

Working Together for a Better Community

# NEROCHE VILLAGES Newsletter

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

Issue 39 - Spring 2021



*"The Forgotten Bridge" in Staple Fitzpaine courtesy of David J Dalley*

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.



# Running a Small Business during a Pandemic

*By Jacq Wanstall*



Running a holiday-let business during Covid-19 has been a rollercoaster.

When we had our first lockdown in March, we had guests staying at the cottage. After Boris's evening announcement, I spoke with them and they sadly packed their bags, leaving the following morning. We then had to remain closed for the next 4 months, which was really sad as we had spent the last two years building up the business and had many repeat guests and lots of bookings over the spring and early summer months.

We eventually reopened in July, and thankfully we were fully booked for the summer. Our holiday cottage is in the pretty town of Dulverton, in the Exmoor National Park, so is very popular with walkers, we also have many guests who come to the area for mountain biking, fishing and the nearby beaches.

There was a lot of work involved with re-opening, as many things had to change or be tweaked to ensure maximum safety for our guests. In addition to my normal cleaning schedule, I now also wash down all the areas that are frequently touched, such as door and window handles, bannisters, light switches, plug sockets, chairs and tables, TV remotes, the list goes on!!



This is done with hot water and anti-bacterial liquid, followed by disinfectant spray, I now do all the cleaning wearing gloves and an apron to keep as safe as possible.

We also leave lots of anti-bacterial wipes and spray for the guests to use, so they really have peace of mind. Also, in the Welcome Folder we have the NHS Covid check in QR code, so they can use their phones to login at the cottage.



After lockdown was lifted in the summer, many holiday-lets stopped providing linen, as that was easier than having to follow the new government guidelines. We opted to continue to provide them and changed to washing all bed linen, bath and hand towels, tea towels, etc in biological laundry powder, as this contains more bleaching agents than non-biological powders or liquids.

Due to all these additional procedures, change-over cleaning now takes considerably longer, but it is 100% worth it to make sure our guests are safe.

Despite all this extra work, summer was lovely being so busy, driving to Dulverton once or twice a week to do the change-over cleaning and look after the guests. With the mountains of washing and ironing that then follows, it was nice to get back to normality.

Unfortunately, late autumn continued to be a rather up and down affair involving taking and then cancelling many bookings. The cottage then had to close again for the November lockdown and again when Somerset was moved into Tier 3. Sadly, all the guests who were booked to visit the cottage over Christmas and New Year, visiting their family in the area, all had to be cancelled.

So now we find ourselves closed for the foreseeable future, although are very hopeful that this spring, summer and autumn will be busy. With much talk about Staycations being everybody's first choice of holiday this year, fingers crossed that Exmoor is once again a thriving holiday destination.

# ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 15 APRIL - JOIN BY ZOOM ALL WELCOME

*By Alan Hyde & Jane Hole*

The Annual Parish Meeting was, unfortunately although understandably, not held last Spring as we were all getting to grips with the first phase of Covid lockdown.

To avoid us missing out on this important community gathering for two years in a row, an online meeting is planned this year, via Zoom, on Thursday, 15 April 2021 from 7pm.

It should be a great opportunity to keep up to date on issues of common concern and interest, simply by attending from the comfort of your own home.

Short presentations are planned on a range of topics from a selection of invited external speakers, with the opportunity for you to ask questions online, glass in hand if desired.

Planned subjects include:

- the Climate Crisis - what can we do as individuals and a community?
- an update on proposals to upgrade the A358 between Southfields roundabout and Taunton, particularly local road links
- Broadband rollout

If you've got any other thoughts for topics you'd like to hear about, or would like to help organise the meeting, please get in touch by return email at [alan.hyde@sky.com](mailto:alan.hyde@sky.com)

Joining instructions for the meeting, including the Zoom link, will be sent out nearer the time via the Email alert. In the meantime, please make a note in your diary and spread the word. Everyone in Neroche is welcome to attend.

Look forward to seeing you all. If, for whatever reason, you don't want to be seen on screen, remember you can always turn off your camera and just listen in.

Stay safe.

## Spring Update

**By Ross Henley, District Councillor**

Hi everyone

I'm writing this at the end of January and of course we are in full lockdown again. The last year has been so difficult for so many people locally. Many have been ill with Covid, and some are still struggling with the physical and mental pain that causes. Some no doubt will have lost loved ones too. It really has been such an awful time for everyone on so many levels. As I write, we now have a vaccine which is giving us all some hope. The local GP surgeries are working through the numbers of local residents in the top 4 groups, and I know lots of people at the time of writing have had the vaccine. Thank goodness for the scientists! It's absolutely chilling to think how worried we would all be right now if there had been no vaccine yet found.



We also have a regional vaccine centre here in our villages run by the NHS at Taunton racecourse, which is hoping to vaccinate around 900 to 1000 people a day. I have been speaking to local residents who have been volunteering at the site and they tell me how well organised it all is. I'm hoping, as we all are, that by the time this newsletter is published things will look more positive. One of the scary factors with the Covid crisis is the effect it's having on people's mental health. So many are finding it very hard. Thank goodness we live in such a beautiful place where many of us can enjoy local walks and fresh air. One thing that has shone throughout this time is the love, care and support shown by so many people locally to their friends and neighbours. I particularly want to highlight the work of Issy White who has co-ordinated the local Curland, Bickenhall and Staple Fitzpaine Community Facebook page, which has carried so much useful information. Along with the other local Facebook pages and the regular Neroche Villages emails, these have been an absolute lifeline to everyone, while we can't get out.

Sadly, there are also some people out there using lockdown to break the law and fly-tipping on highway verges and private land. Driving out into the countryside and dumping rubbish and unwanted goods like a

fridge freezer on someone's land is a despicable act, and I feel very sorry for the landowners when this happens. Each time we have gone into a lockdown, the volume of fly-tipping incidents increases. The recycling centres are open, some seven days a week. I do feel that for some recycling centres to close two days a week is an act of folly by Somerset County Council. I have reported all the fly-tipping incidents I've been made aware of, and please keep contacting me when you see any incidents and I will report them. Fly-tipping is disgusting.

Somerset West and Taunton Council has been busy paying out grants to local businesses as they did during the first and second lockdowns. The latest group of grants were challenging as government wants a separate tier 2 grant, a tier 3 grant, a tier 4 grant and a lockdown 3 grant. To try and simplify things the council contacted all those who previously had been awarded grants and instituted a register of interest for business which when returned the council would tell businesses which exactly of the different grant schemes they qualified for.

The local plan will be up for consultation probably sometime this year. This has been delayed due to Covid. As soon as I hear more, I will let everyone know. I am continuing to support local residents on several different issues and I'm always free to chat to people about any local issues.

I'm also very pleased to see that during the recent cold spells that the roads were gritted. It seems impossible to believe that two years ago Somerset County Council wanted to reduce the number of roads gritted in the rural areas. I campaigned hard against this cut, and I'm glad that the council in the end, relented and restored the gritting routes.

In conclusion, I want to say stay safe and take care of each other and I can't wait to see everyone when it's safe to get out and meet you all again.

Kind regards

Ross

# St Peter's Church Flower Guild

*By Jacqueline Kolkowski*

It was lovely to decorate the church with sparkle and light for the Christmas celebrations even though we could not hold the Carol service inside the Church. The candles were lit, the crib illuminated, and all those that visited the church said it looked lovely. Alison Brown produced the pedestal display, Peta Trott and Candy Janes decorated the porch, and Carole Wensley-Dodd produced the organ stool decoration. The windowsills were decorated with greenery, candles and baubles. The tree looked magnificent adorned with the children's decorations.



*Decorated porch*



*Carole's Organ Display*



*Pedestal*



*Christmas Tree*

Due to Covid, the weekly cafe in the Church was closed, so the cafe could not run the "Come decorate the Christmas tree" morning as usual. Pauline Phelps and I came up with the idea of taking Christmas decorating kits to the children for them to make at home. Pauline sourced peg angels and ribbon wreaths, then spent many hours cutting metres of ribbon to add to the kit. The pack also included wooden stars for the children to decorate with their own designs. Pauline and I delivered the kits to the families who requested them, the finished decorations were then brought to the church and placed on the tree by the children.



*Macey Children - First Tree Decorators*



*Flower Guild Packs Awaiting Delivery*

families for making those special decorations for our tree.

Thanks for decorating the church go to all the Flower Guild members and those who provided greenery, along with Rebecca George for the lovely door wreath. To the Popes for the wonderful Christmas tree and Harry Dunn for putting it up. Thank you to all the

We are looking forward to Easter, hoping that the Church will be open for services. From Palm Sunday until Easter Sunday, a memory tree will be erected in the Church porch, where your memories or prayers for friends and loved ones can be written on the tags provided and attached to the tree.

The floral displays at Easter traditionally contain lilies, if you would like to donate £5.00 toward these in memory of someone and support St Peter's, please contact myself ([Jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com](mailto:Jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com)) or Alison Brown ([aabrown.battens@gmail.com](mailto:aabrown.battens@gmail.com))

*If you are interested in joining our small group who make up the Flower Guild, please do not hesitate to contact me*



# ***You're Invited!***

***Neroche Annual Parish Meeting***

***Thursday 15 April 2021***

***From 7pm***



***Online via Zoom – details to follow  
All Welcome***

***Planned topics from external speakers include: A358  
upgrade & local road connections; the Climate Crisis;  
and Broadband Rollout.***

***Simply join from the comfort of your own home, using  
your laptop or mobile - and bring some nibbles with a  
glass or two!***

# Neroche Local History Knowledge Quiz

*By Jane Hole*

1. Who was the Lord of Staple Fitzpaine and Bickenhall after 1086?
2. What is the connection with this building and our parish?



3. Who is commemorated on a white marble wall plaque in St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine?
4. What role did this person have in Curland?
5. Where is the location of the disappeared medieval settlement called Play Street?
6. Who erected The Methodist Chapel in Curland in 1821?
7. Whose ghost is said to roam between the site of Old Bickenhall Church and St Peter's in Staple Fitzpaine?
8. Why is this the case for the roaming ghost?

9. Where would you find this structure in the parish?



10. What crop is shown here?



11. What was the crop used for?

12. What is a double looped palstrave?

13. What is the origin of the name Neroche?

14. What event hit some of our villages in July 1968?

15. County shires used to be divided into a Hundred. What was the name of the Hundred for Bickenhall, Curland and Staple Fitzpaine?

16. What was the commonest job in our villages during the mid 19th Century?

17. What did the devil allegedly throw at the tower of St Peter's Church in Staple Fitzpaine?

18. Where was the "Penny School" built in 1892?

**Answers on Pages 45/46**

## **'Now this is a Christmas Display!'**

***By Karen Learoyd***

I'm sure many of you will be familiar with the fantastic display of Christmas lights that Dawn and Brian Phelps have outside their house, Curle Cottage, which is on the Staple Fitzpaine to Neroche Castle road, approximately half a mile from The Greyhound. As relative newcomers to the area, and with little reason to venture out after dark, we were unaware of this annual extravaganza. However, just a couple of weeks before Christmas, I received a delightful email from Brian letting me know of its existence.

One evening, we took a slow drive past the house although felt compelled to stop for a proper viewing. As luck would have it, Brian saw us, came out and gave us a proper guided tour, socially distanced of course. I'm afraid the attached photos do not do the show adequate justice, as it's very hard to capture the dazzling lights and scale of the display! Brian explained it's quite a feat putting up all the outside lights, especially as he is getting a little older, and that they have been doing this for the past 20+ years, and felt that the Parish needed some cheer, especially over a dark Covid winter.



Of course, the lights are spectacular, and then he showed us through the windows, the efforts that go into decorating the inside of their lovely cottage. Every possible surface, beam, piece of furniture is festooned with baubles, decorations, lights, candles, you name it, this is Christmas in spades!! Every room has its own tree, presents abound, and there are beautiful wooden villages, as they do in Europe. It was absolutely amazing to witness. Brian told us that it takes weeks to

decorate the house, both inside and out, and that they make Christmas last as long as possible, with presents being shared for days on end. Also, the lights would stay on until February to provide maximum opportunity for as many people to take in the spectacle as possible.

Dawn and Brian are certainly a couple who love Christmas, and everything it stands for. Let's hope that by next Christmas, we will all be able to enjoy the festive season in our own ways – although do make a note to go and see the Curle Cottage Christmas display.



### **Broadband Update**

Subsequent to the last edition of the Newsletter, Connecting Devon and Somerset have awarded the contract for the provision of local broadband, covering Somerset West and Taunton, to Airband UK. Their latest plans suggest this will be complete by 2024, although there are no defined rollout plans as yet. If you would like to register your interest, please visit their website [www.airband.co.uk](http://www.airband.co.uk)

## **SCHOOL HOLIDAYS**

**Half Term - 15 February to 19 February  
inclusive**

**Spring Holiday - 2 April to 16 April  
inclusive**

# Neroche Woodlanders at Young Wood

## COPING WITH THE COLD

It's a pretty miserable time of year, what with the continuing lockdown, the cold winds, rain, snow and dark skies. The seasons are turning, and the woods are signaling the return of spring on the horizon – catkins unfolding, snowdrops and a few primroses in flower, and cuckoo pint, wild garlic and bluebells already poking green shoots through the leafy forest floor.

Climate change is already reshuffling our wildlife calendar. Spring is arriving at least a fortnight sooner than it did 50 year ago, and every year it feels like flowers and new greenery appear a little sooner than last year.

Right now, it's still very much wintertime. So how do woodland creatures cope at this time of year? Trees of temperate climates like ours naturally lose their leaves in the winter, in order to reduce their surface area and hence their moisture loss, while also reducing the risk of being blown over by high winds. Plants that continue to have green foliage right through the winter naturally secrete antifreeze proteins which inhibit the growth of ice crystals in their cells.

For warm-blooded animals, maintaining body temperature and looking for food can burn more energy than they're able to consume. As well as a lack of food and shelter, small mammals have to deal with losing heat more quickly due to their larger surface area to volume ratio.

Some mammals like bats, hedgehogs and dormice, hibernate during the winter, finding a sheltered, insulated spot or building a cosy nest and shutting down completely for several months. During this time, they lower their breathing and heart rate, and their body temperature, so they can conserve resources and cope with the cold. Bats can slow their breathing to as few as five breaths a minute, and some species can last almost an hour without breathing at all.



Rather than truly hibernating, some of our woodland residents like mice and shrews enter a state of 'torpor'. Like hibernation, this is also a state of inactivity although for a shorter period, and they can revive themselves to go foraging during milder spells.

Badgers are also less active in winter and go through cycles of torpor which can last for more than 24 hours. They will stay in their sett for days without food when winter conditions are too harsh to venture outside.

Meanwhile, queen bees will gorge on pollen and nectar to store fat before burrowing deep into the soil in early autumn. They can stay there for up to nine months. Most butterfly species spend winter in the larval stage or as eggs, although some hibernate as adults, including brimstone, peacock and comma. They settle down in outdoor structures like sheds and farm buildings and enter a dormant state as the weather turns cold. They then wake again around April or May.

And while you hunker down waiting for the icy conditions to pass, bear in mind one consolation: deep frosts kill off a lot of bugs like ticks, so fewer survive to begin their bloodsucking afresh once the spring eventually arrives.

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

[www.nerochewoodlanders.org](http://www.nerochewoodlanders.org)

## Household Recycling & Refuse Collections

2nd April: collect 3rd April;

5th April: collect 6th April;

3rd May: collect 4th May

All collections will be 1 day later than usual collection day.



To check collection dates go to:

<http://www2.tauntondeane.gov.uk/asp/webpages/waste/pdf/RefuseWednesdayB.pdf>



## Grandpa David's Spring Quiz



This quiz is intended to encourage children to use reference sources to get the answers. I hope it will tax grown-ups too.

1. The country of Zaire has a new name. What is it?
2. James Lovelock is famous for what?
3. What is *Ligustrum ovalifolium*; common in gardens?
4. What is the oldest national park in the UK?
5. What is the (Latin) name for the common honey bee?
6. Where is your hippocampus?
7. Most people have three things called Pelvis; where?
8. Which city is thought to be the origin of Covid19?
9. Where are The Needles?
10. There are at least three kinds of condenser; name them?
11. What is a Trig point; what was it for?
12. There are dragon's teeth near Axminster; what were they for?
13. What is an analgesic?
14. What is the name of the main Paris airport?
15. Where is Brobdignag?
16. The French word Pamplermousse is which fruit?
17. The difference between psychology and psychiatry?
18. How many HMS Ark Royals have there been?
19. What does DVD stand for?
20. Where is the village of Nasty?
21. And Pratt's Bottom?
22. What does the Welsh word Araf mean?
23. What is an actuary?
24. What is the highest point in Cornwall?
25. The difference between a microphotograph and a photomicrograph?

Good Luck!! **Answers on Page 47**  
Courtesy of David Spears



## News from Bickenhall and District WI

*By Jacqueline Kolkowski*



We are back with news from your local WI!! It's still very strange without our monthly meetings, although we have all been keeping in touch and we are continuing our meetings on Zoom. We started 2021 with fun and games, a treasure hunt won by Sheila Green, what a treasure trove Sheila has on her dining table! Charades was also great fun on Zoom. Well done Pauline on performing all the questions from Film, Books and TV.

As for all of us, Zoom plays a big part in our lives – as well as our monthly meetings even the Annual Meeting was held virtually. We are lucky to have various events organised for us on Zoom, walking netball workouts, Denman at home courses ranging from cooking to Tai Chi, along with The Somerset Federation's excellent weekly Zoom talks. These have included some very entertaining and informative guest speakers.

Peter McCleave, a Pride of Britain nominee, spoke about his stem cell donor campaign. This is a subject close to the WI's heart as it is currently one of our National Resolutions.

Ian Gunn spoke on Cyber Crime, he discussed and gave examples of the spreading of false news, paralysing Government agencies and, closer to home, emptying our bank accounts, and most importantly how to keep us safe from cyber-criminals.

Lucy Richards of the YMCA, spoke about the shoe box donations, along with the work of the YMCA and how it has changed with Covid.

Presentations were given by the Great Western Air Ambulance Charity, and the Dorset and Somerset Ambulance, both teams explained how their services and staff cover Somerset, along with how much it costs to run these services. Most of the cost is covered by fund raising, and again, as with other charities how things have changed since Covid.

Although we all try to keep in touch with each other we do miss that personal contact. Tricia Dryden (our President), organised and delivered a lovely Christmas goodie bag and Christmas quiz to all members, with help from others. The quiz was produced by our super

quiz setters Candy and Peta. It was a very close result with Carole being our Christmas Quiz winner by one point.

*Bickenhall and District WI usually meet the second Wednesday of each month, at the Neroche Hall*

*We are now on Zoom and our meetings will include speakers so if you would like to join our meetings, please contact Tricia Dryden*  
[\*tricia@witchlodge.co.uk\*](mailto:tricia@witchlodge.co.uk)

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## **Thurlbear CE VA School Update**

***By Steve Gillan, Head Teacher***

As a proud Church school Headteacher, it was a proud moment to be interviewed for 'Manna' monthly magazine, created by a team connected to the Diocese of Bath and Wells. I felt it was worth sharing some of the answers in this publication, too, as my replies possibly reflect the thoughts and feelings of many in education, right now!

### **What has surprised/impressed you about your school community throughout the pandemic?**

Nothing surprised me! I have been at Thurlbear nearly 9 years and I knew, deep down, that we would stand up and be counted when it mattered most. What has impressed me most about that commitment has been the level of enthusiasm, drive and community swell of support that has been sustained over a full year. That level of energy is so challenging but, right now, it is being maintained and I am proud of that on a daily basis.

Most recently, I have been overwhelmed with the huge generosity of the wider community, as they have come forward to donate devices for those pupils learning at home to use. Others have even donated their own money for us to choose the devices of our choice; this really has brought out the best in some people.

### **How have you (and your staff) been sustained throughout the pandemic?**

As mentioned, sustaining a level of teaching at this intensity is incredibly hard. Our teachers have been delivering both online, live lessons *every day* as well as teaching the pupils who are still in school.

During this most recent lockdown, our school has approximately 40% of pupils back (around 90), which presents a big challenge to maintain staff safety and wellbeing. As with every school, the resilience and drive of all staff is a wonder to behold. You really feel that sense of achievement when you get in the car on a Friday evening and say: "Yes, that was another good week." Sometimes, we could do with Paul's letters to the small band of Corinthians, steeling us against future challenges and exclaiming those small victories in the face of adversity!

### **How have you sought to sustain others?**

How do we sustain? We talk, we have honest debate, and we seek assurance from each other. As Head, I make myself available every day for (socially distanced) chats...and I make sure the 2 kettles are always filled and I buy the chocolates on some Fridays (this can get expensive!).

### **Looking back over the last year is there any single moment that stands out for you?**

I emailed the staff regarding opening for the weekends for one particular family. It was a desperate measure and I knew I couldn't do it on my own for safeguarding reasons. I sent it out into cyberspace, in hope rather than expectation. Within 10 minutes, I had 30 replies from staff volunteering to be put into a rota for Saturday and Sunday. That was a tight-throat moment and quite overwhelming.

My 'moments' happen every Friday. I make sure our After-School Club pupils have all been collected, around 5pm, and then I sit in my office and reflect. I look at what we have achieved since Monday, how many messages we have answered, how many families have been contacted and share a small prayer of thanks. My 25-mile drive home is a time to prepare to be dad/husband/foster carer at home!

### **Does your school have a connection with your local church community? If so, has that changed at all in the last year?**

We have a wonderful Seven Sowers Benefice who has done its best to support us. Christabel Ager normally brings her wonderful Open the Book team every Tuesday to share a Bible story through the media of

acting! Sadly, this has been curtailed, although they have been videoing the stories instead! They have also been at the end of an email should we need them, which is a good option.

### **Have you got any words for parents who are worrying about the impact of the pandemic on their children's schooling?**

Renoir wrote: "The pain passes, but the beauty remains." We will *all* get through this and every single one of those families will have had some beautiful, golden moments at home; the kind of family experience that you simply couldn't get in school.

Children are incredibly resilient, positive people. They will catch up. My message to parents would be: "Ignore the doom and gloom merchants in the media, telling you of a generation of lost children. Instead, trust your schools and work with them to fill any gaps. Trust schools to do their jobs and do not take heed of anyone talking down the chances of your child. We are experts. We know your children. We will find solutions for every child and will work tirelessly to achieve the best of outcomes. To borrow from Proverbs: We will do everything in our considerable power to train up our children in the way they should go!"

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## **Home Schooling**

***By Fiona Gledhill***

I offered to write my experience of home schooling, to give an insight into what it's like. My children go to Thurlbear Primary School, and we have been home schooling last spring and this year so far. Both my husband and I work full time from home on our computers. During these times of Covid, I have been trying to look for positives in everything, so I will start with those!

Thurlbear School have been absolutely fantastic in their support and this year have set up daily online lessons for all children. They were even able to loan us a laptop, so that the children could both work on computers individually. Thanks to anyone who donated a laptop or iPad to the school. They are getting them professionally wiped and set up ready to give to other families from the school. We have to juggle our work meetings with their online lesson times, to make sure that they don't clash, and we are able to support them. I have a deep respect for

the teachers, and how they have adapted to teaching online to 20+ children, while having a smaller group in the classroom from the key worker parents. For my youngest, who needs me to sit in the lesson (just out of video) to ensure attention is being paid and sorting out any issues with the technology – although to be honest, I have noticed that the children are quicker than me now in remembering how to press the right buttons! Once a week they both have an online P.E. lesson: we clear a space in the dining room, and we (Mum out of view of the camera of course) follow the intensive regime of press-ups and star-jumps!

Spending more time with the children and seeing how they learn and get better every day is the biggest positive. It has been a learning experience for us as parents too – learning phonics sounds that are used to teach children how to read, has been tricky. I find it amazing how we all learn English, which seems to have so many conflicting rules or no rules at all!

Working at the same time is the biggest challenge. The children are pretty good at knowing not to interrupt us when we are on our calls, although it's fitting everything into one day that is hard. I try to keep some of the morning clear for teaching, although that means working in the evenings to catch up. Frequently I have had to tell my colleagues to wait a moment on our calls, while I retrieve fish fingers from the oven! Multi-tasking has never been so challenging!

Hoping they get back to school soon, as they miss their friends and Thurlbear is such a lovely school for them to enjoy. Good luck to everyone in our community doing home schooling too.



*Kingfisher © John Learoyd*

## It looks and quacks like a duck to me...

*By John Thorne*

THERE is an old saying that if something looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck... then, it's a duck! So, if a business looks like a housebuilder, sounds like a housebuilder, and acts like a housebuilder.... then, it's a housebuilder and not a farmer! Which is why I don't think anybody should be too surprised that Taylor Wimpey wants to build houses on land that it purchases.



*John Thorne in a typical new estate street*

Readers will, of course, appreciate I am talking about the former Crown Estates land which Taylor Wimpey bought for the sort of knock-down price one might expect to negotiate while sitting next to a Government Minister at a Party fund-raising dinner. Ouch! I hear you exclaim. A Conservative county councillor knocking the apparent shenanigans of a Conservative Government Minister. Of course, I reply, I am a councillor for you first, before I am a Conservative Party councillor, and where something appears fishy to me, I will say so.

My background of investigative journalism equips me with the sort of nose a detective police officer has when he instinctively knows someone is up to something. Which means that when property agents Savills acts for the Crown Estates in the sale of hundreds of acres of land in and around Neroche, and simultaneously acts for Taylor Wimpey in the acquisition of said land, I don't need to be a serving police officer to know that someone is up to something. Who and what that someone and something is, we may learn over the next couple of years, because our MP, Rebecca Pow, has instigated a Government-level inquiry into it. I work closely with Rebecca and I know how concerned she is about this matter, and not just because she lives locally.

But the results of that inquiry may not come until after Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) has agreed its Local Plan setting out where and what development it is prepared to accept between

now and 2040. Many readers may have attended the public meeting in Stoke St Mary village hall in the days when we were allowed to have such meetings, where huge public concern was voiced to SWT officers and councillors. They may recall my asking the SWT planning portfolio holder, given the weakness and previous failures of his planning department, why residents should have any faith in the council's ability to prevent thousands of new homes being built in fields near them. And they may recall his extremely glib answer, quote 'because we have the political will to do so' unquote, implying that the previous borough council was politically unable to protect people who live in the countryside, although now his new administration could.

Gobsmackingly dismissive, I thought at the time. And now his chickens could be coming home to roost, for we have started to see Taylor Wimpey lay out plans for turning its low-cost Neroche farmland into goldmine housing estates. A whole new 'garden community' and further massive development is proposed to the east of the motorway.

Fortunately, your parish councillors are on the ball and already working with neighbouring parishes to put together a co-ordinated and robust rebuttal of Taylor Wimpey's plans. They will be able to have their say when SWT consults on the Local Plan 2040, which is likely to be during the summer. It will be important, too, that as many individual residents as possible also have their say in the consultation in order to influence the voting public sensitive SWT administration. So, let's start getting those postcards ready.



*Chinese Lantern © David J Dalley*



*Photo © David J Dalley*

## Poetry Corner

We understand many of you enjoy poetry and in these unusual times, words can provide a level of comfort or inspiration, or even a good laugh! We thought you may enjoy the following poem written by U.A. Fanthorpe (1929 - 2009), an Englishwoman with a fabulous sense of humour.

The poem has three verses, the first is from the dragon, the second from the maiden and the third from St George. It is based on the painting by Paulo Uccello of St George and the Dragon. Enjoy!!

### “Not my Best Side”



*Paulo Uccello c1470 National Gallery*

I

Not my best side, I'm afraid.  
The artist didn't give me a chance to  
Pose properly, and as you can see,  
Poor chap, he had this obsession with  
Triangles, so he left off two of my  
Feet. I didn't comment at the time



(What, after all, are two feet  
To a monster?) but afterwards  
I was sorry for the bad publicity.  
Why, I said to myself, should my conqueror  
Be so ostentatiously beardless, and ride  
A horse with a deformed neck and square hoofs?  
Why should my victim be so  
Unattractive as to be inedible,  
And why should she have me literally  
On a string? I don't mind dying  
Ritually, since I always rise again,  
But I should have liked a little more blood  
To show they were taking me seriously.

II

It's hard for a girl to be sure if  
She wants to be rescued. I mean, I quite  
Took to the dragon. It's nice to be  
Liked, if you know what I mean. He was  
So nicely physical, with his claws  
And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,  
And the way he looked at me,  
He made me feel he was all ready to  
Eat me. And any girl enjoys that.  
So when this boy turned up, wearing machinery,  
On a really dangerous horse, to be honest  
I didn't much fancy him. I mean,  
What was he like underneath the hardware?  
He might have acne, blackheads or even  
Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon-  
Well, you could see all his equipment  
At a glance. Still, what could I do?  
The dragon got himself beaten by the boy,  
And a girl's got to think of her future.

I have diplomas in Dragon  
Management and Virgin Reclamation.  
My horse is the latest model, with  
Automatic transmission and built-in  
Obsolescence. My spear is custom-built,  
And my prototype armour  
Still on the secret list. You can't  
Do better than me at the moment.  
I'm qualified and equipped to the  
Eyebrow. So why be difficult?  
Don't you want to be killed and/or rescued  
In the most contemporary way? Don't  
You want to carry out the roles  
That sociology and myth have designed for you?  
Don't you realize that, by being choosy,  
You are endangering job prospects  
In the spear- and horse-building industries?  
What, in any case, does it matter what  
You want? You're in my way.

## **Do you Run a Local Business?**

**You could help the running of your Neroche Newsletter  
by advertising with us.**

**For a small fee, we will place your business flyer or card  
in  
with each edition, which is then hand delivered to  
250 local houses and businesses.**

**If you are interested please drop us an email to chat about  
it: [nerochenewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nerochenewsletter@gmail.com)**

## **News from RSPCA West Hatch**

### ***By Bel Deering – Centre Manager***

Despite the latest lockdown we remain very busy at the centre with both wildlife and domestic animal admissions. Our procedures are outlined below although be aware these may change with national guidance so check our web pages to keep up to date.

**Wildlife Centre** – open for admissions every day 8am-9pm.

Anyone finding a sick or injured wild animal is urged to take it for help at the nearest facility – this may be a local vet or, if closer, our wildlife centre. If you are coming to the site please observe this guidance:

- Please do not come to the site if you are experiencing any of the symptoms of Covid-19 (high temp, continuous cough, etc)
- We ask that only 1 family member brings the casualty to the centre
- Please wear a face covering if you are able and use hand sanitiser provided
- On arrival please ring the doorbell by the green gate and wait for attention
- Please ensure social distancing at all times and stay behind safety screens/signage as requested
- You may be asked to take the box/bedding you brought with you back home

**Animal Centre** – remote rehoming only – no visits to site permitted

- Please check our website [www.rspca.org.uk/findapet](http://www.rspca.org.uk/findapet) to see what animals we have available
- If you find a suitable pet, please ensure you have read the full description and can meet the criteria required
- Drop the centre an email to let us know of your interest and we will then send over a Perfect Match form for you to complete
- Be prepared to exchange information, including ID and photos of your home and animal accommodation by email
- Be able to watch videos we send you and look at photos to ensure that the animal is suitable for you and the one you want
- Be able to pay over the phone
- Be willing to have your chosen pet dropped off at your house by a member of our staff.

## Out in the field

Lockdown has kept our Inspectorate colleagues as busy as ever. In recent years the RSPCA has seen more than 50 animals a day reported as abandoned over a typical festive period, and with the rise in pet ownership over the last year, 2020 was no different. Between March 23 and November 29, there were 11,052 reports of abandoned animals. The local area has seen its fair share of this too, with examples such as the Guinea pigs found in a layby on New Year's Day - just one case.

Animal rescue officer, Clara Scully, said: "These two beauties were dumped in a lay-by on B3147 just before entering Dorchester. Whoever dumped them cut the hole in the hedge to leave them in... It took some time although thankfully we caught them before it was too dark. If they had been left in the freezing temperatures overnight they would have died."

Luckily for the pair, named Bramble and Blackberry, they were taken into care and made a good recovery from their ordeal. Another animal that benefited from experienced rescuers was a pony in North Devon. It had been spotted by passers-by and reported as seemingly underweight and in a field without food and water.

When the Inspector visited it was immediately obvious that the mare was malnourished, with her bones visible despite her thick winter coat. There was barely any grazing in the field, only some poor quality hay and no source of water. The vet who attended noted the elderly pony had skin issues and very poor teeth, and a faecal sample revealed a high intestinal parasite burden.

With signed vet support for offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the police were able to legally seize the pony and her removal to a safe location was quickly organised.

Due to complications caused by the first National Lockdown and resultant Covid restrictions it did not prove possible to obtain sufficient evidence to prove ownership of the pony which remained in RSPCA care. The matter was eventually laid before Exeter Magistrates Court in December when the Judge granted the RSPCA ownership of the pony under Section 20 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The mare has continued to make excellent progress and is now only on a small amount of medication a day. The next step is to find her a sanctuary home to live out her days in loving hands!



## **Work at the centre**

Winter at the centre has seen us continue to be busy with grey seal admissions – to date we have cared for over 70 in the 2020/2021 winter season. Most have come in as orphans or with illness and injury. Some, however, had slightly more dramatic stories.

On the 11th December, a call was taken about a seal pup that had been found in a warehouse gym in South Wales. Unfortunately, by the time the inspector arrived the gym workers had ushered him out of the gym and back into the sea.

Two days later, the seal was reported by some workers who were clearing up a diesel spill from a train derailment at Llangennech, Llanelli. The seal was in a ditch full of water and diesel fuel. Workers had contained the pup and were trying to wash it with clean water to remove the contamination. The pup was removed and taken for assessment and initial triage. On examination it was found to be underweight and exhausted. It was still covered with diesel, had raspy respiration and a bloody nasal discharge. There were also a few minor abrasions to the underside of its fore flippers. He was given rehydration fluids with some activated charcoal to help remove any ingested diesel, eye drops and started on antibiotics.

The next stage of the journey for this young male was to travel to West Hatch for treatment. Here he was named 'Bergamot' and given another

full examination to be sure no issues were missed. Staff here continued stomach tubing with fluids, introduced 'fish soup', continued the antibiotics and started to leave fish to see if he had any interest in food. By the following day he had begun to show an interest in the fish and was looking a lot brighter. By the 16<sup>th</sup>, he was self-feeding, brighter still although we still continued to give fluids and antibiotics and to closely monitor him. The bloody nasal discharge had stopped, possibly just irritation of the nasal membrane from the diesel, and his condition steadily improved day by day. After 5 days his treatment was stopped.



Now we are in February, Bergamot is still in the centre but making great progress towards release back into the wild later in the spring.

Meanwhile in the Animal Centre, we cared for over 500 animals in 2020 and continued to rehome and foster animals out under our new Covid processes. One dog who benefited very much from our care, and then the care of a wonderful fosterer was Bella, an elderly dog that had been severely neglected.

As the photos show, she was suffering hugely on admission to the centre. Bella was underweight at just 8.6kg and had extensive skin problems, dental issues, multiple tumours, heart disease and dementia. She was quickly put onto a range of different treatments and began a slow journey towards a better state of health.



All court cases have been taking much longer due to Covid, and



Bella was not signed over for us to be able to rehome. As such, once she was more stable we looked for a foster home for her to stay in until we knew more about what her future held. She found the most amazing home where they supported her as she regained weight, and coped with her many quirky behaviours. Finally, in recent weeks we heard that the court had removed her from her previous owner and signed her over to the RSPCA. In even better news, her fosterers have now adopted her permanently, giving her twilight years a chance for happiness at last.

There is always a lot more going on at the centre than we can cover in the newsletter – why not follow us on Facebook to keep up on a more regular basis. You can find us at:

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPCAWestHatchAnimalCentre/>

and

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPCAWesthatchwildlife/>

## Fed up with Poo too?

By Fiona Gledhill

Enjoying the countryside has been pivotal for many of us during lockdown; walking around the villages or through many of the woods with the family has been great for our spirits and health. The areas near car parks in Neroche woods have become quite a health hazard with unpicked up poo and are almost impossible to negotiate with small children or bicycles. It's a shame when there are so many responsible dog owners that pick up, and the area is being spoilt by the minority who don't. Dog mess can cause blindness in children if ingested and causes grazing cows' harm through a parasitic infection that harms unborn calves. I love the woods and want to walk without having to watch every step that we make.



It's likely that during lockdown more people from a wider area have been coming to walk dogs in the woods. If most people pick up, then who are these people letting their dogs foul these footpaths? Well, I met one of them last Sunday. My family and I were walking into Neroche woods from the entrance half-way up the hill. We passed an elderly gentleman with two dogs, one of which decided to poo right in front of us. As he walked on towards the gate, I asked him "Do you have something to pick it up with?" He responded gruffly "It's the countryside". I was really shocked to think that someone can think it's ok to leave a dirty mess on the path right in front of an entrance way where lots of people are going to walk through. Poo doesn't disappear by magic, it disappears by being trodden on and taken away on shoes or wheels. I complained that it was not ok to leave it on the path where everyone walks, and he rudely said that if it bothered me then I could flick it to one side! If you are that man reading this, please change your ways. It's not ok.

With 9 million dogs in the UK, that's a lot of poo if it's not picked up! A cultural change is needed: if you see people failing to pick up where you live or walk, then please make sure they know how you feel too. Education of the health hazards and how to keep our spaces and footpaths clean should be more widely shared, and I am looking for support from the Parish Council and Forestry Commission.



## February Village Agent News

February finds us back in lockdown, and many people may be struggling to stay active this time round with the cold, wet dark days of winter set in. We have some great tips for you, staying mentally and physically active during these challenging times, helping you to stay fit and well!

Village Agent TOP TIPS keeping your mind and body active in lockdown:

1. We have recently hosted many Talking Cafes to help you –
  - a. Watch this one with advice from a Personal Trainer on what you can do at home: <https://tinyurl.com/yy75mqpe>
  - b. Watch this one on New Year Mental Health and Wellbeing realistic resolutions: <https://tinyurl.com/y3tgdlnr>
  - c. For Gentle Exercises to help your mind & body – easily done at home! <https://tinyurl.com/y4wl8onk>

You can see all past Talking Cafe sessions on the subject under the 'Mental Health & Well Being' or 'Health & Medical' sections, available to watch on YouTube if you are not on social media – go to <https://somersetagents.org/talking-cafes/>.

Tune in for the live streams weekdays at 11am to join in the conversation, [www.facebook.com/talkingcafesomerset](http://www.facebook.com/talkingcafesomerset)

2. Download some free games apps you can play with friends – in your devices App Store, search for games like Gin Rummy, Scrabble or similar and share with your friends so they can download the same game and play together! If you need help with this get in touch with your local Agent or ask a friend! Suduko and other mentally challenging games are great for keeping the little grey cells ticking over.

3. Check out what local places are doing within lockdown restrictions – Winter Watch on the BBC is a great place to get inspiration to go outdoors! For local ideas try: <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/> or the <https://www.rspb.org.uk/>
4. Get Creative with the Seed of Sedgemoor Arts project, all about allowing more people to choose, create and take part in arts and cultural activity from home <https://seedsedgemoor.com/>
5. Join Age UK Somerset's Relaxation and Mindful Breathing online programme, starting Monday the 25th January! There are three sessions each week, and full details can be found here:  
<https://ageuksomersetcoronavirus.org.uk/staying-well/exercises/ageing-well-exercise-sessions/>
6. Fancy a chat with someone? A new friend or a Talk & Support service? We have a new Chat to Connect programme that links people with similar interests so you can connect with new friends! Also, Village Agents can connect you with a befriending or Talk & Support service, or you could call Mind in Somerset listening service if you need a friendly ear <https://www.mindsomerset.org.uk/> call 01823 334906 (Taunton & West Somerset) 01935 474875 (South Somerset and Mendip) or 01278 421190 (Sedgemoor & North Somerset).
7. Do something small each day for 10 minutes, whether that's
  - a. mindful exercises whether that's movement, meditation or colouring – ideas below:
    - i. <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>
    - ii. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/mindfulness-exercises-tips/>
    - iii. <https://www.happinessishomemade.net/free-adult-coloring-pages/>
  - b. Go for a walk - even a few minutes each day helps your body and mind. SASP have some great ideas: <https://www.sasp.co.uk>

- c. Try an online free exercise class – so much is free on YouTube!
- d. Find a new hobby – because of lockdown, so many companies are offering free training or courses – speak to us if you want to find something specific and we can help!
- e. Contact Somerset Libraries who can help you with Audio books, films and much more and may be able to offer home deliveries <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries-leisure-and-communities/libraries/>

### **Would you benefit from a free food box?**

We are still here to help you with your food needs, no one should go hungry this winter, or if you are a Carer and would benefit from some respite from cooking, we can provide some respite meal packs for you and the person you care for. If you need help with any of this please do contact your local Village Agent on 01823 331 222 or visit [www.somersetagents.org](http://www.somersetagents.org).

Stay safe, stay well and stay active



*Schnoz*  
© David J Dalley



*Somerset Apples*  
© David J Dalley

## February in the Forest

**By Robert Greenhalgh  
Community Ranger**



England's forests provide a beautiful, strong, and renewable material that is part of our everyday lives. Forestry England is the largest supplier of homegrown timber in England. I'm privileged to help look after nearly 900 hectares of sustainably managed woodland – equivalent to over 1,200 football pitches. At this time of year, the trees are growing more slowly although they are still putting on height and girth by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it up as new wood growth.

Our Forest Management Plan for East Devon and the Blackdown Hills records what makes the forests unique, such as the soil, local climate, wildlife and existing trees. The plan also describes how we will manage the woodlands and what the future will look like. We consider the changing climate, possible pests and diseases, and our need for timber. We need carefully managed woodlands that will thrive beyond our lifetime to provide a sustainable source of wood for generations to come.

The forest plan guides which tree species we plant, and where. Now is the best time of year to plant as the young trees are in a dormant state. You might be surprised to know that our tree planting is done entirely by hand, with approximately 2000 trees planted per hectare, depending on the species. It's demanding work!

Once the new trees are in the ground, helping them to establish is our next priority. This might mean keeping them free from bramble and other crowding vegetation. Sometimes it means protecting them from deer and grey squirrels which can cause extensive damage and kill high numbers of trees. As they grow, we continue to monitor the trees for early signs of disease or damage and make sure they're growing at the rate we expect for the particular species and conditions.

As the trees grow bigger, we remove some of them to give the remaining trees more space and light to carry on growing, in a process called 'thinning'. When we eventually harvest the remaining mature trees, the forest plan helps us to do this in a way that makes the most

of the environment. While working in the forest, we usually take the opportunity to make other improvements such as creating more open space or improving habitats for wildlife.

After felling, we often let the ground rest. The forest plan tells us how to replant the land or let the seeds in the soil regenerate naturally. Sometimes we create other important habitats instead, such as heathland.

Timber from our forests is made into many products including construction materials, furniture, kitchen units, and fencing. We work with hundreds of businesses that rely on a year-round supply of wood, providing jobs and supporting local economies.

Of course, on top of this, the forests provide incredible green spaces for exercise and to support wellbeing. In the Blackdowns and East Devon, we're fortunate to have scenery, wildlife, and heritage in abundance and one of the highlights of my job is seeing people enjoying the forest. If you're missing the forest, check out our Forests at Home resources to get your forest fix: <https://www.forestryengland.uk/forests-at-home> You can also read our Forest Management Plan online, simply search 'East Devon Forest Plan'.



*St Peter's Church © David J Dalley*

## News from your MP

*By Rebecca Pow*

Hello again

It won't come as a surprise that I am starting this update with Covid-19 which has dominated our lives for so long now, although I write in a somewhat optimistic spirit knowing that across the UK millions have already been vaccinated, and we are on track to deliver on the NHS commitment to offer a first vaccine to the four most vulnerable groups by mid-February. It is the vaccine that offers the way out, and so this is pleasing news with the roll out in Somerset on track to deliver vaccines against these national targets. As of the 31st January, 94% of all over 75s in Somerset had received their first dose – an incredible achievement so far that is testament to the really commendable joined-up partnership working locally involving the health and care sector, public services and hundreds of volunteers.

I normally spend much of my day on Zoom meeting calls although towards the end of January I was invited to visit (all socially distanced of course) the large vaccination centre at Taunton Racecourse in person, and I only have praise for what I saw. An army of well organised volunteers were helping to direct people in, the centre ran like clockwork and there was a general sense of positivity in the air. In addition to the Taunton Racecourse centre, Somerset also has a second large vaccination centre at the Royal Bath and West Showground - joining a total of 17 vaccination venues now open across the county (at the time of writing).



Given some older and more vulnerable people don't drive or have access to a car, and that it is extremely important that people come forward for their vaccination when they are invited to do so, I am pleased that Somerset County Council have taken steps to build on and enhance the support already offered by our superb Community Transport services. For those who have no form of transport please do either call the Somerset Coronavirus helpline on 0300 790 6275 (lines are open from 8am to 6pm, seven days a week) or alternatively visit the community transport pages on Somerset.Gov.Uk.

I am keeping a close eye on the deployment of vaccines right across Taunton Deane, linking in regularly with the delivery team and feeding back to Ministers as necessary, so if you have any concerns, please do let me know.

## **SCHOOLS**

A recent Zoom call with a group of local head teachers highlighted the pressures they are under at this challenging time, although also what a phenomenal job they have been doing keeping our schools open for the children of key workers and vulnerable students and providing remote learning for others. They deserve huge praise and thanks for the role they are playing. I am pushing the case to get the teaching profession prioritised (with the hard-working early years staff and those who work in our special schools as part of this too) once the vaccination roll-out progresses to the next phase.

Another meeting (on Zoom again) with staff and pupils from Richard Huish College and Bridgwater & Taunton College, gave a first-hand account of what students and staff have been facing over the past months and what they continue to face as their remote learning continues. Both colleges have done an exceptional job and there is no doubt that the challenge has been tough for all concerned, although some positives have also resulted (for example a number of students commented that they have become better at organising their time,) and there are bound to be lessons learned in terms of how courses are delivered in future.

Like the great majority of us, I want children to be able to return to school at the earliest opportunity. However, it is important that restrictions stay in place while case numbers of coronavirus and transmission rates are still high. The Prime Minister has confirmed that

it will not be possible to re-open schools immediately after the February half term. However, if we continue to make progress in driving down case numbers and achieve the target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable groups with their first dose by 15 February, then it may be possible to start reopening schools from Monday 8 March.

## **BEES & NEONICOTINOIDS**

There has been much interest locally recently regarding bees and protection of our pollinators as a result of an emergency authorisation for use of a neonicotinoid pesticide to control aphids on sugar beet by growers in the East of the country. The aphids spread a virus which has been decimating the crop.

I want to give assurances that this is a temporary authorisation for a crop that is harvested prior to flowering and very strict conditions have been put on its use. Neonicotinoids are otherwise banned here and are certainly no longer available for use on oil seed rape crops that are widely grown locally.

It is worth noting that this emergency authorisation has been used by 10 countries in Europe since 2018. Here, pesticides can only be used where we judge there to be no harm to human health and animal health and no unacceptable risks to the environment. Crucially, the beet industry is developing alternative solutions. The UK is a world leader in developing greener farming practices and upholds the highest standards of environmental and health protection. The government is currently consulting on the draft National Action Plan for the Sustainable use of Pesticides which sets out the ambition to further minimise the risks and impacts of pesticides to human health and the environment. Protecting pollinators is a priority for this Government and me personally. The National Pollinator Strategy is a 10 year plan which sets out how Government, conservation groups, farmers, beekeepers and researchers can work together to improve the status of pollinating insect species in England and I am working closely with stakeholders on this issue.

## **ENVIRONMENT BILL PROGRESS**

As Environment Minister, I remain fully committed to bringing the Environment Bill through Parliament. Measures in it will set us on a





sustainable trajectory for the future. Progress on this landmark Bill has been slowed owing to the pressures of the pandemic on Parliamentary time but Royal Assent is expected in the Autumn. Key work on implementing the Bill's measures will continue at pace, including establishing the Office for Environmental Protection, setting long-term legally binding targets for

environmental protection covering air and water quality, biodiversity and resource and waste efficiency (a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers will be one of the new measures.)

Outside of the EU, Britain can develop global gold standard environmental policies. Having left the Common Agricultural Policy, we can use public money for public goods, rewarding environmentally responsible land use, and leaving the Common Fisheries Policy means we are able to grant access and allocate quotas based on sustainability, allowing us to pursue the highest standards in marine conservation.

## **FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUNDING & GARDEN TOWN**

I recently took part in an informative webinar hosted by the District Council on plans for the future of Taunton utilising the £14m Future Highstreets Fund which I worked hard to secure. There are plenty of ambitious ideas and I stressed the importance of adhering to

the Garden Town design guide ensuring that future homes and developments are green, environmentally friendly and beautiful, with nature fully integrated. I keep in regular touch with our local businesses who are of course all key to the local economy, and I continue to make representations to relevant Government Ministers to ensure they are receiving the support they need now and looking ahead.

## **STONE WORKS FUNDING**

In other welcome news locally, I am absolutely delighted that the Stone Works in Wellington, the 225-year-old former textile site, has been awarded almost £350,000 through the Government's Culture Recovery Fund. In a visit to Wellington in 2017 with the Culture and Heritage Minister, I remember setting out the unique opportunity, based on the nation's textile heritage, that this site provided, and I have continued making the case to Historic England since then alongside other stakeholders. The site is thought to be the only surviving example of its kind in England and as such, has remarkable local and national significance. Preserving this unique heritage will give it a new role in the community and importantly this funding will help support the livelihoods of many people with specialist heritage skills.

And finally, on funding, I was so proud to receive a personal call from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury informing me that the funding for the new theatre complex at Musgrove Park Hospital has been fully signed off. He recalled my original debate in Parliament calling for action on this back in 2018 together with my petition. Work is well underway, and this will be followed by the complete upgrade of the whole site. It's a great effort by all concerned.

As ever, please do get in touch if there is anything I can help you with. You can either email me at [Rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:Rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk) or telephone my office on 01823 443062.

Best wishes

Rebecca



## 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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:nerocheemail@gmail.com).

## Welcome to Neroche



*Winter Walkers  
© David J Dalley*

In The Shadow Of  
**THE BLACKDOWNS**  
*Memories of Rural Life*

Collected by Alan and Doreen Marsh

At the heart of the book are memories we gathered on a tape recorder some years ago, only a few are of more recent date. They cover the first six decades of the 20th century in times of change and challenge in rural England.

Topics covered include the two World Wars, the farming community, a village shop, tree felling and teasel growing. The last-named topic spans many centuries in Somerset.

A printer has been selected and work will begin as soon as the consequences of lockdown allow.

**THE BOOK**

A paperback of 120 pages

Illustrated throughout in B/W and Colour

Editor -Tom Mayberry MBE - Designer Helen Hillier

**The Price - £10**

The front cover; one of our villages in 1910, not a car in sight, but locals will recognise the "Local". That **is** still there but the dwelling opposite is no longer a farmhouse.

## Neroche Local History Knowledge Quiz Answers

1. Count Robert of Mortain, half-brother of William the Conqueror.
2. The 14<sup>th</sup> century building in Taunton was acquired by the Portman family in the 1500's, they added the wooden timbered Tudor façade. The Portmans were major landowners in our parish for over 600 hundred years. Their estate was sold to the Crown Commissioners in 1944. Over the last 10 years the Crown has sold off the land and houses. The Portman Estate recently bought back their Tudor House now rented to Café Nero.
3. Catherine, the widow of George Sheppard.
4. In her will of 1830, Catherine Sheppard (born in Staple Fitzpaine in 1770s) stipulated a school was be built in Curland "for the instruction of 20 poor girls of the parish".
5. Play Street was situated in the field opposite Neroche Hall. In older documents it is spelt as Plaistrete or Plaistreet.
6. Thomas Murless/Murlefs built the chapel in 1821. His surname comes down the centuries, in early maps there is a Murlefs Wood near Park Farm, Staple Fitzpaine. The chapel was closed in 1996 and is now a private home.
7. The ghost of Rachel Portman, formerly of Play Street.
8. Rachel Portman was buried in the old Bickenhall Church of St Pauls in the 1630s. It was demolished in the 1840s. She is alleged to roam on dark nights between the old site of St Pauls and St Peter's Church in Staple Fitzpaine where she would have preferred to be buried. There is an alabaster effigy of Rachel Portman in St Peter's.
9. Under the road after turning from New Road towards Curland and Broadway opposite the site of the demolished Bickenhall Mill Farm. The elaborate river channels and tail races were built to drive the waterwheels that powered the mill. OS:281185.
10. Teasels.
11. Teasels were used in the production of fine cloth to make a uniform nap.

12. A type of Bronze Age axe. The double loops would have been used to tie it onto the wooden handle. This 3,000 year old axe head was found in Curland in 1937 when a hole for a fence post was being dug.

13. The name is believed to be derived from the Old English words *nierra* and *raecc-wic* meaning the place (kennels) where *rache* (hunting dogs) were kept. Neroche Castle was once part of a much larger royal hunting forest.

14. Major flooding. The River Rag, we know as a quiet stream next to the Greyhound Pub, flooded a nearby house to the top of the first floor. Many local homes were badly flooded.

15. The Abdick and Bulstone Hundred.

16. Agricultural Labourer.

17. Legend has it the devil, aggrieved by the building of St Peter's Church in Staple Fitzpaine, threw several large sarsen stones at the tower. He missed and some of these large stones can be found in the nearby banks.

18. In Staple Fitzpaine opposite the Almshouses. The school was built by Edward Berkeley Portman. Parents were supposed to pay a penny per child per week.



*Most of the questions and their answers come from our local history book **Life in the Lee of the Blackdown Hills: Chronicles of Bickenhall, Curland, Staple Fitzpaine**. Printed in 2018 & reprinted in 2020. If you would like a copy please contact [jane.hole@outlook.com](mailto:jane.hole@outlook.com)*

## Grandpa David's Spring Quiz Answers



1. Democratic Republic of the Congo or DR Congo.
2. He developed Gaia, the science of planetary conservation.
3. Privet.
4. Peak District National Park.
5. *Apis mellifera*.
6. In your brain.
7. The Pelvis is the hip girdle bone; also, the start of the ureters in the kidneys.
8. Wuhan, China.
9. Isle of Wight.
10. Electronic: steam or vapour: light gathering.
11. They are surveying columns usually on hilltops.
12. Concrete columns to act as tank traps in wartime.
13. Painkiller.
14. Charles De Gaulle airport.
15. In Jonathan Swift's book Gulliver's Travels.
16. Grapefruit.
17. Psychology is the study of the mind, personality, behaviour, emotions etc. Psychiatry is the study and treatment of mental disorders.
18. Five.
19. Digital Versatile Disc.
20. Near Ware in Hertfordshire.
21. Pratts Bottom is near Bromley close to the London/ Kent border.
22. Often painted on roads; it means slow.
23. Calculates life expectancy to work out life pensions.
24. Brown Willy.
25. Microphotography is making tiny images of documents etc for storage. Photomicrography is taking pictures through a microscope.

# Local Communication and Information

## **Websites:**

### **Neroche Villages** [www.nerochevillages.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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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