

“Working Together for a Better Community”

NEROCHE VILLAGES

Newsletter

Issue No 19

Spring 2016

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

Annual Parish Meeting



Thursday 21st April 2016

Neroche Village Hall

Doors Open 7.00pm

***YOUR ATTENDANCE AND SUPPORT IS
ESSENTIAL; PLEASE BE THERE!!!***

Welcome to the 19th issue of the Neroche Villages' Newsletter, which hopes to satisfy the need identified in the Parish Plan for a 'hard copy' local news and information medium delivered free to every household in Neroche Parish. The aim of this publication is to improve communication within the Parish by providing news and information on a wide variety of subjects and issues.



Foreword

By: Wally Torrington (Project Coordinator) & Alan Perrior (Editor)



Welcome to yet another bumper edition of your very own Neroche Villages' Newsletter.

The most significant local event of the year, the Annual Parish Meetings, will take place in Neroche Hall on Thursday 21st April (please see notices on pages 3 and 30); it's very important that



everybody attends!

Great news; the parish has finally been provided with its main fibre optic cable-feed for the introduction of Superfast Broadband, and a new 'green box' (Cabinet 1) should be enabled soon. Read more on pages 16 and 47

Finally, as they say, *'all good things must come to an end'*. With Wally celebrating his 70th birthday this year, and Alan looking to move-on to other projects, after 22 issues and nearly six years we are both looking to stand-down from the Newsletter team at the end of this year, with the December 2016 issue being our last publication. If any of you fancy getting involved, to a lesser or greater extent, then please make contact with either Wally or Alan on wallytorrington@hotmail.com or nerochenewsletter@yahoo.co.uk. There is the opportunity of understudying either or both of us for the following 9 months, so that, by the time the new team take-over at the beginning of 2017, they'll be totally conversant with the operation. The systems, including: supply of articles from regular contributors; formatting the Newsletter; printing; delivery (with a reliable team of volunteers); and funding streams, are all well established. The task is more pleasurable than onerous; in fact it is great fun. The roles would suit either long term residents or recent arrivals to the parish (for new arrivals it would be a great way of getting to know the area and the people). If you are in 'two minds' as whether to get involved or not, then why not come and have a 'no obligation' chat, on the basis you can walk away if you don't fancy it.

*Annual Parish Meetings for Bickenhall, Curland,
Orchard Portman with Thurlbear, and Staple Fitzpaine*

Thursday 21st April 2016

Neroche Village Hall – Doors Open 7.00pm

In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, every English Parish must hold an Annual Parish Meeting between 1st March and 1st June each year, and it must take place after 6.00pm



The Annual Parish Meetings is one of the most important local events of the year. An occasion when: residents can make their voices heard; meet their Parish, Borough and County Councillors; learn more about local, social and sporting activities; and be updated on the progress being made by local Action Groups. It is also an opportunity to find out about all the excellent work going on in the parishes and the wide variety of activities that are taking place, and, more importantly, become involved if you so wish. There will be guest speakers, and stands for all the clubs and social organisations in the parishes to advertise their activities. Free refreshments, including wine and cheese, will be provided for everybody attending. It is most important that as many local residents as possible attend. This year's event will be taking place during the evening of Thursday 21st April 2016 in Neroche Hall; ***please put the date in your diary.***

***YOUR ATTENDANCE AND SUPPORT IS
ESSENTIAL; PLEASE BE THERE!!!***

News from Neroche Hall

Richard Davies, Chairman of Neroche Hall Trustees, has kindly agreed to produce a regular article for the Newsletter.



A number of improvements were made to the hall during 2015; I hope this theme continues during the coming year, in addition to promoting all our usual favourites. Several forthcoming events will inevitably be advertised in this edition of the Newsletter, so I will only touch-upon one or two, rather than duplicate them in my article.

Film Nights continue with a new batch of showings for the next few months, with ‘Everest’ in February, followed in March with ‘Brooklyn’, and finally ‘Lady in the Van’ in April. I am sure you will agree there is a wide variety of choice of excellent films and, more importantly, something of interest for everyone. For more in-depth information on the nature of each film, and those starring in them, you should take a moment to visit our website www.nerochehall.org.uk and click onto the ‘Coming Events’ page. Additionally, as each event approaches, our usual notices will appear locally and in the fortnightly Email Alerts, and may also be advertised on the hall noticeboard.

The 11th of March is a date worth putting in your diary, as we will be holding the first of our two 2016 Fish & Chip Quiz Nights, see advert on page 31. Following the success of the food provided at our last quiz night, we are again inviting the ‘fish and chip cart’ to return to cook on-site. Colin Croad has again agreed to act as our quizmaster, and if I know Colin he will already be compiling his questions.

Events held at the hall are, as many will know, promoted by the hall committee to raise funds and enable the hall to continue as a community resource. Meeting the everyday running costs of our hall, which is also a listed building, is our

prime aim, and so it is also important to encourage others to use the hall, thereby boosting our funds. Anyone can book the hall and our rates are on the website, but it is worth noting that we do give a discounted rate to anyone living within the Parish. Rates are competitive and anyone interested should feel free to contact us for an informal chat.

Small improvements to the hall and its facilities can be achieved with any surplus, as I am sure regular visitors will know. One of our latest improvements is the purchase and installation of a professional lighting system to enable any live performances to be properly lit, using a combination of any of the eight spotlights placed on three lighting bars affixed to the roof. This has literally just been installed and was

first used at our January Take Art event. I hope that, by the time you read this, you will have seen them, if not in use then at least in situ. The quality of the lighting is impressive and should enhance future hall productions.



Substantial savings were made in purchasing the lighting system due to diligent research on the internet to ensure we had the best system and equipment at the cheapest price. All the installation and electrics were carried-out by committee members, who fortunately have a good head for heights, thereby ensuring further excellent savings. Luckily, we were able to utilise existing electrical sockets in the main hall, dispensing with the need to employ an electrician.

Finally, I would just like to remind those that have generously supported the 100 Club, and wish to continue in 2016, that subscriptions are now overdue. A small number of people have not yet renewed and now have until the end of February to do so; after that date their numbers will be removed from the draw and may be allocated to another individual. There are vacancies for additional members, so anyone renewing or wishing to join should contact our 100 Club administrator - Jacqui Kolkowski jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com.

As always, information about the hall, forthcoming events, clubs and hiring can be obtained by visiting our website: www.nerochehall.org.uk

Christmas Carols around the Villages

By "An Intrepid Singer"



The annual carol singing tour of Staple Fitzpaine and Curland took place on December 22nd. This was a most inauspicious day, with pouring rain and blowing gales throughout. The organisers were tempted to cancel, however, the weather eased a little at 5pm, and knowing our hosts would be disappointed, the trip went ahead, with around 25 intrepid singers ranging from Theo Glasper, the youngest, to Alison Brown, possibly the oldest (no comment!).

Alison Brown's horsebox was again commandeered for transport, and marvellous hospitality for the singers was provided by kind hosts. Carols were sung with great gusto by singers and hosts alike, liquid refreshment lubricating the vocal chords, and roast potatoes and mince pies keeping out the cold and wet. In fact the weather improved greatly during the evening; the final singing at the Greyhound bringing the Christmas message to the diners therein.

Thanks go to everyone who gave us hospitality, and invited their friends to listen to us. Thanks also to those who supported the collection during the evening, which raised £200 for the Taunton Women's Refuge.



News from our MP

Even though she is now extremely busy with her duties in Westminster, our MP, Rebecca Pow, has not forgotten us, and has agreed to continue producing a regular article for our Newsletter. It will take the form of a bulletin on her activities in Parliament, especially the work she is doing for us here in Neroche.



Whilst always working to push forward Taunton Deane in every respect as our Member of Parliament, with a constituency which has such a large rural hinterland, including Neroche Parish, the rural agenda is one of my special focuses. It is my aim to get rural issues firmly on the radar, being conscious that urban areas often seem to get more than their fair share of emphasis (and funding).

After months of campaigning through our Rural Fair Share Campaign, the grant set up to help rural authorities deliver services in the countryside has been given a large increase in the Government's local government finance settlement. The Rural Services Delivery Grant, which provides additional resources to councils in rural areas to meet the additional costs associated with sparse populations, will increase from £15.5 million in 2015/16 to £65 million in 2019/20.



This follows years of cross-party campaigning from members of the Rural Fair Share Campaign to close the funding gap, which sees urban areas receive on average 45% more funding per resident than rural areas. The inequality between urban and rural areas is grossly unfair, especially since it costs more to deliver essential services to a sparse population, which, in addition, is putting added demand on services by dint of being an increasingly ageing population.

Whilst the funding increase is good news, it is, however, disappointing that the Government hasn't committed to the full £130 million which our campaign asked for, and that next year's increase will only see the grant increased to £20 million. There's a long way to go yet, and I will continue to campaign with my colleagues to improve the deal.

Farming Focus

I always try my best to keep in touch with the local farming community, feeding relevant views into government where appropriate, for example during the recent Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee inquiry into farm prices. A wide range of witnesses were called before the inquiry, including Ministers, supermarket bosses, the NFU and representatives from the dairy, sheep and beef industries to assess why farmers have been hit with such low prices for such a long period. The committee will produce a report at the end of the inquiry and we will then make representations to the Secretary of State for DEFRA

Farming and its associated food industries form the third largest industry in the UK and is a significant contributor to the economy in Taunton Deane and, as



Meeting with some local farmers to discuss rural issues, including Chris Salisbury, Bickenhall Farm (2nd left) and Mark Pope, Staple Farm (far right)

such, I believe the industry needs to receive our full attention. Individually we can all do our bit to help by buying British and supporting local produce.

Trees, Bees and Changing Climate

Trees have recently been receiving some much deserved attention in Westminster. In my capacity as the Chair of the new All Party Group on Ancient Woodland, I brought my own backbench debate calling for more protection for our treasured ancient woodland and trees. There are some glorious ancient trees in the Forest of Neroche and on the Blackdowns, but only 2% of our precious ancient woodland habitat remains. It is as precious as the rain forest and yet has no blanket protection, resulting in hundreds of threats to ancient woodland (largely from a range of developments) being brought every year. I shall continue to work on this issue in conjunction with the Woodland Trust and the Government.



Of course, farmers rely heavily on the pollinating services of our bees and there are many keen bee keepers in our area. So, with this in mind, I spoke in a recent Westminster Hall debate on bees and neonicotinoid sprays. If you would like to see my speech you can view it, along with all of my other contributions in the

Chamber, www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/25407/rebecca_pow/taunton_deane Interestingly, more people contacted me about this than about the Syria debate.

Climate change is another area that many people have contacted me about, and as vice chair of the All Party Climate Change Group I was pleased to make two speeches on the subject recently, one prior to the Paris summit and one afterwards. The global agreements secured at the summit and the commitments to moving us to a low carbon energy society are truly ground breaking and will affect us all.

As usual you can follow me on Facebook/Twitter or contact my office on 01823 443062 or rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk

Christmas Thursday Lunch

Neroche Hall - 3rd December 2015

For some years, the Neroche Hall Thursday Lunch, normally held on the first Thursday of the month, has been enormously popular and regularly attracts more than 40 happy diners.



However, the December Thursday Lunch was even more popular and the 70 plus diners enjoyed a traditional roast turkey Christmas dinner (by arrangement,

a vegetarian version was also available).

The meal was supplied, prepared, cooked and served by the regular Thursday lunch team and was greatly appreciated by all the diners. Alison Brown would like thank the team for all their efforts which helped to make the meal a tremendous success.





After the meal, the diners were entertained by the Neroche Hand Bell Ringers who played and sang festive carols.

*The
Christmas
Thursday
Lunch
Team.*



THURSDAY LUNCHESES AT NEROCHE HALL

Come along to Neroche Hall and enjoy a great home-cooked 2-course lunch. Meet people from the locality, take time out from your busy daily routine and enjoy conviviality & friendliness at a community lunch.

(Price: £5)

Lunches take place on Thursdays at 12.30 for 1.00 pm

3rd March, 7th April, 12th May* (* note change of date)

*Please phone or email to book (need to know for catering purposes).
Transport / special diets can be arranged.*

Contact Alison Brown tel: 01823 480441,
Email: alison-anthony@battensfarm.fsnet.co.uk
Organised by Friends of St Peter's Church

St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine



Forthcoming Lent and Easter Services

6th March, 10.00am Mothering Sunday, Parish Communion
followed by the annual church meeting

20th March, 10.00am Palm Sunday, Benefice Worship for All

25th March, 11.00am Good Friday, Devotional Hour

27th March, 10.00am Easter Sunday—Parish Communion

*Lenten Lunches will take place at
Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall on Wednesdays in Lent
see Benefice Magazine for details*

Regular Monthly Services

First Sunday of Month, 10.00am Parish Communion

Third Wednesday of Month. 6.30pm Reflective Worship

Fourth Sunday of Month, 6.00pm “Inspire” Informal Worship

All welcome

For special services see Parish Magazine

Churchwardens: Mal Lee 01460 234282 Alison Brown 01823 480441

Focus on Local Business

CURLAND EQUESTRIAN CENTRE

(Crosses Farm, Curland, Taunton, TA3 5SD)

Curland Equestrian Centre is now managed by David and Catherine Gray, who moved down from north Hampshire in October 2014 after running a large country estate there for over 17 years. They were looking for a home big enough to accommodate all of their own horses and ponies and Curland EC fitted the bill perfectly, whilst still leaving enough room to be able to provide valuable facilities for the local equestrian community.



Curland EC offers full and occasionally part livery places, caring for a wide range of horses and ponies, from much-loved companions, through youngstock, horses in rehab, to multiple national champions. The Centre provides a home to just 15 horses at any one time as the Grays want to maintain a quiet, relaxed environment, to ensure the horses' health and happiness. Most residents are permanent, but foaling, nursing and holiday liveries from reliable sources can also be accommodated; the Centre has isolation boxes and a strict infection control protocol to minimise concerns. The grazing is good, if rather muddy at the moment, and the access to excellent hacking and the Neroche Herepath is superb.



Although coming from a financial management background, Catherine's practical experience comes from over 40 years of equine care, competing, breeding and showing to national level with her own and friends' horses, and from taking in vet referral nursing cases. Her interests now lie mainly in eventing and showing (particularly coloureds), and she has a passion for breeding, although more recently she has suspended stud operations as she freely admits she is terrible at selling what she has already bred!

David's land and property management skills have been focussed on ways to repair and improve the facilities at Curland, many of which have needed considerable attention and several local contractors have been extremely helpful. The stables have been made over and new fencing has been erected to improve grazing usage; dry storage space, however, remains an ongoing challenge which is why DIY livery cannot be offered. The indoor school is 37m x 19m, and has recently had the sand surface rejuvenated and topped up, with invaluable help from the very generous Alan Perrior. The outdoor sand school's perimeter has been cleared back and opened up to its former glory, and is withstanding the recent excessive rain remarkably well. The Centre also boasts a wonderful set of new British Showjumping standard showjumps which clients can use.



The Grays' decision to delay opening to the public until summer 2015 gave them the time to bring the centre up to a standard where they could feel proud to open their doors, and they are delighted with how swiftly Curland is becoming a popular venue. Both arenas provide a great opportunity for schooling and exercise, whatever the weather, both for liveries and for visitors, who can hire them independently for schooling, lessons or clinics. Catherine has already run



several very well-attended events and continues to host regular dressage, jumping and side saddle teaching days with top level instructors, which are proving increasingly popular as word spreads. There have been specialist introduction days for side saddle, more of which are planned for 2016, and several clinics and teach-ins are scheduled for all aspects of ridden and in-hand showing. All ideas are welcomed - you don't even need to be on a horse to come along - Curland has hosted two dog agility days this winter which were enormous fun!



Numerous people, near and far, have been in touch as they have either seen or heard about the changes, and the Grays have received some wonderful messages and visits from people who worked or were pupils at the centre up to 35 years earlier. Local support has also been especially encouraging, with people taking the time to drop in and give a warm welcome or send kind messages. Catherine hopes to organise a get-together for friends of Curland, old and new, later this year.

If anyone would like to know more, or to arrange a visit, please ring Catherine on 01460 234983 or 07808 962560



Taunton Deane Borough Council News

John Williams, Borough Councillor for Neroche Ward and Leader of Taunton Deane Borough Council, has kindly offered to write a regular column for our Newsletter.



Some Good News Regarding Connection of Cabinet for Superfast Broadband

I am pleased to report that much pressure from different quarters persuaded BT to just get-on and trench the across the A358! What a turnaround from their previous position but I am pleased it is now done. The new 'Cabinet 1' is positioned, powered and BT is currently running checks on the fibre. Checking the fibre, or light testing, is one of the final checks before the cabinet goes live. I am advised the 'go live' date should be by the end of February 2016, so should be available to those within range by the time this article is published.



I reported on FTTrN (Fibre to the Remote Node) which is now out of trial and in planning - this means it's now one of the options BT has in its armoury. Nothing planned for Somerset but I am advised it may not be the right solution locally; BT will be assessing this at the planning stage. I will continue to monitor the situation, as it seems to have considerable potential for scattered villages.

A lot of work is going into launching phase 2 procurement of Superfast, which raises coverage from 90% to 95% or more. A very successful 'supplier event' was

held on December 4th, with over 30 companies attending; some really positive feedback, which has provided encouragement that there are other serious players out there other than BT, so hopefully ensuring keen competition.

BDUK (Broadband UK) are still working with the European Commission to close-down the state aid debate and sign off a state aid notification for Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) and the other areas (e.g. Scotland) still to sign phase 2 contracts. This should be approved by March. Until the full implications of this notification are known, and how it affects procurement, it is not possible to confirm a launch date for phase 2. Needless to say, CDS is working hard to resolve the outstanding issues and to deliver the best possible deal for the residents locally.

New Major Employment Site, East of M5 Motorway at J25

This is a proposed 65 acre site which is important to support the economic growth of Taunton. The principle of a ‘Local Development Order’ (LDO) covering the entire site has been accepted by Councillors. Approving the use of an LDO should make the site far more attractive to businesses wishing to expand, or inward investors, because it provides certainty as to what can be developed. It also gives certainty on speed of decision making if the proposals conform to agreed parameters as set out in the development order.



There is concern raised by some that the LDO process does not allow proper consultation thus scrutiny of the proposals; this is not the case.

Before an LDO is implemented, it will be subject to full public consultation, with the same standards to be met in respect of the environment, ecology, transport and infrastructure issues, so providing ample opportunity for consultees to input.

Access has always been top of the list of peoples' concerns, so early upgrade of J25 on the M5 motorway has been deemed a pre-requisite to achieving access to the employment site. I am pleased to report that work on the design of



the upgrade of this junction, and the access road to the site is well advanced, the proposed scheme should be available for consultation in early 2016. An important point to note is that any improvement to J25 has to be welcomed, as it should improve what is an already overloaded junction. In addition, it will be designed to accommodate a much needed Henlade bypass, which should be consulted-on later this year.

Somerset Rivers Authority



The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was set up in order to tackle flooding issues right across Somerset, following the dreadful flooding of 2013/14, and I am the Taunton Deane Borough Council representative on the board. It has

always been accepted that we will not be able to prevent flooding, the levels and moors have always flooded but in 2013/14 we saw depths and durations of flooding that was tragic for those suffering. The SRA was set up to work with the Internal Drainage Boards that manages the levels and moors but in addition take a holistic view right across Somerset, as that forms the major part of the catchment area for the Rivers Tone and Parrett. This recognises the fact that

rainwater from houses, even on the top of the hills, goes down a drain and ultimately ends up passing through the levels and moors to discharge in the Bristol Channel.

Managing the discharge of water, with the work that has to be done, such as dredging, raising roads and banks, enlarging waterways and sluices, and ensuring adequate pumping capacity is available, all takes substantial funding. The Somerset Rivers Authority works closely with the Environment Agency



and other bodies involved who have their own funding but the SRA budget is £2.7 million, which last year was funded by central Government, on the basis of a one-off payment. In order to keep-up the good work, we have a need to raise funds locally through the Council Tax, and

Government have agreed that all Somerset Authorities can include a separate tax line on the Council Tax bills to raise the necessary funding. This will form part of the 2016 budget-setting and, subject to approval, will result in a 1.25% increase, which will equate to £14.56 per annum for a Band D taxpayer.

This is all about managing the flow of water from preventing ‘run off’ from the hills, where possible, by managing land use, retention in flood alleviation schemes and managing its outfall into the Bristol Channel. This will help mitigate but not prevent flooding but we must do everything possible to prevent a recurrence of the flooding disasters of 2013/14. The tragic occurrences in the North of England are a salutary reminder that we must do all possible to minimise flooding locally.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any clarification or comment on the above or if you have any other queries in respect of Council services.

cldr.j.williams@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Advance notice for all who promised to enter this year:

STAPLE FITZPAINE, BICKENHALL and CURLAND SCARECROW FESTIVAL 2016

The Theme is Heroes and Villains



23 July - 30 July (*Entries close 16 July*)

More details in June Newsletter and 'Email Alert'

Neroche Hall AGM

Neroche Hall, Bickenhall

NOTICE

Tuesday 3rd May 2016 at 7.00pm

Annual General Meeting

**All members of public welcome to attend.
New potential members particularly welcome.**

Further details 01823 480675



News from the Neroche Village Agent

Trudi Morgan is our Village Agent, and she has kindly agreed to produce a regular article for the Newsletter.



The main topic to which I want to draw your attention is the British Red Cross Everyday First Aid Courses, which I hope to promote in Neroche. The criteria have altered since last year; instead of a fixed course there is now a move to create Tailor-Made First Aid Courses, which deal with chronic disorders, such as: heart attacks; strokes; diabetes; epilepsy; asthma; impaired mobility; and ‘recently returned from hospital’ - to name but a few. These courses are free, and open to sufferers, family members, relatives, friends and neighbours, and will prove very useful should accidents happen. If you wish to find out more about these courses, please contact me on 07908 160736 or email me at trudi@somersetccc.org.uk

I am also available to help in many other ways, such as: do you live alone, have a problem and do not know to whom to turn? Are you struggling as a young person, an older person or as a family and need advice and support? Are you a carer that needs a little help and support? Does your community have a collective problem that needs a kick-start to solve? All calls and advice are treated in strict confidentiality.

Somerset Skills and Learning

This update, by Duncan Macgregor, may be of interest to some of you...

“Somerset Skills and Learning has been meeting with Village Hubs in eastern parts of Somerset, and we are now keen to promote our services in the Taunton areas. I am a tutor and assessor. Formerly part of Somerset County Council,

we are now an autonomous Community Interest College, and are able to put on training courses for groups of people in your area. Our courses include all types of computer use, business administration and office skills, using Microsoft Office, digital camera use, photo editing, the use of tablet computers, web site design, computer maintenance and many others. We are able to bring laptop computers to outreach venues, or use our own centres. I would very much like to discuss any possibilities further with you. Messages can be left for me at the number given, or please email me. Our full range of courses can be seen at our web site: www.sslcic.co.uk Many thanks for your kind attention”

Could be a great idea to run courses in the Village Hall for members of the Neroche local community and other local parishes? You can contact Duncan Macgregor direct on dmacgregor@sslcic.co.uk or 01278 426828

Winter Blankets for the Needy

Finally, some heart-warming news. Somerset residents have been supplied with special winter warmers ahead of the colder winter months. Community Council for Somerset (CCS) Village Agents have been handing out winter blankets to residents after they secured a £500 Keeping Warm fund from Public Health England. This allowed them to purchase 50 thick blankets to donate to those who need them most. I gave out three blankets to local parishioners before Christmas. Read more at...

<http://www.westerngazette.co.uk/Somerset-residents-gifted-blankets-ahead-cold/story-28480725-detail/story.html#ixzz3weawlM1w>



I'm always available on trudi@somersetccc.org.uk or 07908 160736

News from Neroche Parish Council

Our Clerk to the Parish Council, Gillian Midworth, has kindly agreed to produce a regular feature for our Newsletter.



Financial News

One of the first tasks of the New Year is to set a budget and precept for the financial year commencing 1st April 2016, and I am pleased to announce that the Parish Council will not be increasing its precept in the forthcoming year. It will remain at £4,446, which is a Band D equivalent of approximately £18 for the year.

During the review of its budget, the Parish Council has to consider the amount that should be put aside to cover the cost of any contested Parish Council elections that may take place. As Neroche comprises four separate parishes, in theory there could be four contested elections every five years. To my knowledge this situation has never occurred! It is prudent, however, to ensure that funds are available to meet such costs, which range from £500-£1500 per election.

You may remember that Parish Council elections took place last May but in Neroche these took the form of uncontested elections as the number of nominations in each parish did not exceed the number of councillors required. Nevertheless, Taunton Deane Borough Council has, for the first time, required Parish Councils to meet the costs of uncontested elections, and each parish has had to pay £100 to cover the costs of nomination papers, election notices etc. The total cost to Neroche PC is £400, almost 10% of the annual precept.

Annual Parish Meeting

The Neroche Annual Parish Meeting will take place on Thursday 21st April 2016 at Neroche Hall. This date coincides with the Queen's 90th Birthday, and

it is hoped to celebrate this occasion in some way on the evening. Further details will be available in due course (see notices on pages 3 and 30).

Speed Indicator Device (SID) Readings

The latest reports for the Speed Indicator Devices, which were situated close to the Polo Ground for two weeks at the end of November, show that the median speed was calculated at 43mph, which is 3mph above the posted speed limit of 40mph. The 85%ile speed was calculated at 49mph. Indeed, of the nearly 14,000 vehicles recorded, 65% were travelling at speeds between 40 and 50mph, and 13% were travelling at speeds in excess of 50mph. The speeds shown are the approach speeds and do not reflect the adjusted speeds that motorists may switch to after being reminded of the limit by the SID. Experience has shown there to be a reduction in speed of 4-5mph between the approach speed and adjusted speed. During 2016, the SID will be in situ for a two week period commencing 14th March and 1st August.



Library Services Consultation

The Parish Council has received a consultation on the latest proposals for the library service. The proposals seek to ensure that all existing libraries remain open, albeit many will operate with reduced hours.

There will be no change to the opening hours of Taunton library but for those of you that use Ilminster library, the proposed new opening hours are shown below.

Days of the week	Current Hours	Proposed Hours
Monday	9.30am - 1pm	9.30am - 12pm
Tuesday	9.30am - 5pm	9.30am - 4.30pm
Wednesday	9.30am - 5pm	9.30am - 12pm
Thursday	Closed	
Friday	9.30am - 5pm	9.30am - 4.30pm
Saturday	9.30am - 12.30pm	9.30am - 12pm

Further details can be obtained from any Somerset library or the SCC website.

Neroche Parish Council Meetings

Thursday 10th March 2016

Thursday 12th May 2016

Thursday 14th July 2016

(All at 7.30pm in Neroche Hall)

Members of the community are strongly encouraged to attend.

For further Neroche Parish Council information, go to:

www.nerochevillages.org.uk/nerocheparishcouncil

Help Secure the Future of Your Newsletter

The Neroche Villages' Newsletter is a self-funding, not-for-profit publication, which is produced purely for the benefit of the community. It is delivered free to all 230 households and businesses in the Parish. This is made possible by a team of volunteers who: write articles, edit, insert 'flyers' and deliver, however, we still have to pay for printing, which costs about £1,080 per year. If you enjoy receiving your Newsletter, and wish to make a small contribution towards its annual production costs, then please complete the small loose donation 'flyer' enclosed with this Newsletter.

For further details contact Wally Torrington

wallytorrington@hotmail.com

Neroche Rainfall

(By Alan Perrior)

As with most of the UK's population we seem to be obsessed with the weather, especially now, in the midst of what appears to be an inordinately wet winter. The fields are sodden and those of us with hooved animals, such as horses, cattle, sheep and goats, now have fields that resemble quagmires - especially around gateways!

But has it really been unusually wet?

Somerset has a temperate climate which is generally wetter and milder than the rest of the country. Most of the rainfall in Autumn and Winter is caused by Atlantic depressions; the prevailing winds being from the South-West.



Somerset's average annual rainfall is, or used to be, about 28.5 inches with the heaviest rainfall (normally) occurring in December, with an average of about 3.3 inches. But, according to a local weather

station, the rainfall statistics, which have been recorded daily since the mid-1990's, appear to show higher rainfall locally, here in Neroche, than the Somerset average.



However, according to the local amateur meteorologist, 2015 doesn't appear to be as wet as some other recent years. In fact, 2015's rainfall total of 33.75 inches, was only the 9th highest recorded this century. Only 3 of the last 16 years have had less than the average rainfall; ie, 2003, 2010 and 2011.

But, if the weather / rainfall isn't that much worse than the average, why is the land so wet this winter? There are many theories, including;

The drainage authorities are holding the water back, which keeps the water table high, in order to relieve the Somerset levels and thus safeguard the towns of Bridgwater and Taunton.

The water table is high and the fields are saturated after so many years of wet weather.

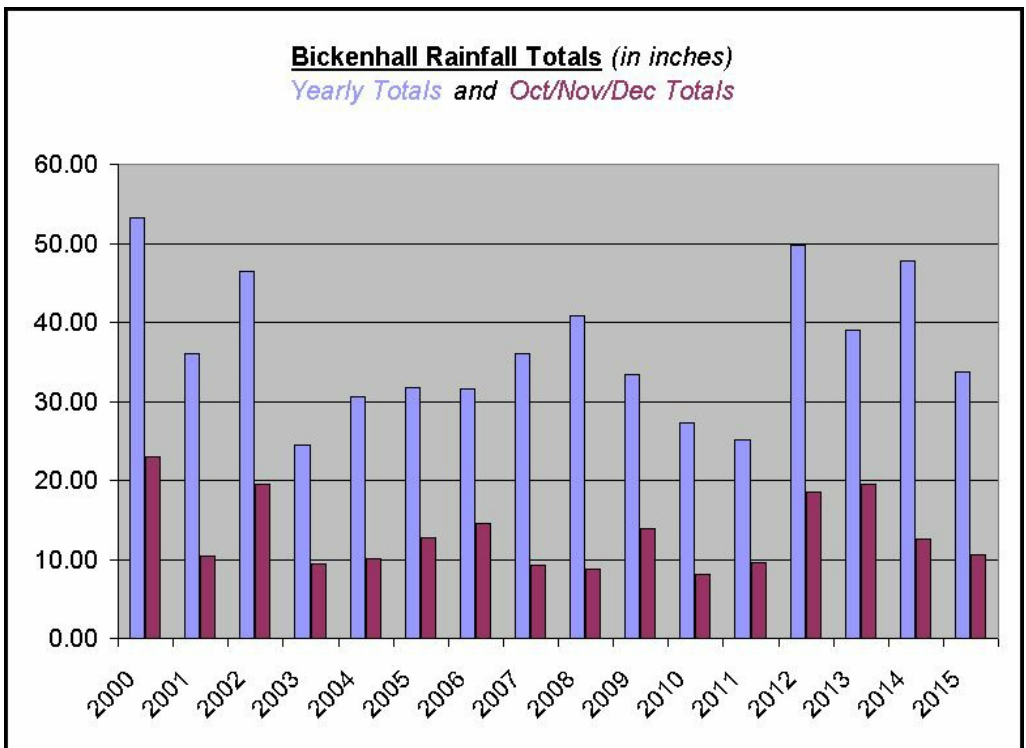
It has rained little and often over recent months thus preventing the land from

drying out. In Neroche, July and August were very wet months, and it rained on 10 days in October, 18 days in November and 18 days in December.

Climate Change / Global Warming. The South-West's average air temperature has increased by about 1 degree celsius over the past 100 years and is projected to increase by a further 1 to 2.5 degrees by the 2050s, with summers 15-30% drier and winters 5-15% wetter, bringing more frequent, stronger and deeper weather systems, increasing the risk of flooding and structural damage.



Who knows the real reason for the recent years of generally wet weather? Whatever it is, it seems we'll have to get used to the rain and saturated fields!



This chart was compiled using data provided by a local meteorologist; neither the data nor the chart should be treated as 'official'.

Drinks and Nibbles Party

By Wally Torrington

Just before Christmas, Rebecca George and Mark Porter hosted a most enjoyable and incredibly successful 'Drinks and Nibbles' party at their lovely home 'Winterwell'.

The delicious buffet was provided by a number of those present, and some gave food even though they couldn't attend. Tricia Dryden did a fantastic job in the kitchen, ably assisted by



Olive Newis and Jeanette Borlase. Thanks also must go to Richard and Di Davies for manning the door, and Chris Newis for organising the parking.

A raffle was held during the event, with some great prizes provided by Alison Brown and Jeanette Borlase. Richard Davies won the impressive

'Guess the Weight' cake, which was baked and donated by Nicky Baxter. Also, to entertain the guests, there was an impromptu session of carol singing around the 'baby grand'.

The magnanimous gesture by Mal and John Lees to donate all the drinks and run the bar throughout the whole event was greatly appreciated by all.



Group of Many Colours: Richard, Nicky, Di, Chris.

The gathering was also the ideal opportunity for Nick Powell to make a well-deserved presentation of a wonderful bouquet of flowers to Julie Pope, in appreciation of her continuing

work leading the church choir in Staple Fitzpaine. Nick said *“While rehearsals are always held in good spirit, it cannot be easy marshalling a mixed band of motley crooners such as ourselves. Anyone with a good ear who might feel they could ease her task would be welcome to join us on Thursday evenings, especially anyone who can play the piano, as we still sadly miss our accompanist, Richard Green, who passed not long ago.”*

As well as everybody having a wonderful time and a lot of fun, the event raised £550 for St Peter's Church; well done everybody!



NEROCHE LITTER ACTION GROUP



The next community litter pick up day is planned for **Saturday 16th April 2016.**

Meet at the Greyhound pub car park at 10.00am

If you have a high viz jacket, suitable gloves, pickup sticks please bring these along; alternatively these will be provided.

Resulting from the parish plan, a Litter Action Group has been formed to keep our parish grass verges clean and tidy; we have had excellent responses on last year's community collections and hope this day will be equally successful.

We are looking for volunteers (min age 16 years) to:

Join in community pick up days to deal with the parish 'black spots'.

Adopt a stretch of road and be responsible for keeping it free of litter.

If you are able to offer a couple of hours on the day please join us as above or contact for more information:

Anthony Brown: 01823 480441 / Jayne Hunt: 01823 480113

Neroche Annual Parish Meetings

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

Thursday 21st April 2016 - Neroche Hall

Open 7.00pm - Formal Presentations Start 7.30pm

Jon Bell, Parish Council Chairman

Presenting the Annual Report

**THE EVENING WILL ALSO INCLUDE A
NUMBER OF PRESENTATIONS OF LOCAL
INTEREST; THE SUBJECTS OF WHICH WILL
BE ANNOUNCED CLOSER TO THE EVENT**

**Stroll around the stands (representing numerous
local clubs, organisations and groups), speak with
club representatives, event organisers, Action
Group members, and meet your Parish, Taunton
Deane and Somerset County Councillors.**

**This is the most important local event of the year.
Your support is essential; please be there.**



*Cheese and wine plus a variety of other
cakes, pastries, beverages and refreshments
served **FREE-of-CHARGE** all evening.*



Neroche Hall Fun Quiz



(with Quizmaster Colin Croad)

BYO drinks

Teams of up to six

£2.00 per person (*food extra*)



Friday 11th March 2016 - 7.00pm

*(Fish & Chips etc will be cooked on the premises by Lazy Ricks,
guaranteeing that the food will be hot and fresh.)*

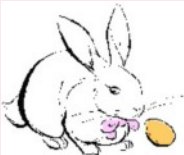
Full details are on the village hall website: www.nerochehall.org.uk

EASTER FAMILY BINGO

Chocolates Easter Eggs

Prizes galore! Raffle!

FRIDAY 18TH MARCH 2016



6.30 PM FOR EYES DOWN 7 PM

at

The Greyhound, Staple Fitzpaine



BICKENHALL & DISTRICT WI

Limited seating

Please book at the pub or email tricia@witchlodge.co.uk



Neroche Friday Film Nights

(By Nicky Baxter)

Neroche Hall's Friday Film Nights started nearly three years ago when our first film was the popular 'Quartet'. About 80 people attended and the night was deemed a great success.

Since then we have shown a variety of films, from romantic comedies through thrillers, biographies and historical dramas. We work in partnership with the charity Moviola who always have a wide range of films to choose from.

We are often able to show the films people want to see but which don't make it to the local multi-plex. Moviola film nights are held at several local village halls; including Churchinford and Combe St Nicholas, so if we are not showing a film at Neroche Hall that you would like to see, it's worth checking the Moviola website as it may be being shown nearby.

How soon Moviola can show the film after general release varies from film to film. For some films it is only two weeks but is more generally a couple of months, and usually just before the DVD is released.

The film nights are not seen as a great fund raiser for the hall but rather as something the village hall provides for the community. We clearly don't want to lose money and therefore so long as it does makes a small profit the management committee of the hall is satisfied. Any money made goes to general hall funds but on the back of film nights we have been able to purchase new chairs, new blinds and make a few general improvements to the hall.

It is always a really friendly community event with bar and nibbles available. In particular, it is an evening when people feel they can attend either on their own or in company.

To put on a monthly film show is quite a commitment on our part and we would really welcome help with setting up the hall at 6.00pm on the night of the film. Help is always needed in running the bar and generally clearing away afterwards. If you are able help with this then please contact me on 01823 480675.

Tickets: £6.00 - Bar & Snacks available

Friday 26th February 2016 @ 7.30pm
Everest (12a)

On May 10, 1996, climbers from two expeditions start their final ascent toward the summit of Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth. With little warning, a violent storm strikes the mountain, engulfing the adventurers in one of the fiercest blizzards ever encountered by man. Challenged by the harshest conditions imaginable, the teams must endure blistering winds and freezing temperatures in an epic battle to survive against nearly impossible odds.



Friday 1st April 2016 @ 7.30pm
Brooklyn (12a)

Eilis Lacey followed her sister Rose's plan to leave Ireland and find a better future and job in the US. Eilis settles in Brooklyn, where many Irish immigrants live, and becomes close to Father Flood, a Catholic priest. She falls in love with an Italian boy named Tony. News from home sends Eilis back to Ireland, away from Tony.

Friday 29th April 2016 @ 7.30pm
The Lady in the Van (12a)

Maggie Smith plays Miss Shepherd, a bag lady who combines patrician grandeur with iron determination, and is often guided in matters – such as where to park her old yellow van – by the Virgin Mary. Her presence in bohemian Camden Town is tolerated by neighbours rich with liberal guilt, who bring her the occasional crème brûlée. When yellow lines arrive, God advises Miss Shepherd to take advantage of Alan Bennett's (Alex Jennings) off-street parking, and she stays for 15 years, as does a whiff of wet newspaper, onions, and worse.



The film for the Friday Film Night on 27th May 2016 will be announced, via the email alert system, nearer the date.

Winter in the Woods

(By Gavin Saunders)

It's been a funny old winter, too warm for much of the time, too wet most of the time, genuinely cold only occasionally. We all like to moan about the weather, but for wildlife the vagaries can mean life or death. Back in December various plants and bushes were showing confused signs of premature spring growth, or even flowers way too soon, only to be knocked back by the cold in January. That may have an implication for fruits next autumn, if many flowers are aborted and fail to develop afresh in the spring. Meanwhile, the winter storms have lashed at the trees and the soil, sweeping everything clean and leaving the soil waterlogged for weeks.

At Young Wood we hunker down and reduce our activities in January, rather than battle against the elements, but towards the end of the month we began winter work in earnest, with coppicing getting underway, and a new season of Family Days, Wild Learning sessions and other activities. As well as the core staff team we have a number of volunteers from the surrounding area who come and volunteer as helpers on these



Staff from Taunton Association for the Homeless enjoy a Team Building day at Young Wood.

sessions. Meanwhile anyone is welcome to come along to our practical volunteer days at Young Wood, generally on the fourth Wednesday of the month. The next date will Wednesday 24th February, when we will be continuing coppicing work – no experience necessary and all tools are provided.

In addition there are also other volunteering dates with the Neroche Conservation Volunteers, on a variety of local nature reserves, on the second and third Wednesdays of the month – see www.ncv.org.uk for details.

After a successful foray into Taunton at the Castle Green markets before Christmas, where we sold pots, spoons and Christmas decorations made from wood from the forest, our next event will be the annual Skills in the Hills hedgelaying competition on 12th March, near Hemyock, where we will be providing green woodworking experiences for children and adults, as well as selling more of our wares. See www.bhha.info for more details.



Coming up soon, there's a chance to come and learn a new wild skill in the woods, through a training course at Young Wood at Easter this year. We are offering the following:

- **Making Fire – Thursday 7th April.** Learn the ancient survival art of creating fire, by friction using the bow drill or by dropping sparks onto natural tinders, and build a camp fire.
- **Make a Shrink Pot – Friday 8th April.** Learn the traditional craft of shrink pot making – beautiful, tactile hollowed greenwood vessels, made direct from freshly harvested wood.
- **Wild Tracking – Sunday 10th April.** Learn to follow the lives of wild animals, spotting their tracks and signs, tuning in, moving silently, and seeing wildlife in its natural habitat.

All courses cost £45 per adult, £15 for children. To book, visit www.youngwood.org.uk or email Gavin Saunders at gavin@nerochewoodlanders.org

Hatch Beauchamp and Neroche Gardening Club

Talk on Foliage and Form

(By Madeleine Spears)

At October's club meeting in Neroche Parish Hall, we were treated to an informative discussion, with Dinah Lindon Critchley from Blooming Hill Nursery, on the use of a wide range of plants and plantings to create autumn and winter interest.

After showing us gardens which use formal and informal plantings of trees, bushes and plants, Dinah outlined the use of small-leaved privet to replace box plants as there is currently a problem with box blight. She also pointed out the benefit of using hornbeams as trees that are easy to keep under control with relatively little effort.

Dinah then moved on to describe the use of specific plants to create different effects.

The first plant she showed us was a delicate aster *symphyotrichum* with white flowers and deep red to purple-coloured fine foliage, which was new to most of those present. This had a soft form and a delicate effect when planted against more upright plants.



Phlomis

For similar striking colours we were shown a variety of grasses of different heights and two asters, one of which had soft flowers and another more upright and a taller plant. Colour can also be created by plants such as *Phlomis* which overwinters as a rosette of green to grey leaves depending on the species. The dead flower heads were also useful to create height in the winter garden. They can be

used as Christmas decorations if sprayed with silver spray!

A rhubarb plant from Canada Rheum Big Red is inedible but provides colour and structure both as a plant with striking green/yellow leaves and red stems.

Rudbeckia species were shown as good examples of flowers of different forms for added interest in the garden well into the autumn months. An additional feature of the plants shown was their hardiness.



Rudbeckia

The evening ended with the sale of the plants used in the talk.

Hatch Beauchamp and Neroche Garden Club

Annual General Meeting

will be held on March 24th 2016

at

The Neroche Parish Hall at 7.30pm

New Members welcome

Contact: Wendy Morris
staplemead@waitrose.com

Neroche Local History Group

By Jane Hole

The history group has been running for nearly nine years and we have much to celebrate! The aim has always been to look at the history of our own area – hence the term ‘Local’ in our title. Since we were founded, we have maintained a good record of local research with presentations by members of the group and always try to have our external speakers talk about matters local to the area.

We have collected oral histories relating to farming, life in the villages and recollections of WW2. We raised the money to commission a commemorative plaque for St Peter’s Church in Staple Fitzpaine, which was dedicated on Remembrance Day last year. With the support of archaeologists associated with the Neroche Project, we did a survey of Britty farmstead and helped with the dig at Play Street near Neroche Hall. Our article on ‘A Social History of Curland, Bickenhall and Staple Fitzpaine’ was published in *Along The Wild Edge* in 2011. Ongoing research about the lost houses of the three villages continue to intrigue us all.

Curland, Bickenhall and Staple Fitzpaine

A Social History

Jane Hole with contributions from Rosemary Graham, Dianne Hood & Jennifer Stewart

As we look back over these nine years, it is time to go ahead with a long-cherished ambition to produce a book based on our local research. If you are interested in joining-in or have a story to tell, then please come along to the March meeting. Any story about local events, no matter how long or short, are all welcome, for example: George’s story, “In one of the Curland lanes, you can still see the hollow where a WW2 incendiary bomb fell”.

Our Next Challenge: The Book!

We will look at our local maps, outline the contents of the book, and gather local stories. Please come along and join in this local project.

Neroche Hall March 23rd 7.30pm

All welcome Non members £2.50

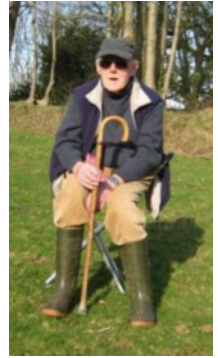
jane.hole@outlook.com

Britty Farm - Britty was once a thriving smallholding, comprising a series of small fields cut out of the expanse of unenclosed heath (Staple Common). It was occupied in the 1920s by the Rooke family - Ted Rooke survives and has recently

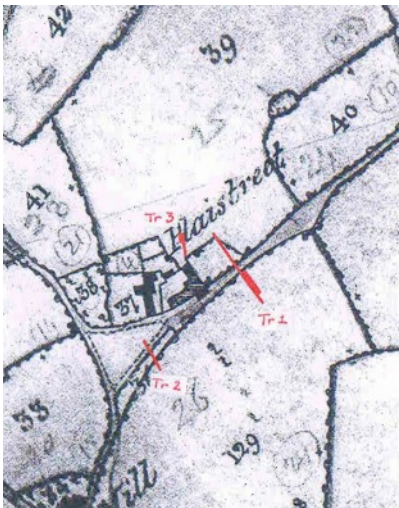
allowed the Neroche Team to record his recollections as part of an oral history archive. The farm fell into disrepair in the 1960s and was abandoned in 1975. Soon after it was stripped of useful building materials and left as a ruin. Today, only the outer walls and chimney stacks remain - but it retains a strong atmospheric quality which has captivated many people.



Neroche Local History Group are currently involved in researching the history of the settlement at Britty. They have also started a programme of fieldwork recording the buildings and the surrounding fields.



Playstreet, Bickenhall - Playstreet was a medieval settlement, which was deserted and left to ruin. Aerial photographs taken in 1977 showed extensive remains of the site. The settlement consisted of a street marked by a shallow holloway, with crofts and building plots on both sides, which was surrounded a triangular shaped green. The name Playstreet is probably Saxon in origin, meaning quite literally the street where people played.



Playstreet was mentioned in 1658 by Thomas Coleman of Bickenhall. He describes how all the stray stock from the common land in the Forest of Neroche were driven to Plaistreet Green for collection. The remaining stock were kept for one hour before being driven to Bickenhall Pound. The site is now ploughed, and littered with medieval and later potsherds and roof tiles. Slight earthworks associated with a former trackway survive in the field to west.

Prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-1540) Playstreet was owned by Taunton Priory before falling into private ownership. In 1602,

Rachel Portman (daughter of Sir Henry Portman) obtained the property and made it her residence. The house is described as having two chambers and a little orchard outside the kitchen door. On her death Playstreet became part of the Portman estate. Rachel Portman is buried in Bickenhall churchyard, which has since been demolished. It is said that her ghost, riding a white horse, roams the area from the old churchyard at Bickenhall, through Park Farm to Playstreet.



Between June - November 2008 the Neroche Community History Project undertook an excavation of Playstreet. An exhibition of the findings from the excavation took place in Neroche Parish Hall in March 2009.

For further information, go to www.nerochescheme.org/archaeology.php



Neroche Parish Walking Group



Our next walk is on Saturday 5th March. Since we were rained off from the pub for our annual lunch in January, we shall do it in March!

Come and enjoy a walk in the local area followed by a pub lunch.

**Meet at Home Mead, next to the Greyhound pub
at 10am on the 5th March**

*Tel Jane Hole 01460 234410 or
Sheila Green 01823 480764*



Taunton Racecourse

By Bob Young, Chief Executive



Major improvements have been made to course facilities during the past year. In an effort to reduce energy bills, solar panels have been installed on the various roofs of the Orchard Stand by local company 'Solar Systems' based at Ashill. The Orchard Stand

itself has benefited from an £80,000 facelift during last summer. The foyer has been remodelled with a new colour scheme and carpets. The theme continues up the stairs into the Orchard Restaurant, resulting in a more welcoming, bright, modern look, which has already been well received by everyone who has used the restaurant since the re-fit. In addition,



new chairs, cutlery and glasses have been purchased, and with a new *à la carte* menu, all diners will now be served by waiting staff. A table for the day, including admission, a three course meal, afternoon tea and a racecard is priced at just £60. – along with in-house catering, this provides the best value of any course in the south-west by far.



Highlights for the rest of the season include an Easter Holiday Ladies Day meeting on 7th April, and an evening meeting to finish the season on 20th April.



I'm sure that those of you who are members, or considering membership, would agree that Taunton Racecourse offers tremendous value, with a record-equalling 59 reciprocal race meetings at 47 different courses throughout the country, plus a reciprocal with Hickstead at the Royal International Horse Show, and reduced admission to the Royal Bath and West Show; with full membership facilities applying to both.

At Taunton, annual members and their guests, together with owners and trainers, have exclusive use of the Paddocks Stand, which we believe is quite unique in this day-and-age. The two course racing lunch, available for £17 in the Paddock Stand Restaurant, continues to be very popular. Members are welcome to bring up to four guests per race meeting into the Paddock Stand. What a wonderful way of reciprocating hospitality, by wining-and-dining your friends in the Members Restaurant whilst enjoying a great days racing.

The racecourse greatly values its relationship with the local parish community, and also its association with the Neroche Villages' Newsletter. Please join us soon for some thrilling racing and super hospitality; we look forward to welcoming you.



Taunton Racecourse Business Club

Offering businesses around the region a range of racecourse benefits alongside social and networking events



FREE RACING

Monday 14th March 2016



*A LIMITED NUMBER OF FREE GRANDSTAND TICKETS
AVAILABLE IF ORDERED ONLINE NOW!

HURRY BEFORE THEY RUN OUT!

*Maximum 4 per household

For more details visit www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk



2016 Membership now available!

Entry to all Taunton fixtures with 59 days of free racing at 47 other courses including free entry to Hickstead and reduced admission to the Bath & West Show.

All this for only £170 [Click Here](#)

Gold Cup & Grand National Lunches 2016



Enjoy the two most prestigious jump races of the season with us here at the Racecourse,

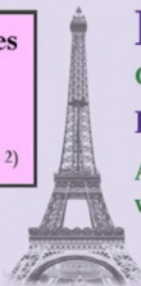
The package includes the following..

Welcome drink, 2 course lunch, Afternoon Tea,
In-house Bookmaker, Racing Host and much more...

£30 pp or £50 pp for both events



VIP Packages
available
from £70pp
contact Troy on
01823 337172 (option 2)



Ladies Day.....7th April

Gates Open 12.05pm First Race 2.05pm

Prizes include..

A Weekend for two in Paris
with return flights from Exeter

Sponsored by...

Dave Criddle Travel, Taunton



EVENING RACING

Season Finale

Wednesday 20th April 2016

First Race at 5.30pm Gates Open at 3.30pm

6 Action Packed Races - Popular racing celebrity

Derek Thompson will be hosting

All accompanied children under 16 FREE All car parking FREE
Courtesy bus from Taunton Railway Station leaving two hours before first race

www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk

SAVE UP TO
20% WHEN
BOOKED
ONLINE IN
ADVANCE



The Rural Living Spring Show



In association with
St Margaret's Hospice

7th & 8th May
2016

TO BE HELD AT...

Taunton Racecourse
TA3 7BL

Saturday 10am - 5pm
Sunday 10am - 4pm

Entrance £3
Children under 16 free

Dogs permitted in the
grounds only (not in
the buildings) -
except for Guide Dogs

AA signposted
Parking available on site
Full disabled access

A spring garden show based upon our highly successful Christmas event. The show will host a wide range of the fabulous crafts and innovations available in the South West, demonstrations, gardens stands and of course, our famous Food Hall with its own exciting cafe. On Sunday we will be hosting a Classic Car day and a Charity Fun Run - with so much on offer, it is sure to be a fantastic day out.

News from Bickenhall & District WI

By Nicky Baxter

Hello from your local Bickenhall and District WI.

The year got off to a tremendous start with us enjoying our annual birthday party, which should have been in October but, as is usual, was held-over to January. At the event, the business was quickly dealt with and the party continued with a delicious meal at The Greyhound Inn, where we are always looked after so well.

The evening saw a resurrection of our sketch, which was originally performed at the County Annual Meeting as part of the annual celebration. The skit, based on the *Absolutely Fabulous* sit com, sees teenage Patsy and Eddy trying to



The 'Absolutely Fabulous' Sketch

get into the garden party at Buckingham Palace in 1965, to then celebrate 50 years of the WI. There are rumours it will be repeated at the church Pancake Party, but who knows. We were lucky enough to be joined for the evening by Veronica Andrews, our WI advisor, who also entertained us while the 'actresses' we're getting ready for the sketch.

The evening gave us a chance to welcome new member Rosemary Grabham, one of the few (if not only member) to be born-and-bred in the parish. We are very pleased to have you join us Rosemary.

The overall winner of the monthly competition was Nicky Baxter, second Brenda Crossley and Frances Alford third.

The business-side of our meetings has recently included voting for the resolution we wish to put forward for the Annual Meeting. This year, the matters up for discussion are:

Banning the microbead
British fruit reviving our heritage
Free sanitary protection for homeless women
Prevention of sudden cardiac death in young adults
First aid to save lives
Mind or body - equal funding for care
Avoid food waste, address food poverty
Appropriate care for people in hospital with dementia.



Author, Rosie Thomas

As can be seen, the topics are wide-ranging, and equally important. Every member has a vote. Further details of resolutions, campaigns and all other WI topics can be found at <https://www.thewi.org.uk>

On a lighter note, arrangements have been made for a friendly skittles match against West Buckland WI, and a number of us have signed-up to go to a literary lunch at Oake Manor Golf Club, with the author Rosie Thomas.

The Christmas Bingo went well in the new venue at The Greyhound Skittle Alley. A good profit was made, fun was had and one person was able to cross an item off their bucket list. Thanks must go to Chris Baxter who was the ‘caller’ for the night. Details of Easter Bingo can be seen in the notice on page 31.

We have an interesting array of speakers in the coming year, covering a wide range of topics, including: Safe Driving; A Walk in China; Foothealth; and Christmas Craft.



Bingo Caller, Chris Baxter

If you would like further information about Bickenhall and District WI please contact Tricia on 01823 481037.

News from Somerset County Council

Ross Henley, our Somerset County Councillor, has kindly offered to write a regular column for our Newsletter.

In my article for the December issue, I wrote about how the Crown Estates had sold a number of their properties in Neroche Parish to a housing association. This is one of the options we asked the Crown to consider when they sold-off a number of properties in 2014, against the wishes of the local community.



I went back to the Crown Estates and asked them some further questions about the remaining properties they have in the parish, and they came back to me and said that they now have only 4 properties on assured tenancies and still have some on secure tenancies. The Crown has promised to me that they have no intention of serving any further notices to quit unless someone has breached the tenancy agreement. I will continue to monitor this issue and keep in contact with the Crown Estates on this matter.

I was contacted before Christmas by an American journalist who was writing a story about the Crown Estates issue. Our campaign was highlighted in the article and can be viewed on the Bloomberg News website. Our story was also reported in a similar article in a Bloomberg magazine, distributed right across America.



Good news on the broadband issue. This story/saga has highlighted a litany of failures by local authorities and BT; now, at last, there is some good news. One of the major stumbling blocks in our area was the fact that necessary cabling to connect Neroche Parish had not been brought across the A358. This had been delayed for months. As previously reported, I decided to take Pat Flaherty, the Chief Executive of Somerset County Council, and Chair of Connecting Devon and Somerset, to see the problem first-hand. I took him to meet Wally Torrington at a

Macmillan Coffee Morning, and after enjoying some lovely homemade cakes, we got a commitment from Pat to get things moving, and, to be fair, that is what has happened. The cable was brought across the road and we hopefully look forward to faster broadband speeds. This was an exercise well worth doing, and we got a result.



I am making a grant application from the Somerset Health and Wellbeing budget for the Neroche Woodlanders. They do a great job getting people active in the fresh air in the beautiful countryside we have here, and I'm looking forward to my next visit.

I have been contacted by Tim French about some bridleway problems in the parish, and I'm looking forward to meeting up with him and his wife, Jane Hole, to have a walk and look at the issue.

Just before Christmas, I visited the Artisan Bakery at Bickenhall, and have made a return visit in January as well. We are so lucky to have this facility on our doorstep, and the bread and croissants are fantastic. Whenever we have visitors or family staying I make a point in getting some croissants and bread in as everyone likes it so much.

Whilst driving home from the bakery I noticed that the fly tipping problem on Staple Hill had reared its ugly head again. I noticed yet another mattress; where do they come from? Also, three separate bags of fly tipped rubble had been left in different locations by the roadside on the hill. Sadly, this seems to be a real fly tipping hotspot; certainly for mattresses. My son did groan as I pulled the car over to take a picture of yet another fly tipped mattress.

Finally, I'm looking forward to some forthcoming events at Neroche Hall. It's Quiz Night again on Friday 11th March [*please see advert on page 31*], and I am going to attend one of the monthly film nights as well. I have always had a lifelong passion for the cinema and films, plus I love the fact that village halls are bringing the community together with regular events such as these.

Take Art - NAMVULA

(By Anne Perry)



Performing to a sell out audience on Friday 13th November, Namvula delighted all, starting the evening with thoughtful melodic songs inspired by her Zambian family but finishing with lively world compositions which had the audience on their feet dancing with carefree abandon.

The band consisted of an Israeli, a Malian, two English men, an Algerian and Namvula herself, who has a mixed Scottish and Zambian background. A wonderful statement in today's crazy world.

I received many comments that Namvula and her band were the best performers ever to come to Neroche Hall, and with our new stage and professional lighting from David Spears, the hall has never looked better.

The event was brought to us by Take Art, a Somerset wide Arts organisation that promotes professional performers from the world of Music, Dance and Theatre in rural venues.

Much of the ticket money goes to Take Art and the performers, while we, the hall committee, take a small part of the tickets sales but all of the bar and raffle proceeds. So, we all win but more importantly we have exceptional, professional events in our local hall.



Take Art - Graffiti Classics

(A Comedy String Quartet at Neroche Hall)

(By Anne Perry)

Sunday 24th February saw the second of this season's Take Art events at Neroche Hall. Playing to a full house, Graffiti Classics introduced themselves as 16 strings, 8 dancing feet and 4 voices. What voices they had! Their harmonies were perfect, and band leader Cal had a beautiful tenor voice, which he demonstrated so well.

The music ranged from the classics such as Air on a G String by Bach, La Comarsita by Kavas through Russian, Eastern European and Hebrew folk such as the famous Hava Nagila as well as Irish traditional songs. Sounds so serious doesn't it? But it was all very funny as they larked around throughout. The



Flight of the Bumblebee was performed on vibrating lips, Danny Boy was sung so beautifully by Cal as the rest were supping Guinness and donning leprechaun hats in the background. At one point a six years old girl from the audience was invited on to the stage to play the bow on the double bass while Cal plucked the strings higher up to make the tune.

Graffiti Classics were all good comics, good singers, good actors and first class musicians. We are so lucky to have such professional performers available to us.

The next Take Art event at Neroche Hall will not be until the autumn/winter season, so watch this space. Meanwhile, some of our neighbours have Take Art events; Curry Mallet have the Gypsy Jazz band , The Schmoozenburgs on Saturday 20th February and Churchinford have the same band on Friday 18th March. On Saturday 16th April Stoke St Mary will have the story tellers, The Devils Violin...not to be missed. For more details visit www.takeart.org or phone 01460 249450.

The Farming Calendar

By Mark Pope

As many of us living in the Parish do not fully comprehend the world of farming, Mark Pope of Staple Farm has kindly penned a few words to give us an idea as to what he is up to at this time of the year (written late January).



On the farm we have put Christmas to bed and just finished tidying-up the last few trees. For those of you who walk around the Christmas tree fields, you will notice great heaps of conifers. These have been thinned-out to allow the trees either side to grow thicker. Our first job In January and early February has been to prune some 10,000 trees; this will encourage them to thicken up even more. Soon, we will be preparing a new area of ground for planting another 1,000 trees in early March.

Alongside the Christmas trees, we have also been trying to spray some of the crops, however, the weather seems to have had other ideas. If it hasn't been raining, then it's been blowing a gale. The only thing that has been absent so far is a winter, with decent spells of frost, which would slow the crops down and also check the massive levels of disease. Looking at some of the fields of wheat, you'd be forgiven for thinking it is April. The worry is, we will get a late winter and no spring.

I cannot remember seeing our land so wet, for so long, as it has been this winter. We record all our rainfall here on Staple farm, and up to the end of last December, our actual annual rainfall was down to about 30 inches for 2015; our historical average has been 42 to 47 inches rainfall per year. I think the problem of the excessively wet ground has been caused by rain falling nearly every week since mid-August, apart from a drier October.

Assuming the wet-weather tap gets turned off, one of the first jobs will be to roll all our new grass land; this is to push-down any large stones away from the machinery. The next job will be to fertilize all the crops; then, with the addition of sunlight and warmth, we just wait for the crops to grow.

This winter, Somerset has been lucky with the weather, unlike many in the North of the country, which, as you are all aware, has seen some terrible flooding. I have been heavily involved in the setting-up of the Somerset River

Authority (SRA), representing views of landowners across the county. Once the SRA is in place, and the funding model is 'sorted', I believe it will put the whole of Somerset in a lot better place. We are also introducing some small scale schemes on our farm to try and slow the flow of water, in an attempt to keep our soil in the fields. This is an initiative that I believe you will see being adopted in other areas as well. It is not the total answer; we still need improved flood defences and well maintained river systems. (Please see SRA article on page 18.)



Forestry Commission

By Jon Burgess

The recent harvesting work on the Forestry Commission land came to a finish in the weeks before Christmas, which was a welcome relief after a period of intensive work. The last sticks of timber were removed and we were able to reinstate the tracks and reopen all sections of the woodlands to the public again in time for anyone wanting to walk-off a mince pie or two over the festive period. Thank you all for obeying the diversions and respecting the essential worksite safety exclusions. We will be undertaking harvesting elsewhere in the area later in 2016 but for now we turn our focus on replanting.

As I write, we are currently in the middle of planting 21,000 trees at Middleroom



Wood, to fill the areas that were cleared of windblown Spruce. Most of the new trees are Oak but with a healthy scattering of Wild Service Tree (*Sorbus torminalis*). This uncommon tree is worthy of note; it is a UK native but one which many people would pass by without recognising. It is absent from much of the UK but around the Blackdown Hills it seems to be a

bit of a stronghold and present in most native woodland – indeed it already grows throughout Middleroom Wood. See if you can spot this oddity next time you are out for a walk in the woods. We are hosting a guided walk at the site in May, if you would like to come and see what we are up to. Booking is via the Blackdown Hills AONB website.

It is with mixed emotions that we also let you know that we are saying goodbye to Sam, our Works Supervisor, who has been promoted within the Forestry Commission. He will be missed.

The Curious Case of the Japanese Soldier in the Blackdowns

By Our Staple Fitzpaine Correspondent

The Blackdown Hills abound with stories. Some of these may possess stronger provenance than others, but all are memorable, particularly when one is young and eager to absorb imagery from a countryside imbued with history. Take for example, ‘*Fight Field*’; an innocuous pasture adjacent to the road en route from Curland to Broadway. It does not, as one might imagine, contain a boxing ring for the resolution of inter-village rivalries. Rather, in 1685 this quiet pasture was the site of an armed confrontation between scouts of the Duke of Monmouth’s rebel army, and the King’s Dragoons; the latter led by John Churchill, future Duke of Marlborough and one-day victor at Blenheim. Pause for a second before hurrying on to the clatter of cutlery at the Square and Compass Inn, and you may just discern the clank of armoured legs against the flanks of cavalry horses, mingled with Anglo-Saxon oaths.



James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth 1649 - 1685

Then there are the giant marker stones at Staple Fitzpaine crossroads. According to local legend, they were thrown by the Devil from his pedestal at Neroche in an attempt to demolish the tower then being added to St Peter’s church. One other such stone lies in Buckland St Mary, having fallen back over the Devil’s shoulder. These stones, the story continues, bleed if pricked with a pin. This author is aware of a well-known local who attempted such a venepuncture one spring morning; on that day though, they did not haemorrhage.



A Giant Marker Stone at Staple Fitzpaine, covered in undergrowth

And so to the tale of the Japanese Soldier. He was a fiercely loyal Gunsō (Sergeant) secretly posted to the Neroche area during the Second World War to gather intelligence (a notion known to wring wry smiles from inhabitants of the Quantocks) and report to his superiors by radio. This he did, but early in

1944 his radio set stopped receiving, although he continued to transmit his reports despite being unable to listen to replies of any description. By this time, he was encamped in the remote abandoned farmhouse at Britty, unaware that the war had finished. There he remained for many years, and his presence is believed to account for numerous curious occurrences during the post-war years. Take for example, the trainee pilot from Dunkeswell who practiced an emergency procedure which involved a low approach over Neroche woods, and in doing so heard a sharp ‘thud’ which his instructor assured him was a bird strike. On later inspection at the aerodrome, a hole was discovered which could only be explained by the passage of a bullet through the port wing.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the local Shoot regularly found themselves with a bewildered Spaniel; which, having sprinted to retrieve a downed pheasant, discovered the bird was no longer where it fell. Around the same period, the owner of Ruttersleigh Farm pondered on the strength of his homemade cider, as the number of piglets in his sties frequently transpired to be less than he recalled counting the evening before.

Other unexplained occurrences are recorded, such as the theft of electronics equipment from a garage at Bickenhall. On the following Sunday morning, local Home Service listeners heard a sudden burst of Japanese speech halfway through the Archers omnibus (although most simply assumed the BBC had broadcast the ramblings of Walter Gabriel at the wrong speed).



The soldier is long gone, and the faded photograph reproduced here is believed to be the only evidence of his tenure at Britty Farm. Its veracity has been questioned by those who highlight the difficulties inherent in crossing the Pacific and then needing to navigate the Rivers Parrett and Rag against the prevailing current. But this should not diminish the verisimilitude of a story told to a young child on a country walk one damp winter’s afternoon years ago; an imagination inspired to look for signs of a fire hastily extinguished, the remains of a spit roasted rabbit, or a discarded cap.

What stories do you recall from the Blackdowns? Send in your favourite tales and we’ll include a selection in a future issue.

New Year Honour for Local Resident

Richard Davies is Chairman of Neroche Hall Trustees and lives in Curland, with his wife Diana. I'm sure you would wish to join the Newsletter team in offering Richard our warmest congratulations on his wonderful achievement and richly deserved award.



The following article appeared in the Somerset Gazette:

“Richard Davies said he was shocked to hear ‘out of the blue’ that he was getting the British Empire Medal for services to the bereaved. He was honoured for his work as the Coroner’s Officer in the West Somerset patch, which takes-in the Taunton, Minehead and Bridgwater areas. “I was a bit shocked when I got a letter at the end of November, it was a big surprise, but a nice one” said Mr Davies aged 69.



Mr Davies, who lives in Curland and is married with a grown-up son, worked his way up through the ranks [in the Police Force] to Inspector, after joining as a cadet in 1962. On his retirement in 1998, he became Coroner’s Officer in Bristol, moving in 2000 to West Somerset, where he is based at Taunton Police Station.”

During his time as Coroner's Officer in the West Somerset area, Richard has personally dealt with in excess of 15,000 deaths, of which approximately 14% have resulted in full inquests. In recent years, he was dealing with twice the recommended number of annual deaths for a Coroner's Officer; however, an additional Officer has now been taken on, which should ease Richard’s workload.

British Empire Medal

Pets Reunited

By Wally Torrington

The Email Alert has enjoyed two major successes in recent months, reuniting pets with their owners, Eddie the cat and Alfie the dog. Eddie resides with Emma and Tom Wright in Curland; Alfie, on the other hand, is a northerner, and was on a visit to the Neroche area with his owner Chris. The following are the 'thank you' messages that I received...

Eddie the Cat. *“Firstly, Tom and I would like to thank everyone who called us with sightings of our missing cat, Eddie. We are grateful for the fantastic community spirit in the parish. Eddie has been part of the family for nearly 12 years. He's quite the character, with everything being on his terms. He prefers a daily rabbit to cat food, and loves to bring us 'presents', for which he demands congratulation. However, recently we were having a complete redecoration of the house in preparation for our first child. With a major clear out of furniture and 'stuff' we'd collected over the years, along with the arrival of intrusive decorators, Eddie became very unsettled. Being a confident cat, he thought he deserved better! So he decided to go and find a quieter environment. After ten days of no sightings, we turned to the Email Alert, asking our neighbourhood to keep a watchful eye out for him. Thanks to a thoughtful reader, within 24 hours of the 'Alert' Eddie was reunited with us; much to our delight. Since his return, everything has settled down once more and he is back to his usual self. His gifts are returning, but not just for us now, as he loves our new baby, Ella, who also moved into our home the day after his return. Our sincere thanks to all who reacted to our appeal. Warmest regards, Emma Wright”*



Alfie the Dog. *“I am just writing to you all in Neroche Parish to express my sincere thanks to all involved in helping find my dog Alfie. Alfie is usually a very good boy, however, he took it upon himself to run away from me on a late afternoon walk at Castle Neroche on 18th November. He is a typical Spaniel – full of energy, cheeky and bright - he outwitted me and disappeared.*

Given the size of the area, I advertised it straight away on www.doglost.co.uk and contacted the local dog warden. I then spoke to a Pauline Phelps who kindly passed a message to Wally Torrington, resulting in the circulation of an Email Alert. The weather was dreadful, and after around six hours of searching, calling and whistling, I had almost given up hope when I received a phone call from Wally, who gave me the address of a lady who had taken-in a little black and white Spaniel that sounded suspiciously like my Alfie! Arriving at the ladies house, I found my boy in her barn, having been fed-and-watered and looking very pleased with himself. Alfie is in great health and none the worse for his little adventure – in fact I don't think he wanted to leave his cosy bed in the straw! If not for the kind lady taking him in and the excellent communication network in your parish, he may still be lost now - thank you once again for your quick thinking and care. Chris”



Help Required

The team that produces this Newsletter is looking for volunteers to help with all aspects of the operation eg:

Have you basic skills in 'desk top publishing' or similar; would you be willing to write articles or take photos of events you attend; could you write features on local topics; does the thought of selling advertising 'ring your bells'; if needed, would you be happy to be called upon to help with delivering the Newsletter?

If you can help with any of the foregoing, or assist in any other way, then please contact Wally on wallytorrington@hotmail.com or Alan on nerochenewsletter@yahoo.co.uk

As well as being aimed at established members of the parish, this could also be the ideal opportunity for new arrivals to become involved with the local community.

Email Alert Parish Notices

If you wish to be kept informed of all that is happening in the community (including: crime alerts; road closures; community activities; local events; important meetings etc etc) then why not add your email address to the 330 plus individuals that have already signed-up to the service.

Your details will be kept secure, as all Email Alerts use the BCC address system so that nobody sees the full list.

If you are not on the list, then you are missing-out on 'up-to-the-minute' information on all that is important and happening in the immediate area in which you live.

To join, send an email to: wallytorrington@hotmail.com with the message "please add me to the list".

We look forward to you becoming a fully-informed Neroche resident.

School Holidays

It is always useful to know the school holidays dates. The dates below include, where appropriate, the weekends either side, as these are equally affected by school breaks, especially regarding family holidays and road traffic.



Easter Holiday

Friday 25th March 2016 to Sunday 10th April 2016

Half Term

Saturday 28th May 2016 to Sunday 5th June 2016



Household Recycling & Refuse Collections for March 2016 to May 2016



Refuse & Recycling: 30 March 2016 - Revised Collection: 31 March 2016

Recycling: 4 May 2016 - Revised Collection: 5 May 2016

To view the actual dates, go to

www1.tauntondeane.gov.uk/tdbcsites/waste/pdf/WednesdayB.pdf

Events For Your Calendar

March

- 2 Greyhound Pub Quiz
- 3 Neroche Thursday Lunch Club (*see page 11*)
- 3 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 5 Neroche Walking Group (*see page 40*)
- 6 Wedding Exhibition ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 10 Parish Council Meeting (*see page 25*)
- 11 Quiz Night, Neroche Hall (*see page 31*)
- 12 Skills in the Hills (*see page 35*)
- 14 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 18 Easter Family Bingo (*see page 31*)
- 21 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 23 Neroche Local History Group meeting (*see page 38*)
- 24 Garden Club AGM (*see page 37*)
- 25-27 St Peter's Easter Services (*see page 12*)

April

- 1 Neroche Friday Film Night (*see page 33*)
- 2 Neroche Walking Group (*see page 40*)
- 6 Greyhound Pub Quiz
- 7 Neroche Thursday Lunch Club (*see page 11*)
- 7 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 7/8/10 Winter in the Woods Activities (*see page 35*)
- 16 Litter Pick-up (*see page 29*)
- 20 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 21 Annual Parish Meetings (*see pages 3 & 30*)
- 29 Neroche Friday Film Night (*see page 33*)

May

- 3 Neroche Hall AGM (*see page 20*)
- 4 Greyhound Pub Quiz
- 7 Neroche Walking Group (*see page 40*)
- 7/8 Rural Living Show (*see page 44*)
- 12 Neroche Thursday Lunch Club (*see page 11*)
- 12 Parish Council Meeting (*see page 25*)
- 22 Racing ([go to www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://www.tauntonracecourse.co.uk))
- 27 Neroche Friday Film Night (*see page 33*)



For further information go to the parish website: www.nerochevillages.org.uk

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, e.g. on 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 official documents.

Neroche Hall– www.nerochehall.org.uk

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

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

This website 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. It forwards information of a general nature about local events and issues - please contact Wally Torrington at wallytorrington@hotmail.com if you would like your name added.

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 Kate Reynolds on 01823 444023.

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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