the monumental task of carrying out this review. It is certainly a great achievement, and I thank all parishioners who took the time to complete the survey.

The parish council is keen to take on appropriate items that have arisen from this review.

Parish council vacancies

We still have a vacant position on the parish council, and even though it is the parish of Orchard Portman and Thurlbear, we can co-opt any eligible parishioner living in other parishes (within Neroche) to represent this parish. If you would like to join us on the council, you are more than welcome to attend a meeting held on the second Tuesday of the month to observe the work we do. Training will be provided to new councillors.

Schedule of meetings times and dates are published on the village website with a paper copy on the parishes' notice boards.

A358

The National Highways plan for the improvement of the A358 is still ongoing, with meetings between parish councils and National Highways to discuss position statements. Neroche Parish Council declined this offer on the grounds that National Highways have decided that their plan is the best and are offering very little leeway for change. In addition to this, none of our parish councillors are qualified in the civil or road-building field to have a constructive discussion on this matter. We still stand by the Community of Parishes (CoP) statement that this dualling is over-engineered and will cut links with adjacent villages; however, we do agree that Henlade would benefit from a bypass and the Southfields roundabout needs improvement.

We await the issue of the Development Consent Order, when CoP will give evidence to the Examination in Public. This is intended to cover both the content of that evidence (i.e. ensuring that on the four key CoP issues of design standard, safety, access, and Southfields roundabout, parish councils and CoP adopt a consistent approach).

Salt bins

The parish council has purchased four salt bins, one will replace the damaged bin outside Neroche Hall and the other three to be placed around the parishes following agreement with the highways department of Somerset Council. It is hoped that these will be ready before the onset of the frosty weather. When in place, it is hoped that parishioners will take advantage of this facility to salt the roads as required.

CHRISTMAS FAMILY BINGO



FRIDAY 8th DECEMBER 2023

(6.30pm FOR EYES DOWN 7pm)

Neroche Parish Hall

RAFFLE

BAR

Bring your own nibbles

Booking essential

Email pmphelps@enterprise.net



Neroche Hall – What’s Occurring?

By Karen Learoyd, Chair

It’s been a busy few months at the Hall as we have welcomed a number of one-off hires, as well as our regulars. A wedding reception, a christening and a few children’s parties have taken place, and we have more lined up over the coming months. Having the hall regularly used for private events is very satisfying and endorses the improvements we have been making over the last year or so, adding to the already excellent facilities.

In October we held our craft fair, which was well supported, hopefully many of you found some unusual Christmas gifts to buy, as well as cakes to eat. Many of the stallholders remarked on what a lovely building we have, and what a great sense of community there is. At the end of November, our ever-popular Fish ‘n’ Chip Quiz returns and in December, there will be a Family Christmas Bingo night. Do come along and spend a few fun hours with your friends and family. We will shortly be looking at events for next year, so if there’s something different you would like to see held, please do let me know. One thing I have been asked is whether film nights will return. We are considering buying our own audio-visual equipment to facilitate this although will probably need a grant to make this happen – if this is something you would like at the hall, please tell me next time we meet !

The new heaters have been installed and are being tested out by some of our regular groups. So far, so good, they are definitely quieter than the old ones and seem to be functioning well. Luckily, we haven’t hit a really cold spell as yet, although we are hoping they will be up to the job. From a recommendation on the local Facebook group, we identified a roofer who has fixed several slates which have slipped or broken over the last few years. Apparently, it wasn’t an easy job, but we are grateful that they persevered. They have suggested we need a review of the state of the roof overall which will be happening soon.

After almost a decade at the same price, the committee agreed to increase the 100 Club subscription to £20 per ticket, allowing us to offer enhanced prizes. There are monthly prizes of £20 and £30, rising to £25 and £45 twice a year, with a Christmas jackpot of £35 and £50. If you haven’t yet subscribed, there is still time to be in with a chance of winning the December draw but be quick! Contact Diana at

dianadavies32@icloud.com to get a number. We appreciate your support.

Finally, if you were plagued by the hornets which took up residence at the hall this autumn, I apologise. I know several people had to run the gauntlet when locking up in the evenings, not a pleasant experience. With any luck they won't return next year – fingers crossed.

Wishing you all a healthy and happy festive period – we hope to see many of you over the coming months.

BORED ? STUCK IN A RUT ? FANCY LEARNING SOME NEW SKILLS ?

If so, then please consider joining the Neroche Villages website editing team which keeps the website up to date and develops it according to local requirements.

The website is easy to navigate and one-to-one training will be provided by the editing team.

If you're interested or would simply like more details, please contact Andrew Morgan at:
ncagwebsite@gmail.com



WE WANT YOU!

Warden's Report for Mount Fancy Butterfly Reserve

With the official end of the butterfly recording year, it's a good time to review what has been happening on the reserve. Our biggest concern is, of course, the intrusive and aggressive bracken which if not properly managed, shades out all the important ground-cover plants that this reserve depends on. We were late getting started this year, there is always that conflict between managing the bracken and disturbing any ground nesting birds. We eventually managed to cut the bracken in the more important sections within the Shutes compartment although were still cutting when it was already dying back. Within the Mount Fancy section, we only managed to cut a modest band down the centre. What is satisfying to see is, where we have been cutting and raking for three years or so, the ground-cover plants are thriving and showing a rich variety, reinforcing the benefit of doing this work. Next year we plan to cut earlier when the bracken has just emerged and then to cut again, hopefully twice more, during the summer. This should have a good impact.

It is not just the bracken, we have many areas which are damp or even wet all year, loved by the willow and the pioneer birch, sending up many regrowth stems. Unchecked, these young saplings again quickly shade out the ground-cover plants. You might have noticed as you walk around the reserve that we have been working through the year, cutting back some of these groves of sapling or scrub and thus opening long distance vistas throughout. Some of our specialist butterflies, or ones we hope to attract back, are not strong flyers. They can be deterred by even quite low obstacles, so these vistas we have created are forming flight corridors where we hope they can more easily move



Saplings

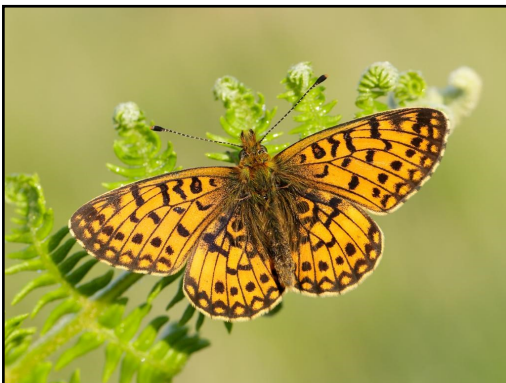


Cut Saplings

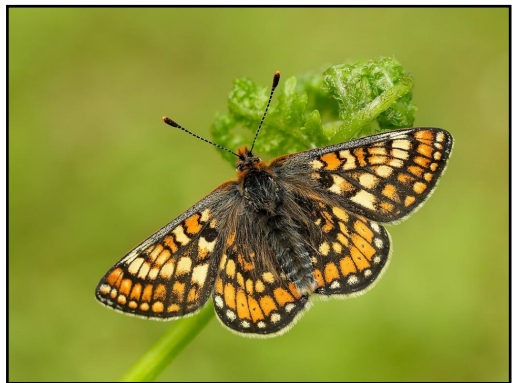
around. As they are prone to parasites, they need to be able to relocate and find fresh uncontaminated areas.

Clearly there is a great deal of work required each year just to keep the reserve meadows open. We also want to improve the management of the reserve, so perhaps some of our now 'lost' species might come back, or we can improve the habitat range such that re-introductions could be considered. Some work can be done efficiently by contractors, and there are many more small pockets which can only be undertaken manually. This is where the **Fancy Volunteers** (<https://fancyvolunteers.weebly.com>) have an important part to play. The group is still very small and urgently needs your support, to keep this reserve on your doorstep, in the best condition possible. Do come along and give it a try. It is so rewarding spending a day outside in a wonderful landscape, working together and doing something both worthwhile and important. All the details are on the website.

It is gratifying that the areas where work has been undertaken over the past three years are now showing the benefits. This year, the 'Bowl' put on a good display of its summer flowers, we had several wonderful patches of the Devils-bit-scabious within Shutes, and there were numerous patches of very healthy Marsh Violets within the Mount Fancy compartment. These later two plants are very important for both the Small Pearl Bordered and the Marsh Fritillaries which have not been seen for several years. Should you see one do let us know right away, with a photo please as they can be tricky to identify.



Small Pearl Bordered



Marsh

Alongside the volunteers the ponies are also doing their bit by grazing and keeping the scrub in check. Always a difficult balancing act, too light and scrub grows, too much and the ground-cover plants are preferentially eaten! Currently the reserve is being grazed by four Shetland ponies which spend four months in each of the two compartments. Be aware that these ponies, though friendly, can sometimes be very annoyingly persistent if they suspect you are carrying food in any bag. Please also remember that dogs should always be kept on a lead within the reserve, as any of the wildlife, including our ponies, can be threatened or scared by a free ranging (well-behaved) dog.

I have mentioned before about our small stalwart band of transect walkers. They have had another successful year and managed to submit these all-important records for nearly all the weeks during the butterfly flight season. Despite all the miserable cold spring weeks with few, if any sightings, through to the summer bonanza. They too desperately need your help to be at the end of the phone, when, on those rare sunny days, they are shorthanded and need assistance whilst they do their two-hour walk around, relishing the seasonal changes in the reserve. This year they have also undertaken a new transect, aimed at the oak tree canopy living Purple Hairstreak. One particular delight this year has been the location of a Brown Hairstreak egg within Shutes, and not seen these last two years. Maybe an indication of a recovery, time will tell. To be continued!



SCHOOL DATES

Holiday 2:	16 December 2023 to 1 January 2024
Term 3:	2 January to 9 February 2024
Holiday 3:	10 February to 18 February 2024
Term 4:	19 February to 28 March 2024

Have your say on the future of the Blackdown Hills

Every five years, the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership creates a Management Plan to help guide the work and activities of all organisations, groups and individuals with a responsibility or interest in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

They are currently undertaking a review of the current management plan to identify the key issues and opportunities that need to be addressed, to provide the focus for partnership action over the next plan period 2025-2030 and beyond. To help prepare the new plan, the AONB Partnership would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to complete a survey.

Your views and knowledge of the area will help to identify what matters most to local people and inform what we can all do to help protect and enhance the special qualities of the area while meeting future challenges.

The online questionnaire can be found on the AONB website.
blackdownhills.org.uk/managementplan

or via this QR code:

The survey will run until mid-December.

Any questions or for further information you can contact the AONB team at:
Blackdown Hills AONB
Riverside
Hemyock
Cullompton
Devon EX15 3SH

Telephone: 01823 680681

Email: blackdownhills@devon.gov.uk



TOO-WIT, TOO-WOO

A note from Neroche Woodlanders at Young Wood



As ever, there's a lot going on at Young Wood, with a range of people benefiting from time in nature.

However, after we leave at the end of the day, at this time of year the twilight woods are pervaded by the beautiful sound of tawny owls. These highly territorial birds establish a home range in the late

autumn and defend it through the winter until breeding commences in the spring.

These owls, which are resident all year and are the commonest species in the UK, usually live for around four years, with the female being bigger and heavier than the male. They defend territories of 30 to 50 acres, so at Young Wood there is room for several pairs. They prey on small mammals, and also take moles, rabbits, small birds, beetles, earthworms, and frogs, given the chance. They usually avoid carrion unless times are tough.

Tawny chicks fledge at around five weeks old and sit around on branches calling for food for some time after that. The parents are very protective – bird ringers who ring young birds for monitoring purposes must wear crash helmets and thick coats before going up a ladder to the nest. However, by early autumn, once the young are properly independent, the parents drive them away to go find new territories of their own.

The male makes the 'Too-woo' sound, and the female responds with the 'Too-wit'. If you are close to a tawny owl, you'll find they have a rich repertoire of other clicks and shrieks and mumbles.

Owls can famously turn their heads through 270 degrees, so can look behind themselves. Although they have binocular vision, the huge, forward-facing eyes can't move in their sockets, so they must turn their head instead.

Meanwhile back in the daylight, would you or someone you know like to be a wise owl and come to the woods to benefit from what we offer?

For families, Young Wild Explorers is our parent and toddler group, and is offered free for low-income families with children up to five years old, from across Taunton and the local area. The sessions are on Fridays, and we provide free transport from town, and try to remove as many barriers as possible that prevent families from being able to come. We have waterproofs that we can lend out and provide hot drinks and a hot lunch cooked on an open fire. All this is designed to enable parents to spend some quality time in nature with their little people.

Sessions are run by two experienced Forest School and Early Years leaders. Spaces are limited, and if you know of anyone who might like to take up a place, please email sarah@nerochewoodlanders.org or phone 07784 800641 for more details.

Meanwhile we're looking for new volunteers for our Wednesday Conservation Volunteers group. This autumn we're coppicing and cutting new paths at Young Wood, while also visiting other nature reserves around the northern Blackdown Hills including Mount Fancy. It's a very friendly group, no experience is necessary, and you can work at your own pace, either all day from 9.30am to 3pm, or for part of the day. To find out more visit www.nerochewoodlanders.org/ncv.

Sarah, Jenny, Tiff, Gavin and the team at Neroche Woodlanders

British National Ploughing Championships 2023

Káren and Andrew Morgan

While browsing the new Neroche Villages website (<https://nerochevillages.org.uk>) at the start of October we noticed an upcoming event which, while being a bit out of the parish, looked potentially very interesting and offered the Morgan household the chance to catch some good photo opportunities.



The 2023 British National Ploughing Championships were being held in Bishops Lydeard over the weekend of 14th/15th October. This is an annual event which has been held since 1953 and moves around the country from year to year. The last time it was held in Somerset was 2017.

With just a slight concern about the recent rainfall we'd had, we headed up the A358 on 15th October to catch the second day of the event. We were guided to a field for car parking where our little red Peugeot looked rather out of place among a sea of 4x4s. The field looked like it might have been a bit boggy in places and I asked the gentleman on the gate what would happen if we got stuck. "Plenty of tractors around to pull you out, young man!" he replied. Me? A young man? He was either being very nice or he should have gone to Specsavers.

Spread over several fields, this event was simply huge, hosting competitions for ploughing with tractors and heavy horses. There were also displays of vintage tractors, agricultural machinery demonstrations, hedge laying, country crafts and shopping stalls (including those selling just about every type of outdoor hat and wellington boot you can imagine!).

We arrived thinking that the competitions would consist of how straight you could plough a line in the soil. After an hour or so, we considered ourselves well and truly schooled. There were around 250 plough persons competing in 15 different categories – including conventional one way, classic reversible and hydraulic vintage classes. The criteria on which the judges based their scoring were presented on boards

throughout the event and are shown in one of the photos.

Winners in certain categories go on to compete in the European Ploughing Championships and the World Ploughing Contest. Who knew?

We spent a few hours wandering around the fields, expanding our knowledge on various items of vintage farming equipment and chatting to some of the contestants and exhibitors. There were a number of steam powered machines carrying out such activities as ploughing, baling and sheep shearing.

The highlight of the day for us was observing the heavy horses - decked out in their brass regalia, ribbons and rosettes. We watched a number of these magnificent, gentle creatures participate in the various competitions, steered by their human handlers. Some ploughs were pulled by a single horse however, many were operated by a pair.

The sun was shining, and although the car park field was not too bad, other parts were extremely muddy and we were very glad we took our wellies. Overall, it was a fun day - and don't beefburgers taste so much better when they are freshly cooked and eaten outside in a field?

Next year the competition will be held in Newark in Nottinghamshire – which may be a bit of a hike to attend. However, we can highly recommend this event as an entertaining day out, so the next time the championships return to Somerset, we'll definitely be back.

What are the judges looking for?

The judges look at many aspects. For obvious points, such as straightness but also how uniform the ploughing is; if it is to an even depth throughout, and if all the tracks towards, great or shallow are well broken.

They won't just start at the end of the plot but will walk on the furrows to check how fine they are. The start and finish are very important and should be neat, level and not too high or deep.

Good ploughing is straight and always looks good to the eye and one of the aspects judged is called General Appearance. (Note that different soil types can make ploughing look different to these photographs). Points will be awarded for many aspects which are not mentioned above. There will be many aspects which are not mentioned above. There will be many aspects which are not mentioned above. There will be many aspects which are not mentioned above.

THE OPENING SPLIT
The competitor ploughs a furrow in one direction and comes back with one or two in the opposite direction to look at the finish which is the main point.

THE START
The split furrows are then covered by either hand or the tractor. The competitor must cover the furrows in the direction of the finish. The furrows then turn down the furrows on the type of ploughing and then ploughed in either way.

THE PLOUGHING
The competitor ploughs an 18m strip of the plot and returns down the main side of their ploughing. The competitor must start. They have to make sure the furrows are straight and the depth and uniformity to be able.

PLEASE KEEP YOUR DISTANCE & TAKE CARE AROUND ANIMALS AND MACHINERY AT ALL TIMES

THE SOCIETY OF PLUGHING, LIMITED is a charity of the Somerset and Dorset Agricultural Society. It is a registered charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993. The Society is a registered charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993. It is a registered charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993.



Beaver believer!

By Arminel Scott, Wildlife Supervisor, RSPCA West Hatch

You may have been lucky enough to have seen a beaver in the wild, although the wildlife team at West Hatch were thrilled to be able to help a pair that were rescued from a blocked storm drain during Storm Babet's deluge in mid-October. Secret World Wildlife Rescue collected the bedraggled pair which had been misidentified as otters by a caller. What a surprise when they saw two well rounded, spaniel sized creatures instead! Adults can measure over a metre from head to tail, these are a little smaller and we estimate them to be 2 years old. Beavers are the second largest rodent in the world, and we have suitable accommodation that is both sizable and chew proof!

Beavers were heavily hunted for their fur, meat and their scent glands which produce a substance called castoreum which was used by humans for many purposes from curing headaches to flavouring food - it has a vanilla like perfume. Beavers use it to waterproof their tails and fur and to mark their territories. The entire beaver population was eventually killed without the foresight of the impact its disappearance would have on the landscape, and the water flow affecting the whole of the British Isles. By the beginning of the 16th century, beavers became extinct in this country.

In 2008, it was discovered that there was a small population on the River Otter in East Devon. No one knows for certain how they got there, and some concerns were raised because they were pretty unusual creatures and knowledge about their natural history is not great for most people. (The Devon Wildlife trust has a wealth of information and survey findings on their website.)

In 2015, Natural England declared that the beavers would be allowed to remain, on condition that they were free of disease and of Eurasian descent. The five beavers were caught and tested – DNA testing showed that the animals were the once-native Eurasian beaver, and none of the beavers was found to be infected with *Echinococcus multilocularis*, tularaemia, or bovine TB. So, the beavers were not culled, and now many projects have been undertaken to improve ecosystems for wildlife and humans with further introductions of beavers. As natural engineers, they can provide an impressive range of services including flood alleviation. The increase in standing and felled

deadwood on land and in water from beaver foraging has also been shown to provide valuable habitat for fungi, invertebrates and beetles which act as a food source for many species of amphibians, birds and fish.

So, back to the pair at West Hatch. They were very dirty and very smelly and clearly out of sorts from their ordeal. It took some time before they felt relaxed enough to start behaving normally. They loved the willow we gave them which was kindly supplied by Coates English Willow, and they soon started to groom each other, which was badly needed. We saw them sitting with their tails folded underneath them which meant they had access to the castoreum to start reconditioning their fur, and also relaxing cat style on their backs under their heat lamp! Their tails are awesome and multipurpose; fat stores, thermoregulation devices, great swimming aids and are slapped on the water as a warning signal to anything that looks threatening to them. You can see how extraordinary and powerful their tails are in the photo.



Whilst it is early days as I write, we will be talking to the Wildlife Trust and Natural England when this pair are stable and ready to return to the wild.



St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine Flower Guild

By Jacqueline Kolkowski

Over the last couple of months, we have decorated the church for two wonderful celebrations, the first being the glorious wedding of Gabrielle and Sam. A rather late request although the motions were put in place. Flowers were chosen with the bride and ordered, but little did we know it was going to be the hottest week of the month and the courier was not up to scratch.



Through many phone calls, sleepless nights and troublesome days we wondered if the flowers would ever get here. No worries, Team St Peter's Flowers were on the case if they did not arrive! We had contingency plans; scouts were out in supermarkets looking for the colour scheme while checking for the flowers in their own gardens that could be used if needed.

Hooray, the flowers did arrive in time and emergency first aid was administered by the team to ensure the flowers looked at their best for the wedding, ensuring Gabrielle and Sam's big day was everything they wanted.

Harvest is always a wonderful celebration especially in this area with all our farm crops, fruits and





flowers in the colours of autumn. We again decorated the church in autumnal colours and local produce. Candy Janes made some superb harvest bread along with the corn and lavender pew ends. Dianne Hood excelled with her wonderful selection of squashes and the dark cider apples.

The competition scarecrows made by Alison Brown and Frances Alford of St Bernadette and St Christopher enhanced our harvest displays.

Sadly, Candy Janes has to leave the Flower Guild due to a relocation, although I and the guild members would like to thank her for her ideas, support, displays and for just being Candy.

If you are interested in joining the flower guild do please contact me Jacqueline.Kolkowski@btinternet.com



St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine

Help Decorate our Christmas Tree

Saturday, 16th December

10.30am – 12.30pm

Decorate your own biscuit

Lots of secrets (hush hush)

Tea, coffee and cakes available



News from Your MP

Rebecca Pow

KING'S SPEECH 2023

At the time of writing, His Majesty King Charles III has delivered his first King's Speech to Parliament, setting out the Government's new legislative agenda for a positive future, growing the economy, strengthening society and keeping us safe. I was privileged to be in the Royal Gallery for the State Opening of Parliament to witness this glorious spectacle, it really brought home to me the weight of history behind our democratic system and the importance of upholding this. It was this very subject that I talked about with the pupils at North Curry School recently when they invited me in to join an assembly during Parliamentary Democracy week. I stressed that as they grow up, they should always remember to use the vote they are given to have their say.

ARMISTICE DAY

I was honoured to place a cross in the Constituency Garden in Parliament on behalf of those across Taunton Deane and joined with thousands of others in attending local Remembrance events to pay our respects to those who've made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our nation, to remember them and give thanks to them and all those who keep us safe. On behalf of everyone I represent, a poppy wreath was also placed on GWR's Poppies to Paddington train at Taunton Station.





RAIL TICKET OFFICES

I was delighted that the Government have recently communicated to the rail industry that the proposed reform to ticket offices announced earlier this year should not proceed.

I received hundreds of letters and emails from concerned constituents earlier this year regarding the future of train ticket offices, especially in relation to our own Taunton station. This prompted me to go right to the top to Transport Ministers to convey the concerns of so many local people. In particular, I

stressed that people really value having an in-person point of contact at the ticket office to help, especially when working out ticketing options and best value for proposed travel plans.

I also engaged with Great Western Railway as well as staff at Taunton station to discuss the proposals and was pleased that the consultation time was extended following my making the case so that everyone had more time to contribute.

In explaining the decision taken, the Rail Minister said that following further meetings with accessibility groups and the passenger bodies, it became clear the ticket office proposals did not meet the high thresholds set by Ministers and Train Operating Companies must withdraw their proposals.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

I was pleased to instigate our first-ever anti-social behaviour roundtable with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss some of the unacceptable issues our valued business owners have been facing

around our county town. It was a really constructive meeting and very useful to bring everyone together to tackle this issue.

Key areas raised included: the potential for the council to use the powers available to it to more effectively to deal with antisocial behaviour; closer working with the community police teams; specific town centre security representation; ensuring CCTV cameras are in the most relevant locations; and knowledge sharing amongst the stakeholders so that those allegedly responsible for the anti-social incidents, particularly a youth element, might be handled effectively. I've been following up on this with the Somerset Police Crime Commissioner and local community police. It links in effectively with the Prime Minister's anti-social behaviour plan and I'm hosting a further roundtable ahead of the Christmas period.

WET WIPES CONSULTATION

In my capacity as Environment Minister I've been immersed in delivering our effective Plan for Water, delivering more investment than ever before in our water infrastructure (£56bn) as well as stronger regulation (no dividends or bonuses can now be paid by water companies if they are found to be having any negative impact on the environment) and tougher enforcement (including unlimited fines). As part of the Plan for Water we have committed to banning wet wipes containing plastic and we are consulting on this right now with a view to introducing the ban shortly. This is something I have personally campaigned for. Wet wipes containing plastic are detrimental to the water environment and can also cause blockages in our sewage pipes, resulting in sewage spills. A simple way to help cut this ahead of the ban is to refrain from throwing wet wipes down the loo please!

CIDER INDUSTRY

We have many superb craft drinks businesses across Taunton Deane and congratulations to David Sheppy from well-known Sheppy's Cider Ltd, for taking on the role of Chair of the National Association of Cider Makers. I caught up with him and other local



producers at a reception of cider makers in Parliament and I continue to work with them to support this important local industry.

And whilst on a beverage note, villagers in Stoke St Gregory have recently taken over running their local pub, adding a

restaurant, café and a shop next door. It's a significant community commitment but judging by the people coming in and out when I was there, I can see that it is a much needed and valued facility. Do check their website and support the enterprises if you are passing.

BUS SERVICES

The Government's recent announcement that the £2 bus fare scheme has been extended nationally until December 2024 is extremely welcome and is helping many residents. Do support your local bus service where possible. The list of bus companies and bus routes included in the £2 bus fare cap scheme is online but if you need any information relating to this do get in touch; similarly, if you are experiencing any problems with some of the recent changes to some bus routes do let me know.

VIVARY PARK & TAUNTON GREEN COURTS

Finally – I'm always keen to encourage exercise of all forms and was especially thrilled that Government funds distributed via the Lawn Tennis Association have been secured to upgrade the public tennis facilities at Vivary Park and Taunton Green together with easy, and reasonably priced online booking systems. As an ardent tennis player myself, I know what benefits and pleasure the game can bring so would entice all interested to have a go!



TAUNTON
CHORAL SOCIETY



Sat 9th December
St James Church,
Taunton

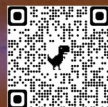
(next to the County Ground)

7:30pm

Handel

MESSIAH

Tickets, information
and much more at



www.tauntonchoralsociety.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 900173

Christmas at St Peter's

Sunday, Dec 3rd at 4pm - Annual Benefice Service at
Thurlbear Church

The service will be held by candlelight. Mince pies and
Teas at Thurlbear School afterwards

Sunday, Dec 10th at 10am - Lay-led Morning Worship at
St Peter's

Saturday, Dec 16th at 10.30am - Decorating the Church

Wednesday, Dec 20th at 7pm - Carol Service
Candlelit, traditional service of readings and carols,
followed by mince pies and mulled wine

Saturday, Dec 23rd from 6.30pm - Carols around
the villages

Sunday, Dec 24th at 10 – 11pm – Carols and Christmas
songs with the Badger Street Band at The Greyhound

Sunday, Dec 24th at 11.30pm – Midnight Mass at St Peter's



St Peter's Church is part of the 'Seven Sowers Benefice' - www.sevensowers.org.uk

Is your Business using the Neroche Villages Website?

One of the main reasons for developing the Neroche Villages website was to promote our local business. It does this in two ways, both designed to help them become better known and more easily found by those needing their services.

All businesses operating within Neroche Parish are entitled to a **free entry on the Business pages of the website**. They are listed in one or more of seven categories: Accommodation, Arts and Crafts, Building and Gardening, Equine, Farm and Agriculture, Food and Drink, Leisure, and Services. No business is too large or small to appear and there are many involving one person. Each free entry lists the name of the business, type of activity, contact details, address and telephone number/s. Many pay £10 per annum to have an email address and/or website added to the entry.

The **Advertisers page** allows a business to provide more details of its activities for an annual charge of £30. We can help you create your advertisement.

Please have a look at the website at www.nerochevillages.org.uk. Use the Contact page to get back with your details or to correct any entry. We are keen to have all businesses listed on the website, and with more than a basic Business page entry. All additional fees are used to fund the activities of the Neroche Communication Action Group.

ARE YOU NEW TO THE AREA?

Here are the different ways you can find out what's happening in Neroche from the Communication Action Group:-

Neroche Newsletter is delivered free to every household each quarter – full of upcoming events, articles on recent events, and updates from local Groups and leaders. Contact us at nerochenewsletter@gmail.com

Neroche Villages Website - the place for information from the Parish Council including planning applications, meeting minutes etc. You will also find information on local groups and clubs, events, News, local businesses, and details of the Blackdown Hills and Neroche Woodlanders.

www.nerochevillages.org.uk

Neroche Email alert – distributed every 3 to 4 weeks, bringing you information about local events, information from the Parish Council, and details of what's happening in our neighbouring villages. To sign up for the Email alert, just send your details to nerocheemail@gmail.com.

Welcome to Neroche



SING-A-LONG CAROLS

A DAYTIME CONCERT AT CICCIC TO JOIN IN WITH

Thursday 21st December

Doors open 11:00 for 11:30am

CICCIC, Memorial Hall, Taunton, TA13PF

Tickets £10 in advance from:

www.creativeinnovationcentre.co.uk

Want to join a Badminton Group?

Friday afternoons – 4pm

Neroche Hall

A social, friendly, ladies group – we play for fun, and a little exercise!

Contact Diana at dianadavies32@icloud.com
for more information



Farming at Staple Farm

By Tom Pope

The weather this year has made a lot of aspects of farming extremely challenging. Earlier in the year (although difficult to believe now) we suffered a drought. This led our wheat yields to fall by close to a quarter. It feels like since the drought ended in July it's rained almost non-stop!

The rain has hampered many other farmers in harvesting their maize and has also prevented some from planting all their wheat. Thankfully at Staple Farm we don't have any winter wheat this year. Instead, we have decided to put land into a government backed environmental scheme for 2 years. The aim of this scheme is to try and reduce our weed whilst also providing a great pollen and nectar source for the bees and butterflies. You will see some of this in the field which is on the very left-hand side of the Greyhound Hill. We've also got various strips which have been planted into winter bird seed and wildflowers.

This year we're very glad that our hens are still able to roam around outside as there is a much lower level of avian influenza in wild birds. Although due to the wet weather we have had to change the side which the birds roam on, so they don't get wet feet!

Christmas Trees For Sale



Staple Farm, Staple Fitzpaine, TA13 5BE

**Available from early December
Pre-cut trees will be available in the yard**



2023 Fixtures

Fixture	Gates Open	First Race	Last Race
Thursday 16th November	11.15am	1.15pm	3.45pm*
Thursday 30th November	10.40am	12.40pm	3.25pm*
Thursday 14th December	10.28am	12.28pm	3.40pm
Saturday 30th December	10.55am	12.55pm	3.35pm

Pop-Up Café

St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine
Every Friday, 10am to 12pm

Come along for a cuppa with biscuits and delicious home-made cakes.

Meet old friends and make new ones

For more information contact

Tricia Dryden
tricia@witchlodge.co.uk





Carol Singing around the Villages Saturday, December 23rd

EVERYONE WELCOME!

Meet at Staple Farm at 6.30pm
4 stops around the villages
Final Stop - The Greyhound

Carols at each stop for approx. 10 mins.
Refreshments and nibbles available

Donations will be given to support homeless in Taunton

Please contact rebecca@indinet.net if you would like to
come and sing!

YogaNess Yoga

My name is Vanessa Bourne, I live in Bickenhall and I am a Hatha Yoga Teacher, specialising in Subtle Yoga, a slow, mindful yoga, designed to suit everyone. This type of Yoga is specifically designed to reduce the effects of stress on the body, using subtle, nuanced and deliberate movement to optimise the nervous system, combating overwhelm and creating ease in the mind and body.

Classes currently available:

At Neroche Village Hall – Tuesdays Mat Class
10.30am-11.30am

At West Hatch Village Hall:
Mondays 11-12pm – Chair Class
Tuesdays – 7-8pm – Mat Class

Please contact me for class dates if you are interested or have any questions on suitability for you - all abilities catered for - I have equipment to borrow if needed.

ness@yoganessyoga.co.uk
www.yoganessyoga.co.uk

The Greyhound Inn

Country pub with rooms

Open daily

01823 480227

<https://www.thegreyhoundinнтаunton.co.uk>



Lending with Heart and Mind

Somerset West
and Taunton

Somerset West and Taunton Council fund a not-for-profit loan scheme for homeowners and landlords*.

We understand the expense of maintaining your home and we work with you to take the stress out of funding repairs, improvements or adaptations.

For a no-obligation assessment or more information visit www.lendology.org.uk or call 01823 461099

*subject to eligibility

Events for your calendar

(Venue is Neroche Hall unless stated)

December

Thursday, 7th - Community Christmas Lunch

Friday, 8th - Christmas Family Bingo

Tuesday, 12th - Parish Council Meeting

Wednesday, 13th - WI Meeting

Saturday, 16th - Decorate the Church at
St Peter's

Wednesday, 20th - Carol Service at St Peter's

Saturday, 23rd - Carol singing around the villages

January

Thursday, 4th - Community Lunch

Tuesday, 9th - Parish Council Meeting

Wednesday, 17th - Quiz at The Greyhound

February

Thursday, 1st - Community Lunch

Tuesday, 13th - Parish Council Meeting

Wednesday, 21st - Quiz at The Greyhound

For latest updates visit www.nerochevillages.org.uk/events-calendar

Local Communication and Information

Websites:

Neroche Villages www.nerochevillages.org.uk

Community website run by the Neroche Communication Action Group. It has an up-to-date calendar of events; a news section; information about residents' action groups, including broadband, traffic; a business section and advertisements.

The website features a comprehensive list of clubs and organisations, including details of those in neighbouring parishes. It is also the website of Neroche Parish Council and lists its activities, agenda, minutes and reports.

Neroche Hall www.nerochehall.org.uk

The website lists the coming events, facilities and availability for hire of our village hall, and has an online booking form.

Church of England Seven Sowers Benefice www.sevensowers.org.uk

Has a calendar of events and church service times for Staple Fitzpaine and Orchard Portman churches, as well as other churches in the benefice.

Email Information:

The Neroche Communication Action Group runs an Email Alert System for sending information to those wishing to receive it. **Please note the email address for the EMail Alert:** nerocheemail@gmail.com

The Parish Magazine:

Full information on benefice matters, a great source of news, coming events and general information, and details of many local businesses and services. For new subscriptions phone Alison Brown on 01823 480441.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this Newsletter.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Neroche Communication Action Group. Publication of an advertisement in, or with, the newsletter does not imply the Action Group's approval of the goods or services.

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Printed by Parish Magazine Printing - 01288 341617