

Working Together for a Better Community

NEROCHE VILLAGES Newsletter

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

Issue 40 - Summer 2021



Photo © Karen Morgan

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.



ON-SCREEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING A GREAT SUCCESS

By Alan Hyde

About 60 parishioners, and some from outside the parish, tuned in to this year's virtual Annual Parish Meeting (APM), held by Zoom on 15 April.



It was a great opportunity for the community to stay connected after the tough time we've all had over the last year or so. No APM was held last year due to Covid, so it was particularly pleasing to see so many interested faces on screen, some clutching their favourite tippie as we heard about some of the issues of the day from invited speakers.

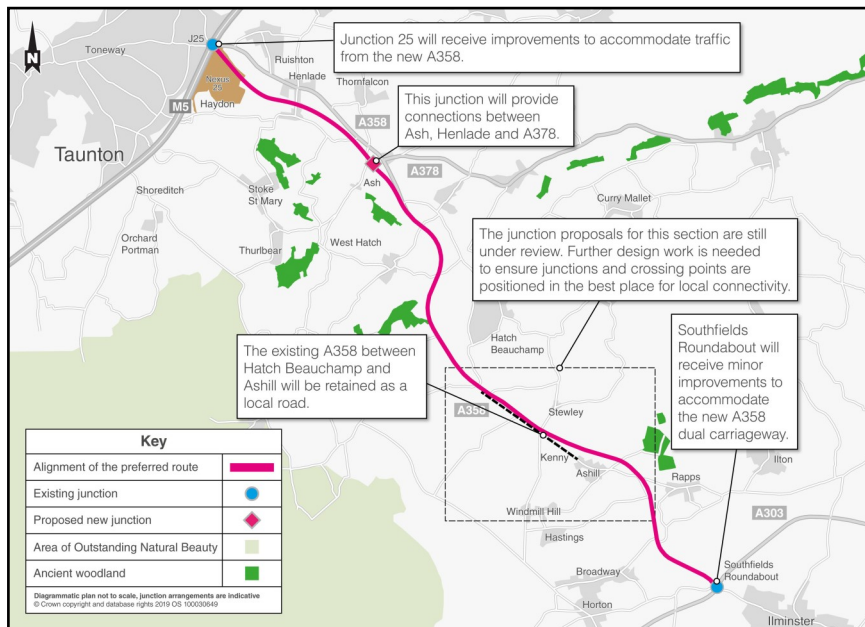
Masterminded by Jane Hole, brilliantly chaired by John Parsons and expertly hosted by Jacq Wanstall, our new Parish Clerk, the two-hour session flew by and, despite a couple of faltering handovers, it went without a technical hitch!

First up was John Bell, Chairman of Neroche Parish Council, who gave an update on local issues including the proposed local government changes for Somerset's county and district councils, a bridleway issue, an unauthorised development, and the Parish Council's purchase of

the defibrillator outside The Greyhound Inn. John concluded by saying that he was stepping down from his role as Chairman although would continue as a councillor. A new Parish Council Chair will be chosen in due course.

Ross Henley, our District Councillor, then gave a brief summary of his activities and, looking back over the past year, recognised the impact of Covid and its restrictions on people's mental health and highlighted the support available.

County Councillor John Thorne spoke about the proposed A358 upgrade and the Taylor Wimpey development at Orchard Portman. Details of the plan to dual the A358 between Southfields roundabout near Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5 near Taunton are available on the Highways England website, including a recently published environmental assessment report which provides some information on the impacts on local roads and the surrounding area. Further community consultation is intended as part of the planning process before the scheme gets considered by a Planning Inspector and a recommendation goes to the Secretary of State. In the meantime, the Parish Council held an extraordinary general meeting on 22 April to seek feedback from parishioners on local access points to present to Highways England.



On the Orchard Portman development, John said the proposal was likely to be included, with other development options at other sites, in a forthcoming consultation on the Draft Local Plan. Watch this space.

This was followed by an encouraging talk on the rollout of superfast broadband by Lynda Sudlow from Airband, which had recently secured a contract following a frustrating chapter for this project. Lynda gave some costs (£38/month for 40 Mgbps download speed and £47/month for 100 Mgbps) and indicative timescales, including building the 'fibre to the premises' solution later this year before project completion in 2022. The installation cost is £99 including fibre router and twist port.

Anyone interested is invited to visit <http://www.airband.co.uk> or telephone 01905 676121.

The meeting culminated with a fascinating talk on the climate crisis by Jane Durney, a former Wildlife Trust Chief Executive from One Planet Bruton (www.oneplanetbruton.org). She shared a number of environmental insights and lessons, particularly on what individuals and local communities can do to play their part in tackling the climate emergency. The hope is that residents in Neroche, supported by the Parish Council, can come together and develop a plan of action for our corner of this green and pleasant land.

All in all, the meeting was, thankfully, a successful experiment for Neroche - with no sign of Jackie Weaver and no heated exchanges about standing orders! If you missed the meeting, an edited recording plus the broadband and climate crisis presentations are available on the Community tab of the Neroche Villages website - <http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk/annual-parish-meeting.php>

Household Recycling & Refuse Collections

Refuse collection dates are all 1 day later in the following weeks (including Saturday collections)



May 31st - June 4
August 30th - September 3rd

To check collection dates go to:
<https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk>

Please Support your Neroche Newsletter

Dear Readers

It is now 2 years since we last asked for your help in securing the future of the Newsletter. Since that time, we have relied on our funds, and a small amount of advertising revenue from inserts, as well as the regular contributions from the Parish Council and Neroche Hall. This year, our printer has had to increase his costs, and as such, our production costs have also increased.

We hope that the Newsletter has continued to be an enjoyable read over the past 12 months, and we are delighted to be able to start promoting events for the rest of the year, as lockdown restrictions ease. Our intention will always be to provide this free to all local residents, although we would appreciate your support through a fundraising donation.

There is a donation form accompanying this edition.

Please make cheques payable to: 'Neroche Communication Action Group' and send to: Karen Learoyd, Seaforde Grange, Bickenhall, Taunton TA3 6TY.

Many thanks for your support. From your Newsletter Team

Neroche Thursday Lunch Club

**Neroche Hall
12.30pm for 1pm**

June 3rd, July 1st, August 5th

Come along to Neroche Hall and enjoy a superb home-cooked lunch in wonderful company for just £7 per head (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.

**Please phone or email by the Monday prior to the lunch to book for catering purposes. Contact Alison Brown
01823 480441 or aabrown.battens@gmail.com**



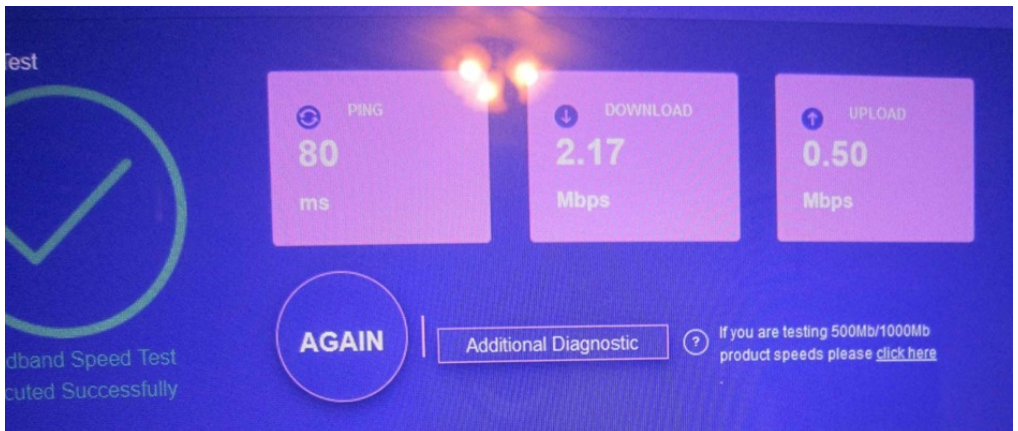
BROADBAND frustration and resolution! A tale of two providers.

By Alan Perrior

So, there I was, just watching the flashing orange light (yet again) on the BT router. How long will broadband be down this time?

I've always been disappointed with BT broadband, with its speed and reliability, although since New Year we've had at least 2 or 3 "outages" per week and we've rarely had more than 1.5 to 2.5 mbps (mega bits per second). And yet I know BT customers, living just a few miles away, getting 50mbps!

This is the fastest speed we managed in January 2021.



Yes, I accept that it's our own fault for living in the middle of nowhere with about 4 or 5 miles of copper cable from the house to the magic green roadside box somewhere between us and the exchange in Hatch Beauchamp. (Taking a circuitous route much of this cable is overhead and thus subject to the vagaries of the weather, overhanging tree branches etc). I wouldn't mind so much if the BT charge reflected the service; perhaps those getting slow speed should only pay pro rata? It seems so unfair that some people are getting a much better service for the same cost.

I was trying to remember when I first heard about, and was encouraged by talk of CDS (Connecting Devon and Somerset) and the promise that soon we'd all be on "superfast" broadband facilitated by fibre optics etc. I reckon that the project was first mooted locally in about 2014; certainly, I remember the endless discussions on the topic at the

Annual Parish Meetings around that time. So, I phoned BT and checked what broadband speed I should be expecting; apparently, between 1 and 3 mbps download and 0.5 mbps upload.

Then I asked when “superfast” would be available here in my part of Bickenhall (we’re the last house in Bickenhall on the road to Broadway and Horton, or if you’re approaching from the South, we’re the first house in Bickenhall) – after some umm’ing and err’ing I was told “*probably sometime around 2025/26*”! Perhaps it’s OK for those lucky residents in “North” Bickenhall; some of whom already have superfast and for others it’s on the way – although, apparently, not for us yet.

Not being encouraged by these responses I decided to look for an alternative that wouldn’t cost the earth – I’d rather not get locked into an expensive contract for a satellite system or similar. I want to pay roughly the same as I pay now for something faster and more reliable. Impossible? I thought the chances were fairly slim until I discussed the problem with a tech-savvy neighbour who mentioned ‘*mobile routers*’. At first I thought he was taking about a router that was mobile; i.e. you carried it around with you, which just shows my general level of ignorance on the subject. However, what he was talking about was a router that operates on the mobile phone network.

First problem. Which mobile phone service provider gives the best signal here? I know there’s a mast on the A358 near the end of



Bickenhall Lane, and one (intriguingly disguised as a windmill) in Ashill near the old Square and Compass (now renamed ‘The Flying Fish’????!!!!!!); there are probably other local masts as well.

Aside: In those dim and distant days pre-lockdown when customers were allowed to stand at the bar and chat with the landlord, I asked why he’d changed the pub name. He said that it was a tribute to his fisherman father back in Barbados. *Hmmm – I’m not convinced that’s a good enough reason for replacing a traditional pub name with something that has no local relevance and risks the displeasure of the clientele.*

It's important to get the right SIM card for the mobile router (routers aren't necessarily restricted to a single provider they can be bought unlocked). But which provider uses which mast? Trying to discover that information is near impossible – it's like a state secret for some unknown reason. All the service providers are quite happy to produce coverage maps indicating what signal strength can be expected in any particular area, although you can forget asking them which mast they're using.

I have an 'EE' mobile phone and my wife's is on 'Sky' (it seems that Sky uses the O2 network anyway) so the only option was to wander around the house doing broadband speed tests on each mobile phone; on the south side of the house to get the best signal from the Ashill mast and the north side for the A358 mast. I'm told that mobile phone (internal) aerials are more sensitive than router aerials, no idea why that should be, although it becomes important when the house walls are solid two feet thick Blue Lias stone!

It soon became apparent that the best signal was achieved using the Sky mobile phone on the south side of the house, presumably from the Ashill mast – so the search was on for an unlocked or O2/Sky enabled router. The router would need to have a SIM card slot and at least two LAN sockets; one for the PC and one for the BT Vision box which, surprisingly, would still work on a non-BT system. Preferably it would also have externally connected aerials so that, if the supplied aerials didn't get a strong enough signal, they could be replaced by a remote (hard-wired) aerial installed higher up the house wall or on the roof.



There are plenty of suitable routers on the market, although I settled on a TP-Link AC750 4G LTE Router which could be connected to the PC by LAN cables or wirelessly. These routers normally retail for about £90 - £100 although I found a BNIB (Brand New In Box) unit on EBAY for £55 – bargain.



Aside: for the quizzers out there; the 'E' in EBAY stands for "echo" as in Echo Bay!

Having acquired a suitable mobile router, I needed to test it before setting up a contract. I put my wife's Sky SIM card into the router and it immediately gave me much faster broadband than that achieved on BT.

Next job was to setup a contract for an O2/Sky SIM card. Any contract would need to include at least as much data transfer capacity as I was already using on BT broadband. I checked my BT bills, although they don't mention monthly usage – which didn't help. I phoned the BT helpline and a nice young man called Derek said that I didn't need to know how much I was using as BT had removed the limits during the Covid-19 pandemic – therefore it didn't matter what my usage was. I insisted that I wanted the actual numbers, so he changed tack and said that the information wasn't available, even to helpline staff. I asked him to check with his line manager and a few minutes later a very sheepish Derek informed me that my average usage over the last year was nearly 30 gigabytes per month.

I shopped around a bit and eventually arranged an O2/Sky SIM card and monthly 80 gigabyte contract with GiffGaff for £20 per month – on the assumption that with a better and more reliable broadband connection I'd probably use it a lot more. The benefit of GiffGaff is that the contract is open-ended and can be cancelled at any time – at short notice and without penalty.

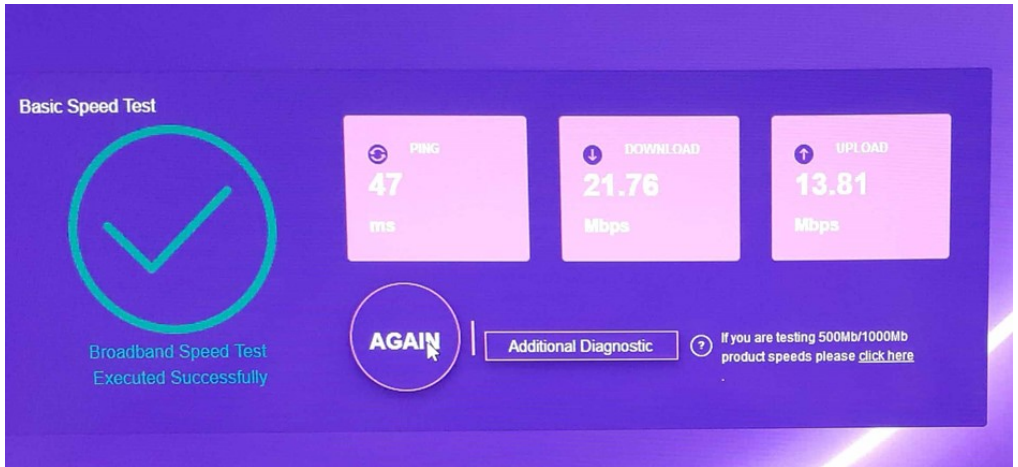
The installation process was simplicity itself. Having activated the SIM card, I swapped the LAN cables (easily identified by the yellow plugs) from the BT router to the mobile router, inserted the SIM card and connected the power supply, turned it on and 'Hey Presto' – within seconds the system was up and running. So far, I've used the mobile router for nearly two months without any problems or outages. Next job was to contact BT and cancel the broadband element of my landline contract saving myself approximately £25 per month (before paying the £20 to GiffGaff).

I suppose I could have purchased a mobile router with a phone socket and got rid of the landline altogether as the router uses a standard SIM card with an allocated mobile phone number, although I've retained the

BT landline so that I can easily and quickly revert to BT Broadband if necessary, or when (if?) superfast actually arrives here.

Overall, I have cheaper, faster and more reliable broadband access for less money – a result!

But how much faster is it? The BT system gave me a download speed of between 1.5 to 3 mbps, refer to the screen “grab” (below) for the mobile router system values. Admittedly this is the fastest speed the system achieved in March 2021 – although the download and upload speeds are normally in double figures and it’s always far better than anything BT achieved.



I reckon that by using an external aerial on the upper south-side wall or on the roof I could get faster speeds if necessary, although that’s for the future. This speed is fine for the time being.

Just about the only job left is to setup a password on the router so that neighbours and passers-by don’t use up my 80 gigabyte monthly allocation – other than that my Broadband access is “sorted”.

Of course, this solution may not work for everyone; it depends entirely on where you live in relation to the local mobile phone masts and what may be in-between (hills, buildings etc). Also, this may not be the best or cheapest solution, although it works for me.

COME & EXPLORE WILDLIFE IN STAPLE & BICKENHALL CHURCHYARDS

WEEK 5-13 JUNE 2021

CHURCHES
COUNT ON
Nature

STAPLE FITZPAINE
& BICKENHALL



For Centuries our Churchyards have been Green spaces, rich wildlife habitats preserving many diverse plant and animal species.

Visit, Explore & Discover!

By counting and recording wildlife during 'LOVE YOUR BURIAL GROUND WEEK' 5-13 June St Peter's Churchyard and St Paul's Churchyard by Neroche Hall in Bickenhall, can contribute records to a national database of species found in burial grounds throughout England and Wales.



- Recording sheets
- Identification Charts
- I Spy Trails
- Colouring In

Available at St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine
Recording sheets, Trails and Colouring in Bickenhall churchyard too



A Celebration of Neroche's Oak Trees

By Jane Hole

One of the many natural bounties of this parish is the large number of oak trees in the hedgerows and fields. As the nation laments its lack of tree density, we are blessed for the time being with our oaks. As a lover of both nature and local history I think the two combine to make for a compelling story we must ensure for the future.

The commonest oak around Neroche is the English Oak (*Quercus robur* – *robur* meaning robust or strong). A mature oak will support over 300 species and subspecies of lichen and huge numbers of invertebrate species, providing food for birds; tree creepers, nuthatches, pied flycatchers, woodpeckers, plus a variety of tits nest in the holes and crevices. Described as the sovereign of British trees, the oak leaf was adopted by the National Trust as its symbol in 1935.

The oaks of Neroche are bound up in the history of the people who lived in our area over the millennia:

Often pollarded, their wood became the strong durable timber used for buildings of many types.

In hedgerows they gave shade to cattle and sheep.

In what was the medieval deer park based on Park Farm, Staple Fitzpaine (subsequently owned by the Portman family for over 350 years), acorns from the oaks would have helped feed the deer over winter.

The 19thC leather tanning mills at what is now Bickenhall Farm would have used the bark from oak trees to soften the leather.

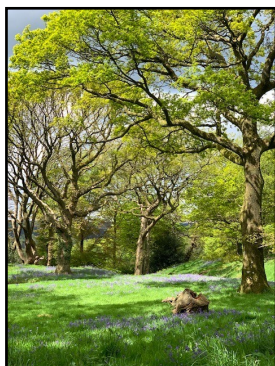
The fact oaks grow well on less fertile land may have saved many from being grubbed up.

All of this contributes to hand down to us the beautiful legacy of what we have now – oaks that feed nature as well as our own human spirit.

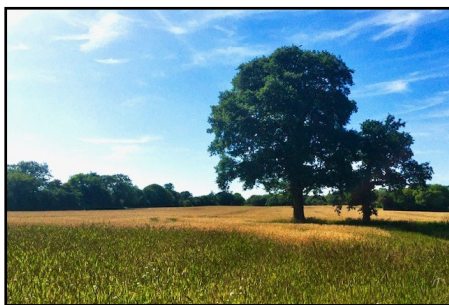
Oaks have three main phases in their lives; youthful vigour, more sedate middle age and if they survive to be veteran trees they lose



Hedgerow oaks with winter silhouette



Spring oaks with bluebells



Summer oaks in field

Photos by Karen Morgan

height, become stout and gnarled. As Shakespeare describes it, “Under an oak, whose boughs were moss’d with age, And high top bald with dry antiquity”. Does it remind you of anyone?



Winter scene with oaks

Most of our oaks are at least middle aged or older. For really ancient oaks the rule of thumb is they grow for three hundred years, mature for another three and become ‘veterans’ in their final three hundred years. John Dryden writing in the 17thC puts it more poetically:

*The monarch oak, the patriarch of trees,
Shoots rising up, and spreads by slow degrees.
Three centuries he grows, and three he stays
Supreme in state; and in three more he decays.*

We have inherited these now ageing oaks from landowners of past centuries. What will happen over the next decades if we do nothing to foster the growth of a new generation of oaks? As each dies of old age, is cut down or damaged by machinery, or the more extreme storms we experience due to climate change, they will gradually disappear from our hedgerows and fields. Then few will know they ever thrived here.

As we try to adapt our lifestyles to reduce pressure on the climate, is there a role in establishing a local community action group on climate change?

A potential starter could be The Neroche Oak Tree Planting Project. We can grow from local acorns. Anyone who is interested, including those who have a bit of land, even if it is only a small field may have baby oaks emerging. Or others who have hedgerows may find small oaks trying to make their way up to the light. More on this “acorn” of an idea in the next edition!

If you are interested in a local climate change action group and/or the oak tree project please contact me: jane.hole@outlook.com

News from Staple Farm

by Mark Pope



At the time of writing the sun is shining down. I hope by the time you are all reading this the sun will still be shining down, and in between we will have had some gentle warm spring rain.

We have just cut our Miscanthus and are waiting for it to fully dry out before it can be baled. We then store this to be used in our biomass boiler. We have also recently planted our spring barley, this now would like a drink of some lovely warm rain, although not too much though. Our crop of winter wheat is looking good coming out of the winter and has received its first dose of fertiliser to help wake it up and start to grow again after the winter.

At this time of year, the countryside is really beginning to wake up with the hedges beginning to sprout and everything starting to grow.

The big project at Staple Farm is the construction of our new free-range poultry unit. At the time of writing we have a very large bulldozer shaping out the site. The building should be all finished and in use by the end of September. We have designed the unit with a viewing area, so in time we hope to be able to show people around, but also continuing to adhere to very strict biosecurity. So, watch this space for more updates on our progress.

New Neroche Parish Clerk

Hi everybody. For those who don't already know me, my name is Jacqueline (Jacq) Wanstall, and I would like to introduce myself as the new Parish Clerk to the Neroche Parish Council.



I have lived in Bickenhall for nearly five and a half years and if my name looks familiar it is because I used to work on the Neroche Newsletter, with Sarah and Alan Hyde, and my husband Mark. I really enjoyed the newsletter, as it meant I got to meet lots of people and see many different aspects of our wonderful community.

Prior to moving to Somerset, I used to work in the technology industry in the Silicon Roundabout in London. I managed a large team of IT and skills-based trainers, as well as training hundreds of business owners and commercial staff myself.

Since moving to Somerset, my husband and I have set up a holiday let business in Exmoor, and I love looking after the guests, the house and the books.

As a keen thespian, I am very involved with our local theatre, The Warehouse Theatre in Ilminster. I have worked on and back-stage many many times, and have, for the last 4 years, sat on the Board of Directors as the Treasurer.

You will very likely see me walking around our parish every day, with our 2 big dogs, Wesley and Woody, they are not easily missed!

I have never been a member of a Parish Council before, so I have much to learn, although I am very keen to get involved in all aspects of our community, and to help make our parish even more wonderful.

Please feel free to contact me on nerochepc.org.uk@gmail.com

Somerset Bus Partnership

The UK Government has just launched a new national bus strategy for England entitled Bus Back Better. The Government believes “buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way to improve transport”. This national Bus Strategy is backed by £3 billion of new funding and forms a key plank in the Government’s twin agenda of “Levelling Up” and “ensuring the economy meets Net Zero carbon emissions.”



Said Tony Reese, Co-Chair of Somerset Bus Partnership, “This new national bus strategy and its extra funding gives us in Somerset the chance to deliver major improvements in the County’s bus services. Somerset now needs to seize this unique opportunity.”

The newly formed Somerset Bus Partnership is supported both by councillors and by bus user groups across Somerset, and it will seek to work with local town and parish councils, and with Somerset County Council to input into a Bus Enhancement Partnership for Somerset that incorporates both what current bus users need, and take steps to facilitate more Somerset residents to switch from using private cars to travel by bus. At 10 journeys per resident, Somerset currently has the fourth lowest bus passenger journeys per population in England. It is the lowest in the South West. Bus passenger journeys in Somerset have decreased by more than 40% over the past decade.

Said Peter Travis, Co-Chair of Somerset Bus Partnership, “The new Bus Strategy provides the funding to reverse this decline in passenger numbers in Somerset, and see Somerset playing its part in the Government’s levelling up and green agendas by launching a Bus Enhancement Initiative for Somerset. Somerset needs to commit to this initiative by June 2021.”

We are looking for local Bus Champions in every village - people who know what is wrong with our existing bus services and with ideas how to improve.

The new National Bus Strategy means that Somerset County Council is required to listen to what local people need and to include their needs into the Bus Improvement Plan. This means that your ideas count, and should be included in future planning, so that services can be improved you are interested in helping, please contact the Somerset Bus Partnership through the Facebook Group, or by following the Twitter account [@somersetbuspart](https://twitter.com/somersetbuspart).

The National Bus Strategy is online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969205/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf

For further information:

Contact one of the four co-chairs of Somerset Bus Partnership:
Tony Reese (South Somerset)
07967 947335
tony.reese@mail.com

Peter Travis (Mendip)
peter_b_travis@hotmail.com

Glen Burrows (Sedgemoor)
burrowsg71@gmail.com

John Hassall (Somerset West and Taunton)
hassalls53@gmail.com

Do you Run a Local Business?

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

**For a small fee, you can advertise in the quarterly Newsletter, and
have your business included on the Neroche Villages website.**

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

NEROCHE SCARECROW FESTIVAL 2021

Theme is "Characters from Stage or Screen"
Saturday 17th July - Sunday 25th July



1st prize £50, 2nd prize £25, 3rd prize £10
Plus Children's prizes

Enter your scarecrow and / or vote for your favourite
Entries £5.00 per Scarecrow

Entries close 12 July

Maps £1 and voting forms available in the Church from Saturday

**Cream Teas on Wednesday 21 July from 3pm
at Battens Farm**

**BBQ and Prize Giving on Sunday 25th July at
St Peter's Church from 12.30pm - £6 per person**

Places limited, please pre-book and bring your own chair

Contact Alison Brown 01823 480441 or
aabrown.battens@gmail.com

Proceeds to St Peter's Church

News from Neroche Hall

*By Richard Davies, Neroche Hall
Chairman*

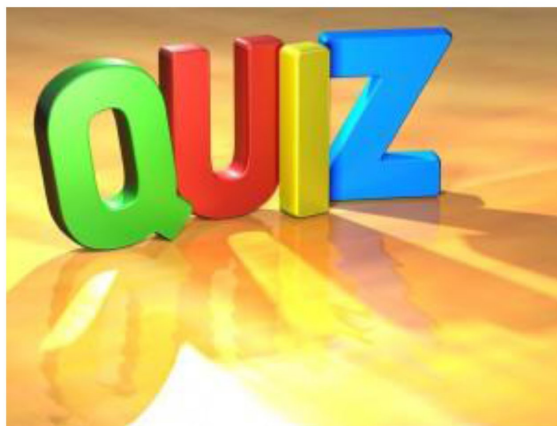
I am pleased to be able to write an article with some positive news after what seems to have been absolutely ages. Neroche Hall is preparing to once again resume its place in our local community by re-opening the doors to events and hirers as we gradually come out of the current 'lockdown' and special measures.



We shall be opening in accordance with the current restrictions and will, as before, have Covid safe measures in place. With the exception of the brief period last year when restrictions were eased the hall has remained fully closed, although still committed to paying the various utility bills, insurance and licence fees. The lack of income was in part offset by a Local Authority grant, although we are now focused on fund raising through events and new hires.

Badminton will shortly resume as will the community teas/lunches that many of you look forward to. One of our planned events is a Quiz Night on 9th July, which is a fitting start as this was the last event held before we went into lockdown. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide fish and chips on this occasion as 'Layz Ricks' are fully committed with weddings and functions postponed from last year due to the lockdown. Instead, we shall provide a ploughman's supper which has in the past been well received. Details on when and how to book a table will be announced nearer the time.

Other events will hopefully include a Boules afternoon in August, a Barn Dance in early October and a Craft Fayre later in October. I hope that the vaccine program together with falling infection figures will give people the confidence to become involved and support some, if not all, of these.



Neroche Summer Quiz

Friday 9th July 2021
Neroche Hall

Doors open 7pm for start at 7.30pm

Tickets £9.00 per person
(includes ploughman's supper)
Max 6 in a team – restrictions dependant

Tickets from
r.davies507@btinternet.com
Bookings open from 14th June

Summer Update from your District Councillor

By Ross Henley

It was great to attend and be asked to speak at the Neroche Villages Annual Parish Meeting. The Chair said I had 5 minutes and reminded me just as I was about to speak, so I was pleased that I made my annual report as your local District Councillor in 5 mins 2 seconds, I was told when I finished speaking. One of the big subjects discussed was the land that Taylor Wimpey have bought from the Crown Estate. I'm a long standing interested party in the former Crown Estate land in Neroche, going back to the time I supported lots of local residents I campaigned with to stop them losing their homes a few years ago. I keep a very close eye on the issue, and I am totally opposed to large scale development here which would destroy our beautiful rural area. There is no need for this development to take place, and no need for the District Council to allocate this site for development in the upcoming local plan. I have made my strong opposition very clear to the leaders of the District Council on this, and by the time you read this, I will have asked questions at Full Council. I'm pleased that Stoke St Mary Parish Council, as well as our own Parish Council, are very proactive on this issue. As soon as I hear anything further, I will let local residents know. This is by no means a done deal, and we have a very strong case with strong real evidence to back up our campaign to save this area from large scale development.



Another issue I raised at the APM was that of fly-tipping. During each of the 3 lockdowns, there has been an explosion in fly-tipping incidents. At one point I was making a report almost every day to the Council.



Like everyone else I've had enough of thoughtless selfish fly-tippers, so I have been speaking to the Council and Forestry England about installing signs and cameras at fly-tipping hotspots, and Forestry England have agreed to install equipment on their land. We won't be saying exactly where the cameras will be though as we don't want the fly-tippers to know.

Just after the end of lockdown I went for a walk in the Neroche woodland with Forestry England staff and looked at 500 year old oak trees and we chatted about fly-tipping, parking issues and litter and dog fouling. It was so good to be out and about in this beautiful special place.

One other thing I mentioned in my report to the APM was the work I have been doing on neurodiversity issues. I have introduced a new Neurodiversity support policy for staff and jobseekers at Somerset West and Taunton Council. I am autistic and very passionate about raising awareness and making improvements for people with this and other related conditions. My newly adopted policy has now been sent to all local Councils as good practice by the Local Government Association, and at the end of March I was proud to be asked to present this policy and to give an autism awareness presentation to the Welsh Government. This session is on YouTube if you would like to see it.

Anyway, it was lovely to see so many people's faces on the Zoom call APM and be able to tell everyone about my work as your local Councillor. I counted 53 people on the call. Zoom and Teams can be so impersonal, although it's undoubtedly made it much easier for people to attend Parish Council meetings particularly in very rural areas. I have very much missed face to face to interaction with everyone though and can't wait to start attending lots of village events as they resume.

Just today I read a post from Nicky Baxter on Facebook saying not long until the village lunches start again. The lunches are such an important part of the village community and bring lots of people together once a month. I can't wait to go again as the food is always locally produced and superb too. That, and the news that they are hoping to hold the Neroche quiz in July also lifted the heart a bit.

The last year has been so awful for so many people. Let's hope we are now through the worst of it with the vaccination programme, which of course is being supported on a large scale at Taunton Racecourse in the heart of Neroche Parish.

Please take care everyone and I can't wait to see as many of you as possible when COVID restrictions are lifted.

Neroche Woodlanders at Young Wood

THE GREAT UNFURLING

We're delighted to have groups back in the woods now, enjoying the nature of springtime in a safe, socially distanced way. We have families from Taunton on our Wild Explorers programme, our Saplings toddler's group, and an adult Woodland Wellbeing group, as well as our regular Wednesday volunteering group. It's a magical time in the woods, as the new tree leaves shimmer like fresh green linen and the birdsong is at its peak.

As countryside-dwellers, we all know our oaks from our maples, and our elms from our hazels, don't we? Well yes, probably most people do. For those who may not be too sure, now is a great time to get out and wander the footpaths, becoming familiar with our native trees. So, here is a little guide to help you distinguish what you see. It's not comprehensive, although it shows the main deciduous species you will come across.

As ever, all our activities are on our website. Enjoy the rest of the spring and early summer!

Gavin, Jenny, Sarah and the team at Neroche Woodlanders
www.nerochewoodlanders.org



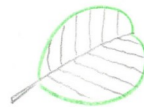
ENGLISH OAK



BEECH



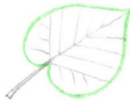
FIELD MAPLE



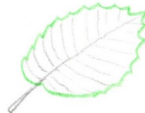
ALDER



ASH



LIME



WYCH ELM



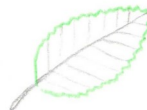
HAZEL



SILVER BIRCH



SYCAMORE



WILD CHERRY



DOGWOOD

As in previous weeks, we have all been keeping in touch and we are continuing our meetings on Zoom but hope to be meeting in person at Neroche Hall in September.

Our speakers on Zoom for March were a daughter and mother act.

Karen Learoyd gave a very interesting and informative talk reflecting on her fascinating experience of being a contestant on the TV quiz show, *The Chase*.

Carole Wensley-Dodd then gave us an introduction into the world of sugar paste flowers, her new hobby. She gave us a demonstration of techniques, and examples of the beautiful flowers she made using these techniques.



April's speaker was Robert Tinkier, who spoke about the history of the British seaside piers. Robert had worked on the Weston pier for many years and gave us many interesting facts and showed some fascinating photographs of British piers. Sadly, many of them have now disappeared or are in a state of disrepair.

Clevedon Pier has been described as the most beautiful and unique pier in England due to its design and construction. It was opened in 1869 and was made using recycled wrought iron railway tracks.

We are fortunate to have access to The Somerset Federation's excellent weekly Zoom talks. These have included some informative and thought-provoking guest speakers including Donna and Shan, who introduced us to the wonderful world of naturism in all its naked glory!

Simon John, a retired solicitor, spoke about modern slavery, while Ashley Jones spoke on the risks and extent of fraud in the UK. Kate Stannard from Target Ovarian Cancer talked about the importance of raising awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer. Our last Zoom was Gardeners Question Time with Jill and Martin Jones, who have a garden in West Bagborough which they open to visitors on request, as part of the St Margaret's Hospice Glorious Somerset Gardens event.

Future Events

EYES DOWN - we hope to be running a Christmas Bingo at Neroche Hall on December 10th.

As I have said before, we all try to keep in touch with each other, although we do miss that personal contact. Tricia (our President) again organised and delivered, with the help of others, a lovely Easter goodie bag and a chocolate quiz to all members. The quiz was won by the aptly named Candy Janes.

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

We are still 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



SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

**Half Term - 31 May to 4 June
inclusive**

**Summer Holidays -
26 July to 3 September inclusive**

Thurlbear School and the Spirit of Easter

By Jo Moore

Thurlbear CE Primary School has a fantastic PTA (Parent Teacher Association), that works incredibly hard for its school community. Just before the Easter break, an idea was initiated by the tireless Mrs Hampson to set a competition over the holiday; a chance for families to have fun together and celebrate such a vital time in the Christian calendar.

Children were invited to make Easter bonnets or design an Easter Garden, bake an Easter Treat or do some colouring - even make and hang an Easter Wreath on the door! The entries that came back were fantastic, fun and creative - and the school have had a tough time deciding overall winners. Once these were chosen, we found that we needed an extra category. Why? One pupil, Vinnie, had entered the Easter bake, but his photo showed that he was not alone. Instead, he had enlisted his auntie and grandma via Zoom to help out and join in!

We felt that this magic moment encapsulated the world right now; the joy of sharing - even if we cannot be in the same physical space as our loved ones. Vinnie and his family had overcome this barrier. For this, we awarded the special "Spirit of Easter" prize.



V Chatwood cake entry



V Chatwood finished cake entry

A Message of Thanks

The pandemic has brought a plethora of developments, both in the Scientific Arena and in the different ways we communicate with family and friends, using platforms such as Zoom. At the end of 2019, who could have predicted that schools and businesses would be learning and working almost entirely remotely!

Thurlbear and other Schools around the World have been able to continue teaching and learning through different platforms too. However, to enable every child to access remote learning, we needed them all to have the appropriate hardware, and with the generosity and kindness of the wider community this has been possible.

On behalf of the children, teaching staff and Governors, we would like to thank everyone for their very generous donations.

Thank you to each and every one of you. You have been amazing!

Val Wright, Governor

Light at the very end of a long Covid tunnel

By John Thorne

THIS time last year we were still in the relatively early throes of the coronavirus pandemic, although it was instantly clear that life for all of us had changed dramatically. I suggested at the time that the virus would be with us for probably longer than a year, and now, 12 months on, we can see how right I was. Back then, despite the gloomy forecast, I was deep down hoping that perhaps it would not hit us as hard as I feared. I had been privy to briefings where things like the Government's mass casualty plan were being mentioned – that is the plan they have for the aftermath of events such as a nuclear attack, with casualties in the high hundreds of thousands. Frightening!



Now, thanks to the development of vaccines, we can see light at the end of the tunnel. It's just that it is still a heck of a long tunnel. We are nearing the end of Boris Johnson's four-month roadmap out of

lockdown, with the 21st June pencilled into my diary (yes, I still prefer a diary to Google's calendar) as the end of social distancing rules, and limits on numbers attending weddings and funerals. But only if we all continue to keep up the discipline we have been showing so far, and not breaking the rules and risking a re-emergence of the virus.

Somerset has been one of the nation's leaders with the vaccination roll out and hundreds of our county council staff have volunteered to help their NHS colleagues with the programme. As I write this, we are nearing 75 per cent of all residents aged 16 and older having received at least their first jab, and nearly 30 per cent being given their second dose. This represents close to 100 per cent of everybody aged 50 and older getting some protection, which, although I don't like to think too much about my age, includes me!

I know that there are those out there who will refuse the jab because of concerns about side effects which may make them seriously ill, or worse. Some are peddling codswallop about tracker devices that are injected with the vaccine, so the Government knows where you are all the time, and similar scare stories. There are those whom it seems genuinely believe the whole coronavirus pandemic is a massive hoax on a global scale. I have spoken out publicly against these naysayers and they have reacted with predictable anger, emailing and writing to me with 'proof' that the Government is lying to us and berating me for being taken in by it all. Well, I'm no Pollyanna (Google it, if you need to!) and I actually have my own conspiracy theory which perhaps some of them might even share. I don't believe for one moment that the virus came from a bat infecting a pangolin which was eaten by a hungry Chinaman, or woman. My theory – with apologies to those World Health Organisation inspectors – remains firmly that it escaped from the lab in Wuhan City.

I'm not sure if I am now risking Beijing hacking my mobile phone and email to determine how much of a threat I am to The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCPC). If I mysteriously go missing before the Editor asks for my next newsletter contribution, then we will know the answer!

Poetry Corner

The Kindness of Trees

Deep in the forest there stood
A tree whose heart beat in the
winter wood
Who understood everything that
was bad
And everything that was good.

It extended long arms to woo you
As the winter wind blew and blew
And everything a child could
think,
The tree already knew.

And every time a boy was sad,
The tree dropped a pine.
And every time a girl got mad,
The tree roared in the wind.

In the dead mid-winter night,
The tree blew a hello, goodbye;
When every child was asleep in
bed,
The tree sang a lullaby.

And when Christmas time came
round
The tree's song soared and
soared.
And when gifts adorned the
ground,
The tree blushed, made a sssh
sound.

And people gathered round the
tree:
To sing the winter song, in
harmony;



One to keep the bright light
glowing,
A song of what we know without
knowing.

It had a sad and piercing melody
—
A worry for the ash, sparrow,
bee.
The polar bear, the ice melting.
A worry for you, me, dear tree.

In the depths of the winter wood,
The friendly tree stood, kind and
good,
And breathed a word that caught
the mood:
A pledge, a promise, a plea for
good.

Jackie Kay is a poet, novelist and playwright. She was born and brought up in Scotland, and lives in Manchester. This poem was written with the help of primary school children. Commissioned by the Poetry Society.

Discovering my Roots

By Karen Learoyd

Have you, like me, been fascinated watching 'Who Do You Think You Are', and wondered more about your lineage? I'm always amazed at what discoveries are made about people's ancestors, and often a touch envious (although being related to Edward III like Danny Dyer would be surreal!)

It's something I've been interested in for a while, as on my paternal side I have just one aunt, and no-one who still bears the Wensley family name. I have strong roots in West London, born in Chiswick, and all my family lived locally. I understood that my Grandad had been orphaned at an early age, and that his father died in WW1, although that was as much as I knew.

MORGAN G. A.	RUSSELL A.	WANSSTALL A. C.
MORGAN W. F.	RYE J. A.	WARD A. B.
MORRIS C. 1665	SAMPSON W. A.	WARD J. H.
MORRIS C. 2031	SANDFORD C.	WARDMAN H. A.
MOUNCEY G.	SAUNDERS W.	WARES E. J.
MUDGE C. F.	SAY E. W.	WARLAND J. R.
MUNDY A. J.	SCOTTON W.	WARREN P. T.
MUNRO H.	SCOTT-WILMHURST T.	WARRENDER H.
MUNSON C. R.	SEAGER G. W. N.	WATFORD A. G.
MURPHY F.	SEAR C.	WATSHAM W.
MURPHY J.	SEWARD G. T. E.	WATSON J. F.
NATION E.	SHARP E.	WATTS W.
NEAL W.	SHARP H.	WAYMARK W. H.
NEALE A.	SHARP H. J.	WEBB G.
NEWMAN E. F.	SHAW J.	WEBB P. A.
NEWMAN G.	SHERLEY C.	WEBB S. E.
NICHOLS E.	SHORNEY F.	WEBB S. R.
NICKOLLS B. S.	SHORT G. E.	WELCH H.
NIXON S.	SHORTER R. G.	WELLS W. A.
NOAKES G. H.	SILK J.	WENSLEY G. H.
NOBLE J. E.	SIMMONS A. J.	WEST G. T.
NOCK A. P.	SIMMS F. C.	WESTON H. E.
NORMAN W. J.	SIMPSON R. G.	WHEELER E. A.
NORRIS H. J. W. H.	SMITH A. B.	WHITE A.
NORTON E. G.	SMITH A. G.	WHITE J.
NURSE W. A.	SMITH G.	WHITTINGTON A. W.
O'BRIEN T.	SMITH H.	WHITWORTH A. J.
O'DONNELL J. P.	SMITH H. C.	WHYTE A.
O'KEEFE D.	SMITH H. J.	WICKES L. C. A.
O'KEEFE J.	SMITH J. W.	WICKS J. W.
OLDHAM A.	SMITH R. J.	

Last Christmas, John bought me an Ancestry UK membership, and with time on my hands due to lockdown, I started my research. Quite quickly I found quite a lot of information about my Great Grandfather George Henry Wensley. He met my Great Grandmother Edith in 1911, in Kings Cross, London at the age of 31. Things must have moved quickly after that, as he had his first child John in 1912,

my Grandad Herbert in 1914 (and also got married the same year!) He enlisted early in 1915, leaving his job as a sugar boiler and was posted to France in early 1916. His service records provide some interesting extra information – he was only 5 feet 1.5 inches, had no upper teeth, and a chest size of 36 inches – what a catch! He was sadly killed by shellfire between 10pm and midnight on June 6, 1917 at Ypres in Flanders - his name is recorded on the Menin Gate, along with nearly 56,00 other servicemen. John died just a few years later at 13, and Edith passed away in 1929, when my Grandad was just 14. So, I had discovered much more about George.

What I wasn't expecting was to find that my entire paternal family have their roots in Somerset! George and his five siblings were all born in Portishead, and Edith and her family heralded from Bristol. I started to trace further back on the Wensley side, and via another George Wensley, and 6 John Wensleys (!) have arrived back at Walter Wensley, born in Wivelscombe in 1616. The generations don't seem to have moved far, from Wiveslicombe to Stogumber, to Elworthy, and then Brompton Ralph, before my great grandfather's family moved to Portishead in the 1870s. Unfortunately, I've been unable to trace the family's movements through the 1901 Census although by 1911 five of the six siblings had moved to London, clearly they did think the streets were paved with gold!

Having a relatively unusual family name has made the job of tracing my ancestors easier than if I was a Smith, although when all the heads of the family for 5 generations were called John, and the daughters were named after their mothers or aunts, it's not as straightforward as it might seem to be sure you have the right person. Add to that, changes of spelling of names, and the handwriting of those writing in the parish registers, it can be quite challenging, but fun.

So, it seems, I really have come home by moving back to Somerset....

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE
Application Number 11544969-10

BEDMINSTER

1880 BIRTH in the Sub-district of **Saint George** in the County of Somerset

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
68	Penistone April 1880 Portishead	George Henry	Boy	John Wensley	Ann's Wensley formerly Johnson	Sellerman	Co Wensley Mother Portishead	Spring Month May 1880	John Lang Registrar	

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 12th day of February 2021

XCJ 200343

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. Crown Copyright



By Mike Aspray

Having been confined to staying local during Lockdown? I'm sure many of you have been out exploring and now know our parish a lot better than a year ago.

To test your knowledge here are a selection of photos of some obvious, and not so obvious landmarks taken by me on a couple of my favourite walks around and about the beautiful countryside we live in. Part 2 of this quiz will be in the next edition of the Newsletter. Answers are on Page 51 together with maps and notes on where to find them.

Good luck and happy hunting!



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

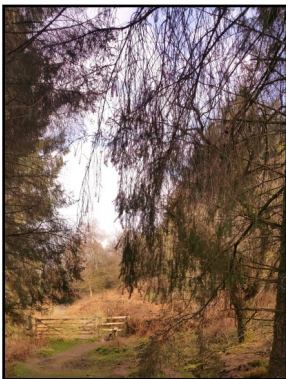


Photo 4

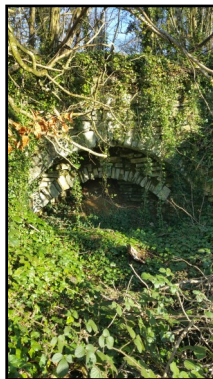


Photo 5



Photo 6

News from RSPCA West Hatch

By Bel Deering – Centre Manager

In line with the rest of the country, life at West Hatch has started to return to something a little more normal. The wildlife centre is open for admissions and certainly feels as busy as a typical spring season, and the animal centre can now accommodate appointments to meet and collect adopted animals. Our overall guidance can be found at the bottom of this update.

Out in the field

Inspectors in our area have attended a wide range of incidents so far this spring, from rounding up some escaped rheas, to rescuing a painted turtle, to catching a stray piglet on a busy road in Bath.



Luckily the rheas were able to be returned to their owner, although the turtle and the pig were among the animals they brought to the centre for us to care for and rehome.

Work at the centre

In the wildlife centre spring has begun in earnest. At the moment we are caring for a host of different baby animals – so here is a montage of some of them for you to enjoy.



Nestling Robin



Fledgling Robin



Orphan Fox Cub



Feral Pigeon Squabs

We get a lot of questions at this time of year asking for help and advice about baby birds, so here is a useful infographic with the guidance summarised for you to use:

Meanwhile in the Animal Centre, Spring Fever has struck as well.

One common animal our Inspectorate colleagues bring to us are rabbits, whether as a result of neglect, cruelty or as strays. This happens especially in the



spring, and we always have a litter or even litters of baby rabbits, called kittens, at this time of year. In the spring of 2020, we had a female rabbit, who we called Abigail, brought to us with a litter of six one-week-old kittens.



She was a wonderful mum and allowed us to health-check them and look in on them every morning. Needless to say the babies soon

grew and we found loving homes for them. Mum, meanwhile, was neutered and rehomed with a neutered male.

Despite popular opinion, rabbits are not easy animals to care for and they must be neutered at an appropriate age by an experienced exotic vet. They can become pregnant as soon as one litter is born, so 30 days later a mum could have two litters to care for! Neutering can also prevent uterine cancers and help calm behaviour to enable bonding with a new friend.

Of course, rabbits must also have appropriate accommodation to allow them to behave normally, 24 hours a day. We recommend 60 square foot of space - which can be a hutch attached to a run, or a shed with a run attached, or even a converted wendy house with a run attached. They also enjoy enrichment such as tunnels, tables to climb on or under, and appropriate tree branches to chew on such as apple wood, and unlimited quantities of hay. Cared for properly, rabbits can make amazing pets although, as with any pet, a lot of planning, research and thought is needed to give them the quality of life they deserve.

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 – by appointment only

- Please check our website 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 come out for a pre-booked appointment to collect your new pet

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/>

Neroche Heritage Fingerpost Project Update

By Jane Hole

Our final year of the project focuses on the last three posts. We need new arms for the junction by Dairy House Farm and the replacement post near Neroche Hall. The patterns for these will be going up to the Bristol foundry sometime in May. We will also be commissioning three new uprights for Badger Street, Dairy House Farm and Neroche Hall. Meanwhile, we will take the arms and finial off the Badger Street post to renovate and then re-erect. While the foundry is busy at work, we hope to prepare the sites at Neroche Hall and Dairy House Farm to erect the new galvanised steel posts that hold the arms. So don't be surprised if at some stage over the summer a pole suddenly goes up! The arms and upright casing will follow once they are completed and painted.

We hope to have all the work finished by mid October and then maybe a Topping Out Party is in the offing for all our supporters and kind donors!!



News from St Peter's Church

By Alison Brown, pp the Churchwardens

After three months of lockdown our first in-church service was able to take place on Easter Day, and we were blessed with the most marvellous weather. Beautiful floral displays in church together with the spring flowers in the churchyard, made us all aware of God's creation. Many thanks are due to our talented flower ladies.

Being able to celebrate Jesus's resurrection from death, with all of us together was a very special occasion, with traditional hymns played by Julie Pope (clavinova) and Rebecca George (violin). There might have been some loud humming behind the masks!

The Easter Memory Tree, decorated by children of the parish and placed in the porch, was a brilliant idea and has proved popular. The church was almost full in a Covid-secure manner with about 50 in the congregation.

The sad passing of the Duke of Edinburgh recently was marked in our villages by the tolling of a single bell on two occasions by Paul Hart, our Tower Captain. Thank you, Paul, for a herculean effort - 99 rings!

The church was again full for a Benefice service on 25th May which was led for the first time by our new Rector, Reverend Joanna Porter. She will now be a regular presence in our church, and we welcome her Ministry in the Benefice. Rev Joanna will have her work cut out for the first few months trying to get around seven churches and remember all her parishioners' names and faces!

Hopefully St Peter's will soon be open daily and able to welcome visitors to our lovely building.

St Peter's Annual Scarecrow Festival will soon be upon us. If you have never made a Scarecrow before do not be daunted. It is great fun and there is lots of help available on the internet.

The competition runs from 9am Saturday 17th July until 12 noon Sunday 25th July, and as usual, voting forms can be found in the church porch. Votes should be cast before midday so counting (and

verification) can take place in time for the results to be announced at the BBQ. See notice on page 18 for details of prizes and entry form. As this is in aid of church funds, any offers of sponsorship of prizes will be gratefully received, and reciprocal publicity will be given to any kind sponsors.

It is hoped that Covid regulations permitting, the Friday café in St Peter's will start again in due course. This much-enjoyed occasion has been sorely missed over the past 16 months for its social interaction, not to mention the lovely cakes and cheese scones baked by members of Bickenhall WI and others. We hope that it will not be too long before St Peter's on Fridays is full of chattering voices and the aroma of coffee and cakes.

All the above activities are subject to the Coronavirus regulations at the time.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS

Community Volunteers needed

The wet weather over last winter and previous extremes of prolonged dry spells followed by prolonged rainy spells, have caused extensive damage to the stonewall boundary on the west side of the Churchyard of St Peter's Church.

If you would be interested in learning the techniques utilised in **Building a Stone Wall**, we hope to offer tuition by an expert over some weekends this summer. Voluntary labour is needed to help us keep the costs down whilst **you learn the skills**. You would also be making a very worthwhile contribution to the community.

To volunteer or to find out more please email
Alison Brown aabrown.battens@gmail.com or
Mark Porter markp@hoki.com

If you already have these skills and would be happy to help with this project please contact Alison or Mark, the churchwardens.

Community Council for Somerset (CCS), Viney Court, Viney Street, Taunton, TA1 3FB

Tel: 01823 331 222 Web: www.somersetagents.org Email: info@somersetccc.org.uk

May Village Agent News

The world is finally opening back up again! We are really looking forward to being able to get back out in the community to see our clients!

Why not look up your local community centre, hobby or Carers group and see when they are active again? If you are not sure what is available in your local area, give us a call on 01823 331 222 and we can connect you!

The re-opening of services will bring great relief to the many thousands of unpaid Carers in Somerset who have not had access to respite facilities for a considerable length of time.

Organisations such as Heads Up Somerset who provide day care for those with brain injuries, learning difficulties and dementia in the Wells area have reopened from April 1st - you can call them on 01749 670667 or visit <http://www.headsupsomerset.org.uk/>

There is also The Filo Project for Somerset residents. The Filo Project offers high quality day care for small groups of older people that have memory loss or moderate dementia. You can call them on 0333 939 8225 or visit <https://www.thefiloproject.co.uk/>

We Hear You provides free therapeutic support to children, families and individuals in Somerset affected by cancer and other life-threatening conditions. Their face-to-face services are re-opening and you can contact them on 01373 455 255 or visit <https://www.wehearyou.org.uk/>

If you are an unpaid Carer, please do get in touch – you may not feel you need any help and support right now, although we can just check in with you, so you know what's available if and when you feel you would benefit from further advice. Right now, we can help you with anything from finding a sitting service if you have a hospital appointment, a package of care if you or a family member are returning from hospital, or provide you with a little rest from cooking with our 'Carer Packs' - delicious pre-made meals for you and the person you care for. We can help make your everyday life

a little easier, check you are receiving the correct benefits and look at the whole family support need, especially as we work closely with your doctor's surgery and adult social care. We have a freephone Carers Advice line you can call 0800 31 68 600 or text 'CARER' to 78070 and the Carers Advice line will call you back.

Whether or not you care for someone you may need a little extra help at home. From personal care, Carers respite, to household jobs, a micro-provider could be just what you're looking for!

Micro-providers are providers of very small, community-based care and support services.

A micro-provider has eight or fewer paid or unpaid workers and is totally independent of a larger organisation. Examples of micro-services could include:

- Support to keep a person well, social and remain independent
- Support to people living in their own homes
- Short breaks and holidays
- Support to access employment, education and leisure
- Day support and help around the home

As Village Agents, we can help connect you with the right micro-provider for your needs - and it may be that you have more than one undertaking different tasks for you, as many have different areas of expertise.

It's also a great career opportunity to become a micro-provider. It's very rewarding and worth considering if you want to start a new career or fresh challenge! You would be well supported starting up with the Somerset Micro-enterprise Project -

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/somerset-micro-enterprise-project/>

You can become an accredited provider, decide your hours and what areas of work you want to do – call Rhys on 07788 350806 for more information.

Hopefully next month we will have news of our Talking Cafes returning to venues across Somerset – although for now don't forget you can catch us live on weekdays at www.facebook.com/talkingcafesomerset and we look forward to meeting you or seeing you again soon out in the community!

News from Westminster

By Rebecca Pow, MP

Hello again,

Thanks to the hard work and enormous sacrifices of the British people, as well as the incredible success of our vaccination programme, the Government has been able to take steps to ease lockdown restrictions. At the time of writing (May 7th), 66% of adults have received their first dose with 31% of adults fully vaccinated, and we are on track for every adult to be offered a first vaccine dose by the end of July, with Somerset doing an excellent delivery job.

Restrictions are being eased in four steps with Steps One and Two worked through already allowing the re-opening of a number of businesses and providing more opportunities to socialise with friends and family outdoors. At all stages, four tests must be passed to move to the remaining steps: the vaccine deployment must be continuing successfully; vaccines must be reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated; infection rates should not risk a surge in hospitalisations therefore putting pressure on the NHS; and the assessment of risk should not have changed as a result of new Variants of Concern.

Whilst some of you have been in touch asking for restrictions to be eased more quickly and others more slowly, I believe this cautious approach is the right one. This has been a difficult time for everybody, although I am comforted that the end is finally in sight.

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. I would urge everyone to have their jab when the opportunity arises to ensure we get through this, and please do also remember to have your second dose too when called as this is vital to provide more durable protection. Remember the mantra of hands, face, space, and fresh air as restrictions ease.

Also, I have secured a meeting with the Health Secretary and Chair of the Somerset NHS Foundation Trust not only to discuss the ongoing work of health teams locally, but also to discuss the draft NHS Bill and

how it may affect us here.

SCHOOLS

I have had Zoom calls with many educational establishments locally including Taunton Academy, Richard Huish College and Year 6's at Thurlbear CofE Primary, to hear about the students' lock down experiences. Needless to say, one and all seem pleased to be back in the classroom. Huge thanks to the dedicated staff everywhere who have coped in these challenging times.

PARLIAMENTARY EXPORT PROGRAMME

I continue to work to ensure the constituency gets the support needed to help it get back on its feet which has included making representation to the Chancellor. I was pleased to facilitate a meeting of businesses from across Taunton Deane in conjunction with the Department for International Trade event (on Zoom) to raise awareness of services the Department provides to grow businesses internationally, focusing on support for exporting. There is growing opportunity and I look forward to conducting further meetings in future. Do get in touch if you would like details of DIT's useful support services.

LOCAL ARTS, HERITAGE & CULTURE FUNDING



*Rebecca Pow MP & Sir Andrew Burns KCMG,
Former Chair of Hestercombe Gardens Trust*

Through the second tranche of the Government's Culture Recovery Fund, more support has been made available to arts, culture and heritage organisations, and Taunton Deane businesses have received an additional £1m on top of the £1.5m awarded previously to ease the effects of the pandemic. Those that have benefited include: the Taunton Theatre Association, the Creative Innovation Centre, South West Heritage Trust, The Production Boutique, Hestercombe Gardens Trust, PCC of St James Halse, Ash Priors Holy Trinity Church, West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust and The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton. I am pleased to have helped secure this funding which will enable these local organisations, which are so crucial to our local economy, to plan for re-opening and recovery.

NEW LEGISLATION



Rebecca Pow MP at a Dogs Trust Rescue Dog Event in Westminster

Of particular interest to many constituents recently judging by my post bag, have included the passing of the **Animal Welfare Act Sentencing Bill** and the **increasing of the charge for single use carrier bags to 10p.**

Tougher prison sentences for animal cruelty will come into force this summer. This means that the maximum prison sentence for animal cruelty will be raised from six months to five years from 29 June 2021. The new maximum penalty will enable courts to take a firmer approach to cases such as dog fighting, abuse of puppies and kittens, illegally cropping a dog's ears and gross neglect of farm animals. As well as a prison sentence, offenders can also receive an unlimited fine. These

more stringent sentences will be some of the toughest in Europe signalling that cruel mistreatment of animals is unacceptable and won't be tolerated.

New legislation to protect service animals, known as ‘Finn’s Law’, has also come into force. It prevents those who attack or injure service animals from claiming self-defence. The law is named after Finn, a police dog who was stabbed whilst pursuing a suspect with his handler PC David Wardell. Finn sustained serious stab wounds to the chest and head, although only criminal damage charges could be brought against his attacker. I worked long and hard as a backbencher to raise these issues and am delighted these laws are now in place.

The raising of the Single Use Carrier Bag (SUCB) charge is another popular new law which I introduced into Parliament as the Environment Minister. The 5p charge on carrier bags in major supermarkets, reduced carrier bag usage by 95%. However, 226m SUCB’s were still being sold through these outlets and smaller retailers were not previously required to charge. The new 10p charge will cover all outlets and should help to clamp down dramatically on the over 3.2 billion bags still sold. This is another important step in protecting our planet from this unnecessary and devastating plastic which does not break down in the environment and is all too frequently littered.

PROGRESS ON KEY PROJECTS:

TAUNTON STATION



Rebecca Pow MP visits the new ticket office at Taunton station

As we emerge from lockdown, attention is focusing on building back better and greener for a more prosperous future. Almost right on cue, I am absolutely delighted that one of my key commitments as the MP, namely, to secure the upgrade of Taunton Rail station, is virtually complete. The state-of-the-art new ticket office is already operating (I use it regularly commuting to Westminster) and the car park and final road junction will be finished soon. It has been a tremendous partnership between stakeholders including GWR, Network Rail and of course was started by the previous Council when, early in my days as the MP, an initial Government fund of £4.6m was secured. With passenger travel due to double through the station within 10 years, this development is vital for the local community, and with improved cycle links and parking facilities, will be a major boost to getting people out of their cars and onto trains, which are one of the greener forms of transport Government is committed to in the drive to transition to net zero, and hit our climate change targets. The updated train schedule now running from Taunton is a definite bonus too.

The development is a sensitive combination of the modern, integrated with the carefully restored listed buildings initially designed in the Victorian era by Brunel. The final icing on the cake will be incorporating some artistic ideas being fed in by ArtsTaunton (whom I have worked closely with), as well as landscaping to fit in with the Garden Town ethos, and finally links will open to the adjacent Firepool site.



Rebecca Pow MP visits Wellington Monument

WELLINGTON MONUMENT & WELLINGTON RAIL STATION

Having chaired the latest Rail Board meeting back in March, I can report really positive progress with the station which is firmly being supported by the Department of Transport and two local MP's – Neil Parish MP (Tiverton and Honiton) and I. More detail coming soon.

And finally, more good news – the restoration of the Wellington Monument is due to be completed by June. This has been a tremendous effort by all concerned including many locally, and of

course the National Trust, and we are all looking forward to the opening, hopefully in June.

Both these schemes were pledges I made when I first became the MP, so this is genuinely exciting.

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 or telephone my office on 01823 443062.

Best wishes,
Rebecca



Forestry England Update

*By Robert Greenhalgh
Community Ranger*



As the warmer months approach, it's been spectacular to watch the forests burst back into life. The summer wildlife visitors are slowly arriving, and the bloom seems that bit more spectacular after the events of 2020 and early 2021.

We have experienced huge visitor number increases throughout our forests and the Neroche Landscape has seen its fair share of those! A huge thank you needs to be said to our neighbours, regular users and community groups and individuals that have helped, supported and reported the various issues that we have all experienced with the upsurge in visitor numbers. It's in such times that we truly realise just how important our forests are to the general public, although managing the behaviour can be tricky, and inevitably it brings some difficult situations.

As the good weather arrives more people are seeking adventures outside and the nation's forests provide an excellent resource for this. However, we have seen increases in fires, BBQs, vandalism,

fly-tipping and litter throughout the region. Fires in particular are becoming much more prevalent and we ask that you report these to the police as well as the local FE team. Sadly, much of this activity occurs during the evenings and we are not resourced to be on call to tackle all of this alone. So once again, thank you all for your help and here's to a quieter summer!

In more exciting news, we will have completed the felling work at Wych Lodge around the ancient and veteran trees by the time this article is published. This operation has been a long time in planning due to the very sensitive nature of the site. Our ancient trees are invaluable to us and we work extremely hard to protect them. Thankfully, the team of contractors we work alongside, Kleen Kut, are well experienced and exceptional in felling within such sensitive environments. The thinning will open up the whole area, allowing much more light to reach the forest floor, and a swath of bluebells should spread within the remaining beech crop for years to come.

In response to visitor pressure we have also introduced a new, 'wilder' trail at Staple Hill. The aim being to spread the numbers through the forest and take some pressure off the accessible loop trail which, I'm sure you're aware, is very well used. The new 'Blue Trail' offers visitors the chance to explore an area which has been dedicated to Forest Research (the scientific arm of our organisation) for the last 15-20 years. The trees planted here were for experimental purposes and we are now left with a magnificent area filled with established poplar (which incidentally smell amazing at the moment, very much like the mock orange you may find in your garden!!), beech and spruce. Having taken my two children (aged 6 and 4) there before the trail was established to get an expert opinion on the place, it soon became apparent that this area lends itself to adventure and natural play. Please take a trip out and see what you think...

Hope to see you in the forest soon!

St Peter's Church Flower Guild

By Jacqueline Kolkowski

Again, it was lovely to decorate the church, especially at Easter, and thank you to all those who gave donations towards the lilies in our display. The church looked and smelt fantastic. Our small Flower Guild produced stunning displays, bringing spring and joy into the church, from the large displays, to the simple jars of daffodils placed in the windows.



Alison Brown produced the tomb and hill scene in the porch, Candy Janes and Peta Trott the font, Karen Morgan the pedestal and Carole Wensley-Dodd the window. It was lovely that our displays were still in place due to the care given to them by the guild, along with the extra displays produced for the first service given by the new rector, Reverend Joanna Porter.



Memory Tree

With the ongoing lock down due to Covid and the weekly cafe in the church still being closed, we could not run our Easter craft morning for a second year. So, Pauline Phelps and I delivered craft bags containing wooden egg and flower shapes so they could be decorated by the families in the Parish. The bag also contained an information sheet about the Easter story and some interesting facts about Easter traditions, thank you Alison Brown.



The decorated shapes were brought to the church and placed on the memory tree in the porch along with the memories and prayers of friends and loved ones.

The designs were outstanding and all so different, thank you so much for all your hard work. The decorations made quite an impact when you walked into the church porch.

If you are interested in joining our small group who make up our flower guild, please do not hesitate to contact me

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

Where in the Neroche are we?

Staple Hill, North Down Plantation and Mount Fancy Farm Nature Reserve

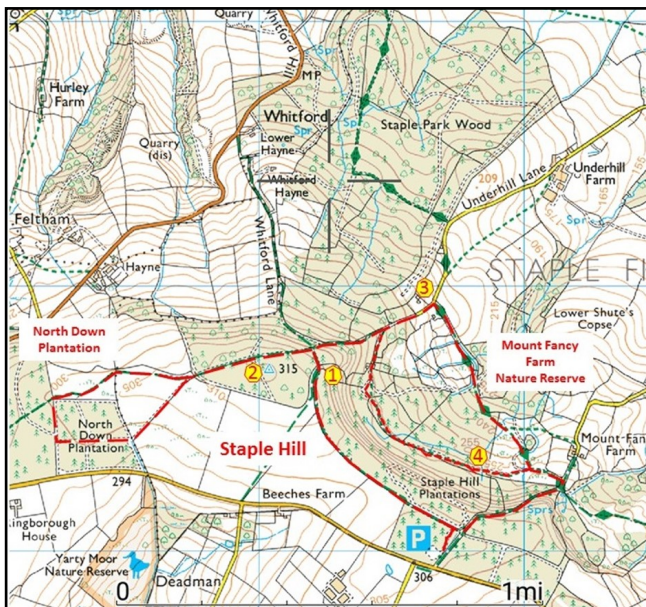
Photo 1: Herepath marker post on the bridleway towards the NW end of the Staple Hill escarpment - the double gate and earth banks in the background should give this away.

Photo 2: Staple Hill Trig Point – at 315m above sea level it's officially the highest point in the Blackdown Hills AONB, note it's easy to walk past this and not see it if you're not looking out for it!

Photo 3: Seat at the top of Underhill Lane – do as it says on the seat and enjoy the stunning view.

Photo 4: Gate and Stile on the alternative route below the Staple Hill escarpment where the path pops out of the forest into the open scrubland above the Mount Fancy Farm Nature Reserve.

These first four photos are of points on my favourite walk encompassing Staple Hill, North Down Plantation and Mount Fancy Farm Nature Reserve.



The walk Starts/Finishes at the Staple Hill CP. The full loop is 3.6 miles in length with 475 feet of ascent and should take between 1:40 to 2 hours not including stops.

Exit the CP following the 'Loop Walk' marker post, then turn L at the 'Viewpoint' marker post, keeping the tall bank on your R. Stay on the bridleway which follows the bank for about a kilometre, switching to the right side of the bank through a gap at about halfway.

Pass the Herepath marker post then gates in **Photo 1**, descending slightly and turn L at the T junction shortly after. From here, there is a slight climb taking you up and over the summit of Staple Hill. About 20m after you pass through a small clearing keep looking for the Trig Point in **Photo 2**, it's about 40m off the track to your L.

Stay on the track and continue over the shoulder of Staple Hill down to the gate into open pasture where you can see the North Down Plantation in front of you. Continue down to the next gate which takes you into the plantation, carry on through it and turn R at the T junction. At the top of the ride/track where the fence-line forms the N boundary of the plantation you will find a gate and footpath marker tucked around the corner of the fence. Make your way through the gate and follow the path which meanders across a section of gorse scrubland, eventually through a gate and crossing the open pastureland to re-join the path and retrace your steps back past the Trig Point.

Go straight on passing the earlier T junction, and descend quite steeply eventually through two sets of double gates (note the track off to the R immediately after the first set of gates – this is the slightly shorter alternative route cutting across the bottom of the escarpment via the Gate/Stile in **Photo 4**). Passing the entrance to Shutes Farmhouse on your L, you are at the very top of Underhill Lane, the seat in **Photo 3** is a few yards further under the large oak tree on the L.

From here take the kissing gate a few paces back up the lane into the Mount Fancy Farm Nature Reserve, and follow the East Deane Way long distance footpath which traverses the Reserve. The route goes through a number of gates and crosses four small streams, it can be very wet and boggy but is well worth the effort. After the fourth stream

continue along the fence-line, ignoring the kissing gate on the R. A few yards further on the path bears R through a gate and climbs up through semi-open scrub joining the path of the alternative route coming in from the R. Continue up and L heading for the gate at the very top of the field above Mount Fancy Farm. Turn R then R again to re-enter the Staple Hill Plantation (note green marker post on your R). From here the rocky path climbs steeply back up through the Plantation to the CP.

Both the path through the Nature Reserve and shorter alternative across the base of the escarpment are fine routes which means you really need to do this walk twice!

Thurlbear Wood

Photos 5 and 6 are in Thurlbear Wood and in early Spring you'll be rewarded with a wonderful display of Bluebells carpeting the woodland and Primula lining the grassy glades.

Photo 5: Again, an easy one – the old Lime Kiln in the NE corner of the wood.

Photo 6: Water Trough and Tree Section in the fields immediately N of the wood - not quite so easy but Stoke Hill in the background might give it away!

The walk Starts/Finishes at the NE entrance to the wood. There is limited parking for two or three vehicles on the side of the lane just prior to the entrance. This beautiful little walk is just 1.4 miles in length with 194 feet of ascent and should take 40 minutes to an hour.

From the Somerset Wildlife Trust information board keep straight on (ignoring all the offshoots) and follow the footpath SW through the wood for just under a kilometre bearing L at the T junction by the one foot high footpath marker post (why so low?).

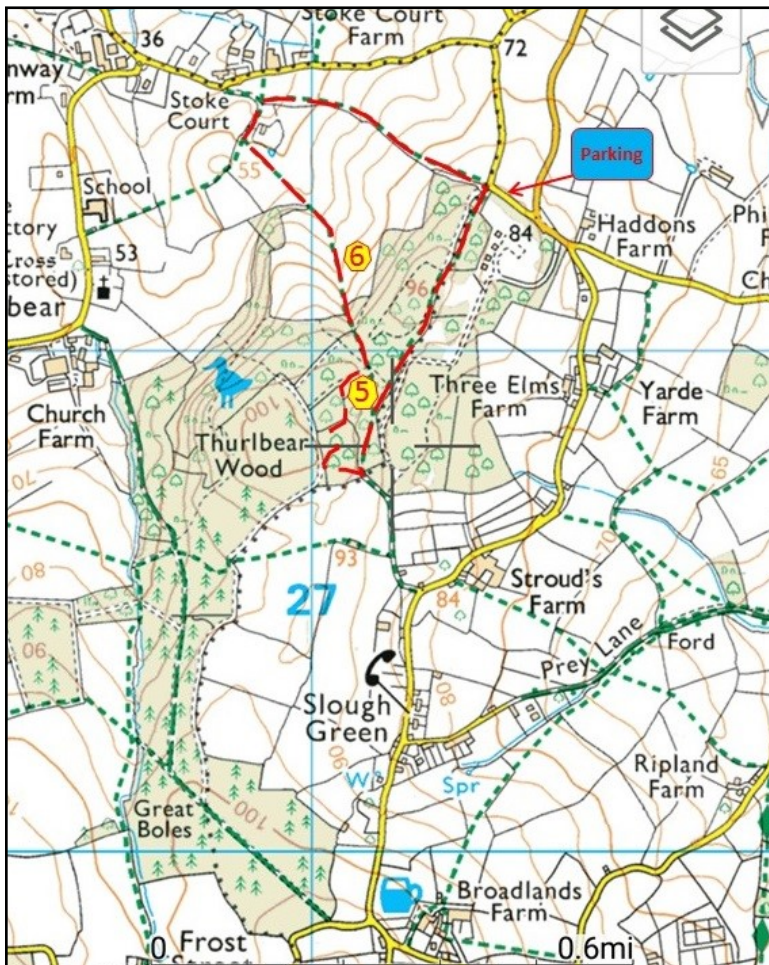
At the footpath/track junction (with another Somerset Wildlife Trust information board on your R) bear R then next R off the track onto a narrow path through a short section of coppiced woodland into a small grassy clearing dotted with a number of strange looking tufty mounds (no idea what these are?).

Go through the clearing and continue on into a delightful tree lined

avenue. At the top of the avenue turn R then next L at the footpath marker post. Descend slightly and the Lime Kiln in **Photo 5** will be on your R.

Continue to descend making your way to the N edge of wood and through the kissing gate into the field beyond. From here, go down the shallow valley passing the water trough and tree section in **Photo 6**. The route makes its way to the gate in the bottom corner of the field (note it's hidden from view till you're almost at it). Go down the lane passing the open barn on your R.

After 100 yards turn R over the footbridge and R again after the stile to make your way up the edge of the field and back to the Start.



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*subject to eligibility

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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