

Working Together for a Better Community

# NEROCHE VILLAGES Newsletter

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

Issue 36 - Summer 2020



*A Tribute to our wonderful NHS in  
Staple Fitzpaine*

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.



## Letter from the Editor

*Karen Learoyd*

Firstly, I hope you are all staying safe and well at home – these are the strangest of times, although it has been wonderful to see such positive community spirit in play over the last few weeks. For those who enjoy being out and about locally, whether that's at St Peter's Church pop-up café, the Neroche lunches, netball, choir practise, badminton, knitting or even The Greyhound, life is certainly different! While we cannot see our friends and neighbours at the Hall, Church or pub, a chat over the fence as you walk past is not denied us, and I'm sure everyone has welcomed this ongoing contact.

This edition of the Newsletter is a little different to usual, although many of our regular contributors have still been able to give us their take on the pandemic and how it has affected them. With no events to publicise in the forthcoming months, we have focused on the Community and how it has responded. Later in the newsletter, you will find an interesting article, with input from a number of residents for whom the lockdown has had differing impacts. Also, we have included a number of delightful photos from our resident's gardens, demonstrating how much hard work has been expended!

We have also seen the establishment of the Community Support Group for Curland, Staple Fitzpaine and Bickenhall – originally the idea of Issy White and Jane Hole, although now supported by a large number of volunteers from throughout the villages. They have been helping with prescription collection, shopping, a kind voice, whatever is needed! We also know that many have taken it on themselves to support their own neighbours who might be self-isolating for various reasons.

The Greyhound has kept us tempted with their weekly take-away menu, which is always delicious! David Spears has been keeping us entertained with his weekly quiz which is distributed via the Email alert – I'm sure many of you have improved your knowledge significantly and will be ready for the Science and Nature round of Trivial Pursuit! Thanks also to Pauline Phelps for the fiendishly difficult Easter quiz.... A big thank you to Sarah Covey who has been making scrubs for the nurses at the Beacon Centre, and I'm sure there are many others 'doing their bit'.

We should also take a moment to give thanks for the wonderful countryside around us, we are luckier than many people to have such space, tranquillity and beauty. Certainly, John and I have taken the opportunity to walk more, and explore our surroundings, finding fantastic new footpaths to enjoy.

Lastly, I just want to assure you that production of the Newsletter has been completed with safety in mind, gloves worn at all times when stuffing the envelopes. Only those who are able to, have delivered your Newsletter. Our aim is to ensure continuity of the service although with limited risk.

None of us know how long this situation will last, although hopefully we will begin to see a level of social interaction in the not too distant future, and we all look forward to that!

In the meantime, stay safe all of you.

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## Living Through Lockdown in Neroche

Have you wondered how everyone else is coping with lockdown? We posed the same four questions to six local residents to provide insight into living and working through the coronavirus lockdown, we hope you will find this both interesting and uplifting.

Thank you to those who agreed to share their stories – Rebecca George, Inez Rowland, Ian Crossley, Linda Burton, Ellie Clist and Andy Palmer.

### Tell us a little about yourself

**Rebecca:** I live at Winterwell with my husband Mark Porter, and our 2 labradors. Our life in Somerset revolves around the Neroche Village Hall, singing with St Peter's Community Choir and going to the Greyhound afterwards, cycling with our friends, and playing with the Badger Street Band. I'm a Managing Partner at Deloitte, where I've worked for 15 years. I spend most of my week in London, as well as travelling extensively to Europe, North America and the Middle East. In London, I sing with the Deloitte Choir when I am able to, and am out with clients, colleagues or friends more or less every night.

**Inez:** I moved to Bickenhall 5 and a half years ago from Plymouth to be closer to my daughter and grandson – I live in the annexe of my daughter's house.



*Rebecca George*



*Inez Rowland*



**Ian:** After 20 years in Primary Education, my partner and I decided to make a lifestyle change and move to somewhere more rural. After spending time helping my parents with the jobs they hadn't got around to doing, it developed into a business – CaniHelp (with support from wonderful locals). Now I help in gardens, fields, clearing, cutting, digging, mowing, painting... doing any jobs that can help people with their gardens and land.



*Ian Crossley*

**Linda:** I'm a Community Agent, working for CCS (Community Council for Somerset). You may have come across my name when I was a Village Agent. I live in Bickenhall, so like to stay in touch with our neighbourhood, and I can still support you.



*Ellie Clist*

**Ellie:** I have lived in Bickenhall nearly 14 years, and turned 18 on the first day of lockdown ~ can't believe my luck... I'm in my last year of A-levels and have a place to study medicine at Plymouth University in September. I enjoy playing all sports and last year was part of the South West u18 team to compete at the British Eventing national youth championships on my horse Riley.

**Andy:** I work as a psychologist across a number of governmental agencies and local Authorities, and we run a small flock of sheep and some pigs off our fields at the back of the house in Bickenhall.

## **How has the lockdown changed your daily life?**

**Rebecca:** I left London on March 12, little thinking that I wouldn't go back for many weeks. I'm working from home now, spending many hours a day on Zoom in my study. From the time I came home we have been extraordinarily busy supporting the NHS, and the UK and other Governments, in their response to COVID-19\*

Work continues to be absorbing and time consuming – and without face to face contact with any of my clients or teams. But my routine is very different. After the first week I realised that I couldn't spend all day every day working, so I block out time every other day to go cycling. Usually with Mark, and we have cycled all around our beautiful area in gorgeous spring weather – making sure that we leave plenty of space when we see other people. I am getting a lot more exercise than I do in London, and spending time with Mark doing something we both enjoy. My best friend told me she is focussing on what she 'has', not what she 'hasn't' and I am trying to do the same. Mark and I are blessed that we live in such a beautiful place, we have space inside and out. We have our health, physical and mental, and each other. I have a tidy garage, drawers, and almost purged freezer. I've done some of my backlog filing, nearly finished a puzzle, sang and played music and have picked up my tapestry again. I have much more to learn about my bees. We 'see' our families and friends regularly - Zoom is our new way of life. We spend rather too much time on WhatsApp, and we have a new Netflix account.

**Inez:** Life has changed as I feel my independence has been taken away. Not being able to do my own shopping, go to the bank or the hairdressers has been very strange.

**Ian:** I was apprehensive at first to carry on working; Would people want/need me? How would people feel seeing someone

driving around? Many lovely people I work for/with soon contacted me, asking me to carry on. Obviously now I have all the wipes, gloves and sanitiser in the van. Huge consideration goes into equipment I'm touching or areas I'm going. A lot of communication is now done through text, emails or windows, social distancing is a vital aspect continually on my mind. Waste is becoming an issue as all sites are closed. I guess work has quietened down a bit, although is to be expected, people are throwing themselves into gardening and clearing more as lockdown continues.

**Linda:** In reality, my workload has doubled since lockdown. Previously I would take all my referrals from Adult Social Care, although due to this terrible Covid19 crisis we at CCS are all working together to offer support to everyone who is suffering during this time. This help comes in many forms, for some it's having regular telephone contact with the outside world, others need help with shopping for essentials, prescriptions, taking samples to doctor's surgeries, food parcels or help with finances as many are facing extreme poverty. This change in roles is still very rewarding and I have made many new friends working with the amazing volunteer groups that have appeared all over Taunton Deane.

**Ellie:** Lockdown has definitely made my life slow down dramatically. I am no longer rushing from college to home trying to juggle multiple commitments. I've volunteered for the community group and am collecting and delivering prescriptions on a weekly basis.

**Andy:** I went down with the virus at the beginning of April and I have to say I have developed a new respect for it as a result. I think I had expected a bit of a cold with some flu like symptoms. However, it was a challenge for a few weeks and certainly took a toll on general energy levels.

### **What's the thing you miss the most?**

**Rebecca:** My mum, widowed six months ago. She is in Basingstoke, stoical and keeping busy, well supported by lovely neighbours. Our sons, my daughter-in-law and other son's partner.

My brothers and their families. Our eldest son and his wife have a new puppy we have not yet met. Playing music with the Badger Street Band. Going to choir and the Greyhound afterwards. Church. Woolacombe, my go to place to soothe my soul. My flat in London on its bustling street with lots of restaurants within a few minutes' walk. Hugging people. Hugging my friends. Hugging my family.

**Inez:** The company and companionship of my friends. Not being able to go the Neroche lunch club, the knitting group or to Vera's for a cup of tea and a chat. I really miss seeing the new friends I have made since living here.

**Ian:** Firstly, has to be the morning coffee with Mum and Dad! Now it's a quick chat from a distance and collecting my equipment. I guess it is actually the time spent with others, whether it be working alongside them or having a relaxed drink and a natter. Everywhere seems a lot quieter (although crossing the A358 is easy now!). My Dad would often come out with me, especially if I need a bit of help or guidance. I have to admit I am missing those times as well.

**Linda:** I do miss all the contact with other professionals and visiting the many client's in their homes. It can be more difficult for many older, vulnerable people to explain how they are feeling and what problems they are facing over the phone (although some don't have any problems with this at all!). I may come out of this crisis with a cauliflower ear!

**Ellie:** Believe it or not I miss going to college. I also miss seeing my friends every day, definitely something we all take for granted when life is normal.

**Andy:** I have now returned to work and have needed to travel as a result, so the lockdown has had a limited effect on life since I overcame the virus.

**What good thing will you take away from the experience?**

**Rebecca:** I will celebrate the simple things I never knew I was privileged to have. Family and friends, meals together. The strength



of community, the kindness of strangers. How important key workers are, and how important it is to work to eradicate health inequalities and improve social care. When we get to a 'new normal' I will reorganise my life to spend more time in Somerset.

**Inez:** To appreciate more of the beautiful things we have around us.

**Ian:** Seeing the community support has been overwhelming, both the help people are giving, and the appreciation people are showing. Not forgetting the kind comments I receive from people I work for. On a personal level whole family Zoom chats, messages and WhatsApp comments have been entertaining.

**Linda:** When we do eventually come through this crisis, I hope that all these amazing neighbourhood support groups will continue the amazing good work they have performed. It really is going back several generations to the days of looking after 'our own' – such a great asset for our neighbourhoods. It has been such a rewarding experience to work with all these groups and agencies keeping hope alive for many vulnerable people.

**Ellie:** I now know how to make my way around Bickenhall/ Curland without a SatNav. I would say my Candy Crush skills have improved drastically having recently reached level 500, although my mum may disagree. On a serious note, being grateful to live in such a rural environment with so many places to explore. Also spending time with my family, we are all usually so busy that it has been nice to spend time with each other.

**Andy:** The period when I was at home served as a reminder of how lucky we are to live where we do. The early morning and late afternoon rat run traffic has stopped, and the human noise has dialled down with the natural sounds increasing. The community support from the various social media groups has been lovely, and people's kindness has shone through. It would be lovely to think that the challenges being faced might remind us of the best versions of ourselves and reset some of the values and priorities.

## **2020 Pancake Supper at Neroche**

***By Carole Wensley-Dodd***

The annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper took place on 25<sup>th</sup> February, with all proceeds in aid of St. Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine.

A good crowd of around 40 people enjoyed the now traditional supper of jacket potatoes, chilli for both carnivores and vegetarians, salad, coleslaw and beans. This was followed by pancakes with a choice of toppings.

The pancakes were made by Mark Pope, Peter Ellis and me, Carole Wensley-Dodd. Mark, unfortunately, couldn't be there in person due to a very important date – Julie's birthday – although still found the time to make the pancakes and send them in! Well done that man!

After supper the serious business began, PANCAKE TOSSING! The pancakes in this instance were bought in, as a very large number were expected to be wasted – not because they were tossed so high as to hit the ceiling, although more likely to be broken up when pans were missed. This proved to be the case, and Alison Brown did a sterling job with a very large broom at the end.

Right at the outset, Mark Porter tried to sneak into the youngster's team, presumably because he knew his skills were somewhat limited, although he was quickly spotted and banished. The competition got under way with Imogen winning for the teens and Chrissie Davies, the adult class.

Tami Boden-Ellis once again masterminded the quiz, causing a bit of head scratching as usual, though no bribery took place in the process. The raffle was of course well supported too, and the whole evening raised over £449 for St. Peter's. The hard work and generosity of the cooks in providing the food, and the good humour and generosity of all who attended, while not forgetting the Master of Ceremonies, Chris Baxter, all contributed to another great evening.



## **Blackdown Hills Repair Café**

***By Karen Learoyd***

Have you been inspired by The Repair Shop on BBC1 to dust down your old items that are broken, rusted up or just a little sorry for themselves! Well now you can take them to local Repair Cafés around the Blackdown area. The nearest, currently, is held every 2 months at Hemyock Village Hall. I volunteered to help at the 'Big Fix Repair Day' in February when 77 cafés across the UK took part in a day long effort to Repair, Reuse and Recycle.

The Hemyock Repair Café is organised by Stephan Lehner who is passionate about reducing the tonnes of carbon that go into the atmosphere or landfill every year that could be avoided by fixing things instead.

The day started at 10am with a queue of people waiting in the pouring rain with their much-loved items. Reception volunteers (that was me!) took their details, logged information about the item and then sent them to the appropriate repair area in the hall. There were 38 repairers on hand with a wide ranging set of skills – one of the most popular being tool sharpening and repair, almost 36% of the items brought in! There were also experts on hand to help with sewing, electrical repairs, furniture and wood, bicycles, computers and miscellaneous repairs to watches, clocks, jewellery, ceramics etc. There were even a couple of well-worn guitars brought in for an overhaul. Having completed the necessary restoration or repair, the items were returned to their owner, who was then asked to make a donation towards the Blackdown Hills Transition Group's Community Fund.

In total, 363 items were logged, of which only 39 items couldn't be repaired, either on the day, having been taken offsite, or with a recommendation for new parts – all in all, a huge success.

As well as the enthusiastic team of repairers, there was an excellent team in the kitchen, preparing an array of bacon sandwiches, home-made soups and cakes, teas and coffees which were available for sale throughout the day.

The Café has been running since March 2018 and has seen many items come for repair in that time, including train sets and a 1930s mini projector, still with the original films inside. It was fascinating to be there on the day, and see the care taken by the repairers and the beautiful items that were restored. Many of the owners brought them back to the Reception area to show them off proudly.

During the day a team of people came by who are planning to establish a Repair Café in Ilminster – unfortunately this has now been put on hold temporarily due to Covid-19, although watch this space.....







## Blackdown Hills Transition Group

# B H T G

An upside to the current crisis we are facing with Coronavirus has been the way the communities in the Blackdown Hills have come together to help and assist those who have been unable to fend for themselves. The pubs have taken to becoming local shops and takeaways, neighbours have delivered essential goods and services including prescriptions to those unable to get out. It has galvanised community support networks to ensure as many of us as possible get through the crisis unharmed.

This working together and promoting community support networks is a fundamental requirement and an essential objective of the Transition movement in order to promote local sustainability.

### **Blackdown Hills Transition Group's Community Fund**

The Blackdown Hills Transition Group through its various activities e.g. Repair Café and Apple days, has been fortunate to be able to offer some small grants funded by donations at our events to support local environment improvements. We would like to thank everyone who has made a donation to make these grants possible. Seven local groups applied and have each received £250 to progress their objectives. They are:-

1. Churchstanton School local hedge regeneration project
2. Hemyock Primary School Kitchen Garden Project
3. Blackdown Community Bus - Providing A Service to the Community
4. Repair at Home and Skills Share Scheme
5. CBO news schools Climate Change project
6. Longmead Environmental Project Raised Bed
7. Hemyock Wildflower Verge Project

For more information and to volunteer your help, please email Stephan Lehner at [blackdownhillsrc@gmail.com](mailto:blackdownhillsrc@gmail.com) or phone 0771 546 0783. All details are on our website at <http://www.blackdownhillstransition.net>

# It's life Jim, but not as we know it

**By John Thorne**

HOW wrong can one County Councillor be? No sooner do I write in your Spring newsletter that One Somerset will be the only topic dominating local politics for the next year or more, when along comes coronavirus. Clearly, the virus will now be the only topic of conversation, not just in local politics, but in the media, and in every walk of life, and probably for much longer than a year. All the briefings I have had on the subject indicate that only if and when a vaccine is developed, will we be able to put the crisis behind us. Even then, I suspect we will be looking over our shoulders watching for the next pandemic to pop up.

Life as we know it has changed since I wrote my Spring column for you. We are all affected by the virus in one way or another and life will never be quite the same again. I have friends who have lost loved ones, family who are 'shielding', family who have been furloughed, and young sons whom I have not been able to see for weeks on end.

And that is just me. I am no different to anybody else and I am sure there will be many, many residents in our County Council division who are affected far more severely. My heart goes out to all of you.

Through it all, I have had to continue working every day,



and to work longer and more frequent shifts, conscious that I am at risk every minute of the working day. Who would have thought during a time when our country and our way of life is under such threat, that a simple cleaning job would be so important to our survival and the nation's future! So, I go into work every morning, clean the s\*\*\* left in the toilets, mop floors, wipe down doors, tables, and stair rails with Covid-killing spray, and litter pick rubbish that is dropped everywhere.

Life as a county councillor has been put on virtual hold. With the lockdown preventing me from getting out and about, I have been able to keep in touch with local issues only through email and phone calls, which just is not the same as going along to your parish council meetings or popping into someone's home to hear about a problem. I have managed to do a little: give some advice on planning issues, provide information on highways work, encourage applications for grants, and help a distressed elderly lady who had locked herself out of her council flat.

On top of that, I have been trying to keep up my fitness by running laps of a playing field near my home. I would usually be in the gym at least once a week and running around a football pitch at weekends as a referee, although all that has gone, of course. I hope that all of you are able to keep up some form of exercise during the lockdown, as physical fitness is a key to maintaining the mental strength we all need to see out this emergency. By staying strong physically and mentally, and following the social distancing rules, we give ourselves the best chance of survival.

At the time of writing, Somerset has been doing better than many other areas of the country, and I hope that position does not change. I hope that we all come through this as unscathed as possible, and I look forward to actually being able to get out and about in the Neroche patch again.

# Who Killed the Secret Agent?

*By Jacqueline Wanstall*

On Saturday 22nd February, the team at Neroche Hall put on another wonderful evening of murder, mystery and mischief. Having attended the previous event, 'Who Killed The Director?' in November 2018, we knew a fun evening was in store and once again, the team didn't disappoint.

The audience listened intently, to ensure no clues were missed and to try and work out who, in fact, had killed the Secret Agent Marcus Moul-Lightly (Double O-M-G), who was wonderfully played by Kingsley Beck. I don't know about the other teams, although all the way through, we were constantly changing our minds as to who carried out the evil deed.



*Marcus Moul-Lightly*



*Ada Swabb*

Was it P, (Mark Porter), or perhaps it was Jilly Fillyfenny (Diana Davies), or Doctor Nigel Tinker (Andy Palmer), no it had to be Ada Swabb (Marianne Bray), oh no it was definitely Glitz Honeypot (Nicky Baxter). Oh my, we were very confused!! The reality is, it could have been any one of them, as they were a super suspicious and untrustworthy bunch!!! Or



maybe Double O-M-G wasn't dead after all??? The theories were flying around!!

To add to the enjoyment of the evening there was the additional Bond Competition, where you had to spot 19 Bond film names and 3 Bond songs hidden within the dialogue. There was much laughter (and groaning) when some of the more unusual titles were crowbarred into the script, Goldeneye and Octopussy spring to mind!!! I have to say, personally I think I was concentrating so hard on this part of the script, that I probably missed some vital clues, as to "who done it"!!!

The evening was broken up by an amazing chilli and garlic bread dinner, which also allowed teams the time to chat through their theories, or perhaps lack of, as with our group!!

The second act brought about the end of the mystery and the evil culprit/s were unveiled, cue much booing and hissing!!

All in all, it was a wonderful evening and the crowded hall seemed to really enjoy it, with a big round of applause and much cheering for both the cast and crew, as well as the super team who provided the lovely nosh.

Although my team didn't win this year (booooo! Team Kojak will make a come-back next year!) we will certainly be back for the next instalment, in the hopefully not too distant future.





## **Neroche Woodlanders at Young Wood**

There's an excruciating irony for us, being in the woods this spring. On the one hand it's one of the loveliest we've seen for a long time – the new foliage on the beeches, limes, oaks, elms and hazels is exquisite, the wild garlic and other woodland flowers are at their best, and the birdsong seems richer and louder than ever. Although at the same time, it's desperately sad that we can't share it, with the groups we would normally be bringing to the woods at this time of year. Most of the people with whom we work at Neroche Woodlanders are not easily able to get out into the countryside, even in normal circumstances, and amidst the Covid-19 lockdown it is virtually impossible for them to do so. Many of them live in small flats or houses in the middle of town, without personal transport, and with little opportunity to enjoy nature this spring.

One way we are trying to tackle this within the constraints we all face, is by delivering a little bit of the woods to the families we work with, who have children to entertain and educate during this difficult time. So we are making up nature craft bags, containing a variety of natural materials: a set of sticks for making a den for a teddy bear; some wooden disks which can be used for simple games or for colouring in; hazel sticks and coloured wool for making stick dolls; and other natural objects and materials which can hopefully spark the imagination and encourage creative play. The feedback from families is good so we will be developing that idea further.

While Young Wood remains closed, we are visiting regularly to check on security and make up the family craft bags (working in a socially distanced way of course). And that at least gives some of us the

opportunity to experience the woods at this most special time. We're seeing the benefits already of woodland thinning and glade creation last winter, as twayblade and butterfly orchids sprout in the newly opened spaces, and the early butterflies like speckled wood patrol the sun-dappled corridors. Meanwhile, across the forest in Piddle Wood, the majestic veteran oaks are in full leaf, and easier to see now, following work this winter by the Forestry Commission, working with our volunteers, to clear growth from around some of the big trees to give them more room to breathe.



Hopefully when the time comes to write for the next edition of this newsletter, everyone will be back to being able to enjoy the forest and wider landscape, as well as each other's company.

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



© Holly-Jane Harris



© Sharon & Neil Bradford

## **News from RSPCA West Hatch**

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

Although Covid-19 has changed the way we work, it has not stopped animals being in need or us doing our bit to help. In this update I will share a flavour of the breadth of our work and what we have been up to in this difficult time.

Keeping people safe as our first priority has meant both shutting to the public, and suspending volunteering at the centre. We usually have around 4-8 volunteers on site each day at this time of year, with roles ranging from admin and maintenance to cat socialisation, dog walking and cleaning. Their presence has been sorely missed although it is more important that they stay safe and we see them back with our animals when the danger is over.

However, even without our volunteers and with some of the team working from home or furloughed, the animal care goes on. Our colleagues in the Inspectorate are still out and about dealing with emergencies and bringing animals in to us so we would like to share some of their stories first since these are the animals that then come into our care.

### **Out in the field**

Covid-19 has had a big impact on the work of our officers in the field, and meant additional calls due to illness and even deaths. The picture here shows Inspector Charlotte Coggins attending a property with Inspector Ken Snook to collect a cat. The occupant of the house had passed away, linked to Covid-19, and so the cat needed to come into the animal centre.



That same weekend the team received a call to Exeter quayside regarding a sickly swan. Inspector Ellie Burt attended and found the swan with a large growth on its wing. The swan was off the water and



she managed to grab it, although it was very strong and feisty and somehow got away.

Ellie called in assistance from Animal Welfare Officer Steve Donohue who came to help. Half a bag of corn and a loaf of bread and about 30 greedy swans later they managed to coax it to the side of the river. Ellie snuck up behind Steve with the swan hook and grabbed the injured swan from behind Steve's legs. Steve got hold of the swan although he also had a battle getting it confined. Five minutes and two poo covered officers later they wrangled it into a swan bag and transported it to RSPCA West Hatch Wildlife Centre for treatment.



## Work at the centre

As these stories show, there are still plenty of animals that need our help. However, as we are unable to take animals from members of the public right now, we have also been busy giving out advice to make sure that animals can get help when they need it. The chart below is just one example of the information we have shared with those in need.



The wildlife centre is starting to get busy with a range of animals, and of course lots of orphans. The photos below show some of the earliest babies that came into our care – young rabbits. Each group of siblings is hand reared by a dedicated member of staff. Wild rabbits are not the easiest of animals to rear and do much better on a one to one basis. This year they have all done extremely well and the first babies

were released back to the wild just in time for Easter.



Spring also means time for fitness training for these Pipistrelle bats who spent the winter in care. Once these bats have regained fitness in our bat flight, they will be returned back to their own roosts.

Just as busy as the wildlife centre, our animal centre has also faced some challenges in recent weeks. When Covid-19 restrictions first set in, we had numerous animals in the centre that were ready to find their new homes - although now became stuck in our care. Happily we have now been told that we can resume rehoming using a new remote process. We have been working hard to implement this, and have relied heavily on our colleagues out in the field to ensure that animals are safely delivered to their adopters.



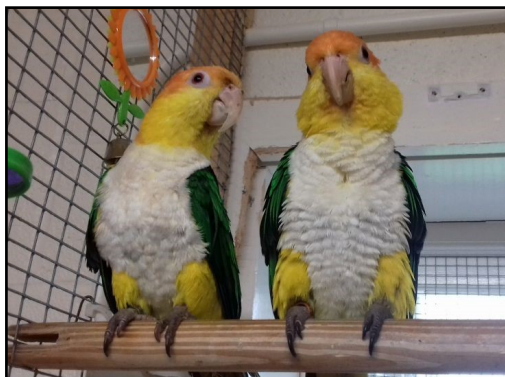


People expect us to care for dogs, cats, rabbits, ferrets and the like. And we do – although sometimes we see more unusual animals come in for rehabilitation, treatment and rehoming.

First up is Patrick, the British Alpine goat, shown here enjoying his orthopaedic mattress and a spot of sunshine. Patrick came into the centre as an abandonment and with old injuries. He quickly charmed us all with his friendly nature and is now looking for a new home.



We have also cared for Jakey and Cupcake, the Yellow-thighed Caiques. The great news is that this friendly and noisy duo have recently found a suitable home.



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 Parish Council – Chairman’s Report 2019/20**

*by Jon Bell, Chairman*



This is certainly not the report I was expecting to write when we started planning the Annual Parish Meeting back in January, so much has changed since then. The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic in the South West has so far been less severe than in other parts of the country and I hope it will remain so.

As far as I am aware there have been few cases of this within the parish. One casualty though has been the Annual Parish Meeting, which we have called off in view of the lockdown and restrictions on movement and social gatherings. With no clear sign of when restrictions will be lifted, I think it would be difficult to postpone it, with no idea of when it might be able to go ahead. May the meeting remain the only local casualty.

Parish Council meetings have also been affected. At our March meeting it was only just starting to become apparent that normality was about to be placed on hold and I must confess that we had given little thought until then about the impact of the pandemic on the parish. In the days that followed, when the extent of restrictions on movement became apparent, a group of local volunteers quickly got together and approached the Parish Council for support. The Council held a rather surreal emergency meeting in John Parsons’ yard, standing in the open air with appropriate spacing, at which we passed a business continuity motion, based on one we had been sent by the district council. This gave the Clerk, Chairman and Vice Chairman authority to act on the Council’s behalf in a range of situations which would in normal circumstances be discussed at Council meetings. It was a chilly evening and I doubt if we will ever hold a shorter meeting!

After the formal Council meeting closed we had discussions with Jane Hole and Karen Learoyd, who had been instrumental in putting together a group of local volunteers, the Community Support Group for Curland, Staple Fitzpaine and Bickenhall, with the aim of helping those in the parish who were self-isolating and unable to shop, fetch prescriptions and perform other essential tasks for themselves. We

agreed to provide a letter from the Parish Council which volunteers could carry when engaged on such duties. Orchard Portman and Thurlbear were not included in this scheme as we understood they were covered by a similar scheme run in Stoke St Mary. The Parish Council also agreed to provide the group with a loan of £500, to be used if needed to facilitate these activities.

With normal Council meetings suspended we have been examining ways in which we could hold 'virtual' meetings. Previous restrictions on this sort of meeting have been temporarily lifted and many organisations are now doing this. We have provisionally settled on Zoom as a means of doing this and I thank Mark Pope for his expertise in setting up a short trial meeting, which went well for those able to take part. Attendance of the public at these virtual meetings will not be possible although agendas and minutes will be published as usual. Anybody with questions or issues they would like discussed should contact either our Clerk Nicola Harrop, or one of their local councillors who can raise the matter at our meeting. Hopefully this temporary state of affairs will not last long, although it looks as if our Annual Council Meeting in May will have to follow this format.

So, what of other events and issues in the year prior to the Covid pandemic?

The Parish Council elections last May, which now seems a very long time ago, brought some new faces to the Council. Daniel Macey and Kingsley Beck were elected, representing Orchard Portman and Thurlbear, and Bickenhall respectively, replacing previous Councillors Chris Baxter, Lynne Spoons and Wally Torrington who all chose not to stand for re-election.

The May elections also brought a change in our District Councillor. John Williams, who had served us for many years and been unfailing in his support for the Parish Council, was replaced by Ross Henley, previously our County Councillor a few years ago. Through this role he is already familiar with the Parish, we look forward to working with him and are grateful for the support he has already given us over various planning issues and over fly tipping. There have been several instances of the latter in the Parish over the last few months.

There has been a contentious planning issue in Curland, where the

purchaser of a small field recently sold by the Crown, began storing various materials which looked destined for building, and also constructed a track into the field through an enlarged gateway. This caused some alarm to local residents who feared some illegal development might be imminent. Following intervention by the District Council, a planning application was submitted for retrospective approval for construction of the track, along with a further application to erect a range of buildings on the site, for agricultural purposes. Following representations from local residents a special Parish Council Meeting was held to gather views on the proposals. As a result of this, the Parish Council objected to the proposals on a number of grounds, and planning permission was refused. An enforcement notice was prepared by the District Council although a new application for planning permission has now been submitted. The Parish Council are at the time of writing considering their response to this, although it seems likely we will again object, as many of our previous objections still apply.

As far as the sale of the Taunton Estate by the Crown Estates goes, I believe all the land involved has now been sold, or is at least in the process of sale. Some has been bought by local farmers with whom many of us are already familiar, the rest of the land within Neroche Parish has been bought by other farmers from a little further afield. The plot bought by a large building developer is outside Neroche, although is causing some concern to our neighbours in Stoke St Mary.

On some of the topics which have been recurring issues in recent years there has been little progress.

Following announcement of the preferred route for the upgraded A358, things on that front have gone a little quiet. I believe there have been some meetings with landowners adjacent to the road, and surveyors have been spotted along the present route, although details which will affect Neroche remain unclear. These include which side of the existing road the new carriageway will be constructed, and where and what form any cross over routes will take. The latter details have big implications for local businesses and for farmers with land both sides of the road. There is still a lack of clarity about exactly where access roads feeding onto the new, upgraded carriageway will be. This also has potentially huge impact on local roads and traffic flow.

The plans for installation of fibre broadband in the parish have also



come to nothing with the demise of the agreement between Connecting Devon and Somerset and Gigaclear. As far as we are aware, there is no new plan and we are as far away from satisfactory local broadband provision as ever, much to our frustration.

Restrictions arising from the Covid pandemic, and the shift in government focus to deal with this, appears to have contributed to a lack of progress on both the above issues.

On a more positive note the project to restore the finger post road signs, led by the local history group with support from the Parish Council is going well, or at least it was until the recent movement restrictions. Several posts have already been restored although others, including the worst damaged, remain to be repaired. Fund raising efforts to underwrite this continue, with money raised being matched by funding from the Parish Council.

On a similar note we were contacted by Otterford Parish Council about a project to restore the cast iron mile marker posts along some of the local roads. The only one of these in Neroche is in Orchard Portman, on the left side of the main road approaching the racecourse from town. We have provisionally agreed to get involved in supporting a grant application they are making for funding to enable this, although I have heard nothing recent regarding this, I guess it is another issue adversely affected by the Covid emergency.

Another positive development concerns the defibrillator, donated to the Parish a few years ago by our previous County Councillor David Fothergill. The Parish Council have now purchased an outdoor cabinet for this, which has been installed on an outside wall at the Greyhound Inn. The cabinet has a coded lock, the combination is held by the Greyhound and by the Ambulance Service, it has also been publicised in the Parish e-mail alert system. Hopefully it will never have to be used although it's good to know it is there. When things return to normal following the present emergency, the Parish Council will explore the possibility of some sort of training event.

And so finally to finance. Each year a small advisory group of Parish Councillors meet to decide what the recommended level of precept should be, this is the share of the Council Tax bill which goes to the Parish Council. We decided to follow the provisional plan agreed by the

Council the previous year and raise our precept by a similar amount to last year's rise. It is unclear what the future arrangement of tiers of local government above Parish Council level will be in the future, and whether Somerset will opt for a unitary authority, although whatever the case it seems likely that there will be future pressure for the Parish Council to take on responsibility for some of the services currently provided by the District and County Councils. We need to be prepared for this, although the debate seems to be on hold in the current circumstances.

Keep safe.

Jon Bell  
Chairman, Neroche Parish Council

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© Jacqueline Kolkowski



© Sharon & Neil Bradford



© Karen Learoyd



© Richard Davies



© Richard Davies



© Carole Wensley-Dodd



© Holly-Jane Harris



# Grow the Tallest Ruby Sunflower Competition



**In Support of St Margaret's Hospice  
40<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Buy seeds from their website  
[www.st-margarets-hospice.org.uk](http://www.st-margarets-hospice.org.uk)  
or small plants will be available for a  
donation from  
[Jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com](mailto:Jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com)

Run the Sunflower sweepstake with your  
neighbours, family and friends - available on  
the website or from Jacqueline

**Prizes for the tallest sunflower grown by  
Under 10s and Over 10s to any age!**

**GET GROWING**

**Plant heights to be measured in September**



© Rupert Ryall



© Sharon & Neil Bradford



© Holly-Jane Harris

**Thank you to everyone who sent in  
their wonderful photographs**

## Thurlbear School: stepping up for its community

*By Steve Gillan, Headmaster*

As a church school, guidance from the words and teachings of Jesus features at the heart of our school life. Galatians 6 tells us to: **“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.”** These words come from Paul the Apostle and were written for early Christian communities. However, as we find with so many wise pieces of advice, they can echo into the ages and how salient this is for our current lives.

No-one could envisage the speed of any COVID-19 developments across the globe. It has dominated our thoughts and actions for the past 2 months and will do so for many more to come. As a primary school, we have had to change our approach to education to a distance-learning model whilst, at the same time, make ourselves available for the children of key workers. Our school has been open every day, including through the Easter Holidays. The brilliant staff have stepped up when it matters most and helped bear the community burden of COVID-19 on our families.

I was particularly proud to speak on BBC radio about Thurlbear School staying open on the weekend for a family in particular need of childcare. This extraordinary appeal was met by a brilliant response from our whole school staff; within 10 minutes, I had 20 volunteers to come in on the Saturday and Sunday. As a Head, I am incredibly proud of the response from this school and we have had lovely messages from Bishop of Taunton, Rt Revd Ruth Worseley and Rt Revd Peter Hancock, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

I am sure that we will face further challenges as this year continues, although I am confident that my school, along with our staff, governors and great school community, can fulfil the challenge set down by Paul the Apostle so many centuries before.





somerset  
**village & community**  
agents

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Taunton,  
TA1 3FB  
Tel: 01823 331222  
Email: [info@somersetccc.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetccc.org.uk)  
Website: [www.somersetccc.org.uk](http://www.somersetccc.org.uk)



somerset  
**carers**

## A note from Keeley Rudd, CEO of Community Council for Somerset (Village Agents)

First and foremost, I hope you are well, keeping safe and managing to access the support and essential supplies you need in these difficult times.

CCS Village, Community and Carers Agents have been providing support for individuals and communities in Somerset since 2012. Agents help by providing practical, community-based solutions to meet people's basic needs and beyond. This is a unique service across the county, and CCS works extremely closely with both the health services and social care to broker a range of support in a person-centred way to enable someone to be nurtured in their own local community wherever possible. Village, Community and Carers Agents are **designated key workers** during the COVID-19 pandemic and have individual letters of authority from the County Council to verify this.

During this unprecedented time the calls to our services and out to members of the community to provide help, support and advice, run into thousands on a weekly basis and the demand is increasing. All Agents (and other staff within CCS) are working extremely hard, and despite the volume are managing to provide the same professional and personalised help and support, and are receiving some fantastic feedback from those they have supported. If you have any feedback you would like to share please send it to: [info@somersetccc.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetccc.org.uk).

If you need Agent support, please use the Agent Call Back form on our website [www.ccslovesomerset.org](http://www.ccslovesomerset.org). The current crisis has shown the compassion, kindness and community spirit of people in Somerset. CCS Agents can help you to get in touch with your local support group.

In addition, we have experienced and knowledgeable staff who can support you if you are part of a Parish or Town Council, a Village Hall Committee, social or community enterprise or community group or charity. Advice is available on our website or you can call the main CCS number on **01823 331222** for help.

If you are a carer and look after a family member or dependent in an unpaid capacity you may need additional support so please call our Freephone number on **0800 31 68 600** or visit the website <https://somersecarers.org> where we offer a web chat facility. If you are concerned about a neighbour or someone you know in your local area who is a carer and they do not have access to the internet, then please give them the advice line number.

I hope you will join me in thanking the dedicated and professional staff at CCS and in recognising and thanking CCS Agents as frontline key workers, who are helping to ensure that essential supplies and support get through to the people who need it most. Include them in your “Clap for Carers” each week to show your support.

## **WHO TO CONTACT THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN FOR SUPPORT:**

- Contact CCS via the usual website and our COVID-19 response form [www.ccslovesomerset.org](http://www.ccslovesomerset.org). An Agent will contact you with relevant information about local volunteers, as well as shops and restaurants that are able to deliver to you in your area. Agents can also provide any other support regarding benefits and housing.
- Contact Somerset Direct if you have safeguarding concerns or care plan issues **0300 123 2224**
- Somerset County Council has a created a dedicated COVID-19 helpline: **0300 790 6275**
- Contact your local Parish Council for doorstep support.
- Contact your GP, NHS 111, and pharmacy or wellbeing advisors if you have any medical concerns.

Provisional dates, coronavirus lockdown permitting

**STAPLE FITZPAINE, BICKENHALL, CURLAND  
SCARECROW FESTIVAL 2020**

Theme is "Historical Character - Fact or Fiction"  
18th July-26th July



**1<sup>st</sup> prize £50, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £25, 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £10**

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

**Entries close 13 July**

**Further details of teas, BBQ etc nearer the time**

**Contact Alison Brown 01823 480441 or  
[aabrown.battens@gmail.com](mailto:aabrown.battens@gmail.com)**

Proceeds to St Peter's Church

# Neroche Local History Group: Our Rights of Way Heritage

*By Jane Hole*

People have walked across the lands that now make up Neroche Parish for millennia. Ancient trackways would have been established linking Neolithic, Bronze or Iron Age encampments. They were used by traders moving from tribe to tribe, or travellers to visit places of worship. The Bronze Age hillforts at Castle Neroche and Orchard Hill would likely have been linked by these ancient trackways.

Many of our current footpaths and bridleways have names that have come down over the centuries. Green Lane is an old route up to Castle Neroche for travellers and drovers. Forest Drove in Bickenhall that nowadays crosses fields, would probably have been part of a route across the old lands of Neroche Forest, which measured some 10,000 acres in the 11<sup>th</sup> C. Just outside our parish, the “Broad-Way” connecting with Hare Lane is possibly the remains of an Anglo Saxon herepath (route). Tom Mayberry (SW Heritage Trust) speculates the Duke of Monmouth and his followers were likely to have travelled through our parts of Neroche Forest in 1685 on his way from Lyme Regis northwards.

Today, many our Rights of Way (ROW) that zigzag across the parish will have historic connections, they also give us the ability to walk or ride through absolutely beautiful countryside.



*Top of Staple Hill*

They are a vital resource to keep us fit, help us connect with the natural world and maintain a sense of wellbeing. It is important they are bequeathed to further generations to enjoy. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required all Rights of Way to be recorded on definitive maps by 2026. Public rights of way are protected by law, the

definitive county maps are the legal record of all known public rights of way. It is estimated across England there are about 10,000 miles of historical footpaths that are missing from the map. We don't know if there are any of these routes within our parish, although a fascinating

project awaits anyone who has a bit of spare time and likes to pore over old maps to see if any of these routes can be found locally.

A brilliant place to start and also for anyone who likes old maps is the National Library of Scotland. It holds a collection of UK wide fully georeferenced OS maps and Bartholomew's "Half Inch to the Mile Maps" of England and Wales. Particularly useful are the very detailed OS County Series 25" England & Wales maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/> Another useful source is the "Don't Lose Your Way - Finding Historical Sources" on The Ramblers website: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/dont-lose-your-way-2026/finding-historical-sources-online.aspx>

Keeping our paths accessible and walkable is important. A small local group has been established (and will return to work after Covid 19 lockdown is over) to walk our current ROW network and audit where repair or replacement is needed for stiles and waymarking posts. Travelling with a pair of secateurs we also liberate stiles and signs from their winter blankets of brambles and overgrown hedges. If you would like to help please mark your email Neroche R.O.W. Rovers and contact us at:

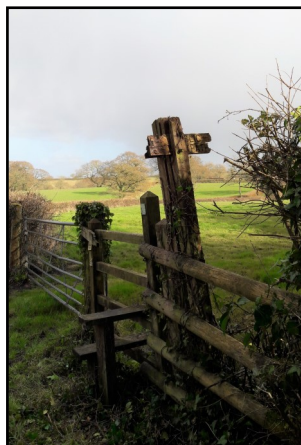
Tami Boden Ellis [peter.ellis33@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.ellis33@btinternet.com) or  
Jane Hole [jane.hole@outlook.com](mailto:jane.hole@outlook.com)



*Cleared Stile 2*



*Stile in need of repair*



*Broken  
Waymarker*



*Broken Post*

## Public Footpaths and Bridleways

### USE THEM OR LOSE THEM

*By Victoria Walker*

Within our parishes, and I am sure many others, access to and the use of public footpaths and bridleways is being made more and more difficult.

These ancient rights of way are a national treasure which we seem to take for granted. If we do not use them regularly, they will disappear.

If a public footpath goes across a field, we have every right to use it. In return we must respect any livestock or crops within that field. PLEASE, however inaccessible some of these paths may seem, USE THEM, and keep them open for us, our children and future generations.

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### Over £800 raised for Musgrove

On March 11th, Rosemary Grabham and Tina Warren were delighted to present Ward 9 and The Beacon Centre with the proceeds of a fundraising wine and cheese party held in December. The very enjoyable get together of friends and neighbours raised an amazing £850.00 in appreciation of the sterling work that the doctors, nurses and carers do in our local Musgrove Park Hospital. A huge thank you to all of you who took part.





# The Spring Fish 'n' Chips Quiz

*By Alan Perrior*

## CoronaVirus, or to be more accurate, Covid-19, comes to Neroche!



Well not quite, although it certainly affected turnout at the latest Fish 'n' Chips quiz on Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> March at Neroche Hall. There were slightly fewer teams than normal and some were short of the maximum 6 players which meant that a couple of “reduced” teams had to merge for the evening.

Given the current (at the time of writing) situation this may well have been the last event held at the hall for some considerable time. The scheduled Thursday lunch club and Friday film night are just two of the numerous events to be cancelled, and Neroche Hall itself has now been closed until further notice.

So, was it worth attending the quiz? The answer must be a resounding “Yes”. The quiz provided a welcome distraction from all the doom and gloom and was thoroughly enjoyed by all those who attended. And, as an added bonus, much needed funds were raised for the hall’s upkeep.

As ever Mike Michaels produced a tough although fair quiz which kept the quizzers struggling for answers and produced occasional groans as correct answers were revealed. There were 10 rounds; nine normal rounds of General Knowledge, History etc although the last round, the Music round, was distinctly “non-normal”.

For the last couple of quizzes Mike has entertained us all with a Music round in which he whistled the questions, last time it was TV and Radio Theme tunes. For this quiz he again chose Theme tunes although this time he played them on a kazoo – an annoyingly tuneless musical instrument played by blowing, or rather humming, into it to produce a buzzing sound! Luckily most of the tunes were fairly recognisable and

nearly all the teams scored well on the round.



'Layz Ricks' once again produced hot meals for the quizzers and helpers in time for the mid-quiz break. All the meals came with chips, as you'd expect, but the menu choice included fish, chicken, sausage and even a veggie version.

As mentioned earlier, some teams had to merge to create teams of six players and for one new team in particular this turned out to be a shrewd move – Ab Fab was created from teams captained by Paul Hart and Alan Perrior, and they won by a clear 4 points with a score of 85. So, it's well deserved congratulations to Paul, Alan, Mel, Jill, Ross and Lucy. Who will beat them next time? Assuming, of course, that the Covid-19 crisis is long gone before October's Fish 'n' Chips quiz!



*2 of the winners and their spoils*

The real winner was the Neroche Hall; this much used and appreciated hall benefited from the proceeds of the quiz and raffle. Well done to all the teams and, special thanks should go to Richard Davies and his stalwart group of helpers. It was an excellent evening.

**Roll on the next quiz in the Autumn of 2020**

## **News from Staple Farm**

*by Mark Pope*

Well by the time you are all sat down and reading this article, the sun should be shining, and the crops should be growing. We have had the wettest winter that I can remember. The rain started at the end of September and did not stop until the beginning of April.

Since then we had a very cold northerly wind which helped to dry out the ground on the top really well. This has enabled us to plant a block of spring barley, more than originally planned due to not being able to plant any winter wheat. We planted the barley using a technique called strip till planting. The machine creates a seedbed literally just where the seed is placed, and the rest of the field remains untouched. The tractor doing the planting is steered using GPS, this allows for virtually no overlaps.

As I write these notes the barley has emerged from the ground in nice straight rows. What it needs now is a nice gentle shower of warm rain to keep the crop growing. Just not too much please! We are also letting 2 fields be planted to maize for a neighbour's dairy cows as winter feed.

At the time of writing we are practising social distancing like many others. This is a real issue with farmers, especially for our livestock farmers, who are losing staff to coronavirus, and then not being able to feed the livestock or milk the cows. Hence when out walking, please take extra care around farms, especially those with livestock.

As I write, the birds are all singing well, and the hedges are colouring up as new life starts to emerge. It is a great time to be outside and seeing things grow.

Let us all hope by the time you read this article we are very much on the recovery stage of this horrible virus.

**Stay Safe**

## Forestry England Summer Update

*By Robert Greenhalgh,  
Community Ranger*



What a strange period for us all. You will have seen that we took the difficult decision to close the car parks on the Blackdown Hills, particularly around the Neroche landscape to support the government's core messages of stay home, protect the NHS, save lives. The most important thing for Forestry England is to keep people safe, both visitors and our colleagues, including limiting the potential for visitors and cars to congregate at our car parks. It wasn't an easy decision and we look forward to things getting back to some version of 'normality' in the near future and fully reopening the woodlands when the time is right.

For those fortunate enough to walk to our forest, you will have no doubt been blessed with the beautiful colour that spring has brought. Nature seems to be having a real bumper year, and it's been a pleasure to still support the great work Forestry England does to maintain these woodlands on your behalf. The bird song, the colour, the returning swallows – it's all been much more noticeable. Tones of the poem 'Leisure' by W. H. Davies have often crossed my mind during my regular site visits in the last few weeks – seems we really do have the time to stand and stare – and what a view it's been with all this sunshine!

April should have brought an exciting event at Castle Neroche as we looked to 'Reawaken the dragons' from their winter slumber. Some of you may have even spotted a sneaky addition to the landscape at Castle Neroche, courtesy of a local chainsaw artist, Gary Orange, who completed the work just before lockdown. For those who



haven't seen the new residents, I've attached a teaser image and hope you meet the pair one day soon. We've yet to name them, so any forthcoming suggestions would be welcome: perhaps when we re-establish some normality we could run a local competition to find the best names!

In other news, thanks to the volunteer work carried out last year at the Piddle Oaks in Wych Lodge, the trees are showing some real signs of improvement. Young growth is visible now the light is able to penetrate the trees again and we hope these ancient trees will continue to show signs of recovery as we look to run several other sessions in the autumn and winter. Please look out for those opportunities advertised locally – it would be great to have your help in preserving these ancient giants. We'll work alongside the Blackdown Hills AONB team and advertise these opportunities locally when they are available. You can also find them on our Facebook page along with lots of suggestions about how to keep active and engaged with nature during this difficult time. Please visit us, 'Like' and make use of some of the content available. From bird watching to forest bathing techniques (which can be applied in a mindful way at home or any natural space, minus the forest!) there may be something on there for you to pursue. You can find it by searching for @EastDevonBlackdownsRanger or typing Forestry England Ranger, East Devon & Blackdowns into Facebook's search bar.

In the meantime, we will have skeleton staff on the ground as some of us begin to enter the furlough period in May. Therefore, if you have any immediate concerns or issues, please refer them to our regional office via [westengland@forestryengland.uk](mailto:westengland@forestryengland.uk) and someone will respond. Alternatively, you can contact us via the Facebook page mentioned above. This will be monitored periodically by retained staff.

We look forward to seeing you in the forests in the coming months but please stay safe, stay home and protect the NHS.

Best wishes for summer.



# Introducing the New Chair of NCAG Mike Aspray



Chair's Report, May 2020

I am delighted to confirm that I have taken over from Tim French as the new Chair of the Neroche Communication Action Group. Having taken the plunge and agreed to take over at the Annual General Meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, unfortunately one of my early tasks was to then postpone our meetings in order to comply with social distancing guidance!

Having taken early retirement after 30 years in the Armed Forces and 12 years managing a large veterinary practice, Val (my wife) and I moved into the area in August 2017 from the Hampshire/Berkshire border, so are still very much newcomers into the Parish.

During these difficult times my immediate priorities are to ensure the continued delivery of effective and informative communications via the Email Alert, Newsletter and Website facilities, and to gain a deeper understanding of how the Group functions across the Parish and my role in it.

Finally, I would like to thank Tim for his many years of service to the Parish (big shoes to fill I think!) and to thank all the committee members and volunteers who continue to work tirelessly behind the scenes to make it all happen!

*By Jacqueline Kolkowski*

## MEETINGS

Our February meeting was a celebration held at the Greyhound, starting with an excellent meal. It was also that time of year when those competition points are collated! As you know, points mean yes, prizes (drum roll please) for the annual competition trophy winners. 1<sup>st</sup> - Frances Alford, 2<sup>nd</sup> - Peta Trott, 3<sup>rd</sup> - Tricia Dryden. The Bickenhall Cup was awarded to Pauline Phelps. An enjoyable evening of fun and laughter was had by all.



Our last meeting before lockdown was in March and we had a most interesting and enlightening talk about Tai Chi and oriental medicine given by Marilyn Clarke, a retired physiotherapist, who trained with the International Tai Chi for Health Foundation and is an advanced instructor with the Tai Chi Union of Great Britain. Tai chi, also called tai chi chuan, combines deep breathing and relaxation with

flowing movements. Originally developed as a martial art in 13th-century China tai chi is now practised around the world as a health promoting exercise. We all tried a few movements that should be slow, gracefully performed in a continuous movement that are gentle on joints and muscles.

## BLANKETS

Following the admission of Jean (Pauline's mum) to a nursing home in Sussex, Pauline started making blankets for the residents. As you know from the last newsletter Jean sadly died, although Pauline, Tricia, Frances and Gaynor carried on making the blankets which were sent to the home in Jean's memory. As you can imagine many more of our members wanted to be involved in this project and are knitting squares for many more blankets to be taken to other homes as soon as we can.

Carole took some to Calway House just before lockdown.



## **SPORTING EVENTS**

With lock down our walking netball has been cancelled although a few of us have tried walking netball work outs on Zoom with netballers from all over the country! (What fun!)

## **DI GRABHAM**

After many years as a member of the WI Committee, Di Grabham has decided to retire. Over the years she has been involved with the Bickenhall WI, Di has held various appointments on the committee including as President. Di, always forthright in her views, has given great support to the Somerset WI Federation, Bickenhall WI and its members along with her friendship, her advice and vast knowledge of protocol and procedures.

We would like to thank her for all her past support and time she has given to the Bickenhall WI, and for the support we know she will continue to give us in the future.



Bickenhall and District WI usually meet the second Wednesday of each month at Neroche Hall. We hope to be back soon.

## News from your local MP

*By Rebecca Pow*

Hello

Welcome to my latest update. It is almost inconceivable to reflect on how much has changed since I last wrote. Since then we have all been locked down in the area because of the Coronavirus pandemic, each affected in our different ways. At the outset I must offer my sincerest condolences to all those affected, especially those who have sadly lost a loved one.

At the time of writing, social distancing measures remain in place, with the Government currently reviewing the situation in advance of a speech to be given by the Prime Minister on Sunday (10 May 2020). I've been engaged, as a DEFRA Minister, in some of this work, particularly in relation to recycling and garden centres. I am pleased that the Household Waste and Recycling Centres have now opened for essential use and work continues to get some relaxation in terms of garden centres opening.

Whilst Parliament is sitting only those actively engaged on the day are advised to be in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I have taken part in the tests on remote on-line voting successfully and in the near future this is the way we will be voting on Parliamentary business.

I appreciate that there will be a time lag before this reaches your doorstep so for the latest information regarding the coronavirus outbreak please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

### **VE DAY**

Many people across the area were incredibly innovative in the ways in which they commemorated 75 years since the end of World War 2, VE Day, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Sticking strictly to social distancing guidance people paid tribute to those who gave their



lives for the cause of freedom. In my own village, people came out between 2pm and 4pm, sitting on their doorsteps, in front gardens or on terraces. And I am sure many people out on their hours' walk or cycle have been entertained by the scarecrows popping up, a number appropriately dressed in 1940's attire.

## **HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY**

A heartfelt thank you to so many people during this challenging time including: all medical professionals: doctors, consultants, nurses, and ancillary staff, GPs and Pharmacists, our care home staff and carers, support staff and the emergency services; also all those in the food supply chain including farmers, supermarket and shop staff and all those involved in the delivery of food parcels to the vulnerable and shielded.

Our teachers too need thanks, they have continued to deliver education for the children of key workers and the vulnerable and many have established successful on-line educational packages. For example, Thurlbear school has not shut for a single day during lockdown and has effectively catered for its school community.

The County Council and District Council have risen to the challenge too. Our councillors and their staff are working tirelessly in support of the pandemic providing much needed financial relief to individuals and businesses as well as maintaining local public



services. And let's not forget the staff at the DWP centre in Taunton doing a demanding job supporting those that need it. I am in regular contact with Job Centre Plus and the reports I am getting demonstrate that the initial pressures on the system has flattened and where individuals have contacted me about their specific situation, I am pleased to say solutions have generally been found.

## **RELATED INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**

I know many people are deeply worried about the impact the virus will have on their jobs and their ability to provide for their families. The Government has introduced a wide-ranging support package. Check this interactive business support finder to see what support is available for you and your business:

<https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder>

The Business Support online hub also answers a number of FAQs (<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/faqs/>) and Somerset County Council also have a dedicated webpage: ([www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-latest-advice/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-latest-advice/)). that provides links to local business support groups clarifying the financial support available.

The Heart of the SW Growth Hub (<https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/>) is the main source of advice and guidance locally. It offers businesses assistance and can sign post to additional help available. This is a rapid and changing situation, though by registering with the Growth Hub, businesses can receive updates as more information and details on support emerges. Alternatively, the Growth Hub can be contacted via email at [info@heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk](mailto:info@heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk) or over the phone – 03456 047 047.

If you would like to received my Coronavirus update please go to [www.rebeccapow.org.uk](http://www.rebeccapow.org.uk) and follow the link.

## **GP 999 CAR**

I am pleased that the CCG's plans to decommission the GP999 Car Service, in the light of the coronavirus crisis, has been reversed following my representations and that of others, recognising the benefits that the service brings to the community.

## **CONNECTIVITY**

Many people are working from home, some for the first time and this may lead to changed working models in the future. This emphasis on home working has highlighted yet again the importance of reliable and stable connectivity, superfast broadband and good mobile signals and I will continue to raise this with Ministers as a priority.

## **WELLINGTON MONUMENT**



Work is continuing at the Monument albeit with a smaller team of stone masons working in line with government guidance on social distancing. The stone for the lower third has been delivered and has all now been tooled ready for fitting. So far, 85 of the stones have gone into the structure to replace failing stones and are looking great.

The top of the pyramidion has also been removed and the team are now moving to the dismantle the lower courses to the base. This will expose the counterweight and should tell us more about its construction. Our thanks must go to all those continuing to

move this tremendous community project on during these difficult times. I am so proud to be part of this endeavour, having secured the initial £1m funding from the Libor Fund which was subsequently match funded by the National Trust. We still have £500,000 to raise to reach our £4m target but I am optimistic we will succeed.

Members of the Greenshield family, who farm beneath the Monument, (and all very musical) played 'The Last Post' on the site on VE Day with other members of The Silver Band in Wellington joining in virtually. It was a tremendously moving tribute and yet again demonstrates the strength and ingenuity of our community.

## FINGERPOST RENOVATION

And finally inspired by the Neroche project to renovate their fingerposts, the inimitable Roy Rogers has been hard at work in the neighbouring parish of Stoke St Mary to restore their fingerposts. Great work! These are iconic signposts and it is wonderful to see them renewed.

I am working from home and have been throughout lockdown, addressing constituency issues and working on my Environment Minister remit. It is amazing what can be done via Zoom! As ever my office remains open with my team working from their

respective homes too; please don't hesitate to get in touch if you need help. You can either email me or telephone my office on 01823 443062, particularly if you are unable to access the internet.



# Remembering Donald Denham

1930 - 2020

Donald Denham, who died on March 10<sup>th</sup>, will be remembered by many in Staple Fitzpaine for his involvement with St Peter's Church.

He grew up at Bulford, Staple Fitzpaine and went to Wellington School. Although he went away to work when he reached adulthood, he continued to live at Bulford after his parents died. He was always interested in happenings in the village and involved in church life. Many fund-raising events were held at his home and in his lovely garden.

He became Churchwarden for St Peter's Church in 1986, and served until 2005, most of those years with Neil Trood as joint Churchwarden. During his time the tower needed some expensive conservation work; the church path was re-laid getting rid of the dangerous old stones; and the south aisle had to be re-roofed following the theft of lead. Huge fund-raising was needed to finance these projects and Donald was full of ideas for this. One of these was a highly successful concert at Queens College starring Mary O'Hara, a well-known harpist and personal friend of Donald's.

In 1988 Donald played a prominent role in the purchase of the disused Bickenhall church from the church authorities, to become what is, Neroche Parish Hall. This undertaking required guarantors, of which Donald was one, and a great deal of foresight and energy to bring to fruition. Neroche Hall is now a well-loved community resource, and Donald had been a regular in later years at the monthly lunches.

His career as a skilled church furnisher for Watts & Co led to St Peter's being most generously supplied with beautiful frontals, chasubles and linen. Donald was responsible for these, both before and after he retired. Some outworkers, who embroidered to his designs, would continue to work for him for several years. Our wonderful church furnishings will be his memorial in the future.

The well-being of St Peter's was always close to his heart, and he loved to see the church filled with song and decorated with flowers. Many times he allowed the Flower Guild, which he started, to raid his beautiful garden for flowers to decorate the church for festivals.

Donald moved to Taunton in his later years, although continued to take great interest in the church, and will be remembered for his generosity and guidance over many years.

Alison Brown,  
with thanks to Di Grabham.

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## **Remembering Madeleine Spears**

**1945 - 2019**

It is with great sadness that we remember Madeleine Spears who died at the end of 2019. Madeleine was much loved and admired by those who knew her, and a good friend to many. She was very active in our community – a founder member of the Neroche Communication Action Group, helping to set up and edit the Neroche Villages website. She supported the Thursday Lunch Club whose members catered for her memorial celebration at Neroche Hall at the end of December.

Madeleine had been a lifelong member of the Labour Party, a candidate at local elections, and a union representative. She and her husband David were well known makers of nature and educational programmes for children's television; her skills as a director and a mentor were testified at her memorial by senior members of the profession. Madeleine is greatly missed.

Tim French





## Blackdown Hills Food and Craft Fayre 2020

Come and enjoy this Annual Fayre, now in its 6th year, in Churchinford Village Hall from noon till 4pm on Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020. Entry is FREE and disabled parking facilities are available. This lively event has over 40 stalls to browse around and last year attracted over 1,000 visitors. There will be signed areas for parking with our team of volunteers to help you.

Children can enjoy face painting and games, whilst parents and grandparents can enjoy the many and varied stalls to visit. There will be samples of all that the Blackdown Hills can offer in way of food and drink, including locally sourced cheeses, cider, honey and preserves. Visitors can buy meats locally sourced as well as sausages from Lorna's Porkers, in addition to enjoying delicious fishcakes from Devon Fish Cakes.

Churchinford Pre School are hosting the BBQ, selling the ever-popular bacon butty as well as beef burgers, teas, coffees and soft drinks. There will be cakes to buy and ice creams to enjoy. There will be many mixed crafts including cards, prints and glassware, all made locally, as well as weavers, curtain makers, and candle makers to name just a few. You can buy your own hedgehog house from Blackdown Crafts, or a coffee table made out of local wood from Carrot, as well as upcycled furniture from Ruth. Bridget's Flowers will have their lovely bunches of carefully chosen summer flowers. All this as well as live music and a Grand Raffle.

So please come and enjoy this memorable occasion held in aid of funds for Churchinford and District Community Shop. It really is an afternoon to remember!



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## Reprint of this popular local history book available now!



*“A fascinating, informative read about three of our local parishes, it brings to life the rich, diverse history and culture of the area through the centuries to the present day” Mary Keat*

*“This book vividly evokes the world of the parishes, tracing them from prehistory to the present day and describing how human toil and aspiration have shaped them over many centuries. It tells us of the Portmans, whose role was decisive across a wide area of the West*

*Country, as well as of families such as the Trumps whose names are so deeply a part of local history.*

*It is a fine achievement and a tribute to all those who have undertaken and inspired the research and writing it contains. It is a gift to the present and the future that deserves to be widely read” Tom Mayberry*

If you would like a copy at the original cost price of £8 please contact:  
[jane.hole@outlook.com](mailto:jane.hole@outlook.com)

## Household Recycling & Refuse Collections

for w/c 25th May-29th May and w/c 31st August-4th September, all collections will be 1 day later than usual collection day. Garden waste is now being collected.



To check collection dates go to:

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

# 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)

A new-look website which 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 there is a new address to contact 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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