

# GLASTONBURY CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Newsletter 121

[www.glastonburyconservation.org.uk](http://www.glastonburyconservation.org.uk)

2006 December 16

## Chairman's report

*John Brunsdon  
(as presented to the AGM on December 1)*

A major event of 2006 was the award of the MBE to Ian Rands for services to conservation in Somerset, as vice-chair of Glastonbury Conservation Society. This recognition of his outstanding work in tree-planting locally is justly deserved, especially as he has to hand on the organizing of trees to Alan Fear after health warnings.

The mayor, John Coles, and I received a commendation from the Somerset Building Preservation Trust in the Stansell awards, held at Hestercombe House, for the repair of 15th-century corbels at 2 Market Place and of the town's 19th-century market cross. The citation reads: "A careful and sensitive repair of important features which collectively enhance the town-centre conservation area." Unfortunately, there has been subsequent damage to the Betrothal Couple corbel, which will be repaired again.

We continue to operate the Parish Scheme for county footpath clearance on behalf of the town council. Nathan Pritchard has taken on this management, but needs more help. We now own a motorized strimmer. The hardsurfacing on the path up Bushy Coombe by Mendip council, by permission of Rory Weightman, the landowner, has been a big improvement. Our guidebook, *Glastonbury Footpath Walks*, has sold well as usual.

The newsletter has been distributed to members and has received favourable comments. Thanks to Jim Nagel for his competent editing, and to contributors, especially Adrian Pearse, who regularly



Ian Rands asked to be invested as MBE locally rather than at the Palace so that all the Conservation Society tree-planters could share in it. So on October 13 the red ribbon was pinned beside his tie at the Town Hall by Somerset's Lord Lieutenant, Lady Gass (left).

takes notes at meetings. Also to Ena Allen, who has for many years organized the distribution and subscription reminders, in liaison with her treasurer husband, Dennis. We need to relieve Ena of this task, with many thanks to both.

Our secretary, Janet Morland, has convened regular committee meetings and taken minutes. Last year's AGM strengthened the committee with new and younger members, and we look to repeat this. Thanks to all who have served during the year.

A committee member with architectural and planning experience would be

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Christmas shop windows make a good start for our project to record Glastonbury in photos for coming generations. If you and your camera would like to take part, please contact the chairman.

Our meetings  
(details, p4)

### • January 19, Friday—at library

45 years in Glastonbury:

John Brunsdon's lifetime of changes  
(inspired by J. G. L. Bulleid's similar paper in 1880)

## NEWS High-profile national developers take on Morlands enterprise *JB*

Two nationwide developers—Urban Splash and Priority Sites—have become involved with the former tannery site on the edge of Glastonbury. Their role was announced by the Southwest Regional Development Agency (RDA), owner of the site, on December 13.

The two companies intend to provide 115,000 square feet of business space on part of the 31-acre Morland-Baily site.

They have strong track records for delivering pioneering high-quality regeneration schemes across Britain, the RDA said. Urban Splash was responsible for success stories such as the Royal William Yard in Plymouth, and has particular strength in the sensitive restoration of listed buildings.

Priority Sites is a joint venture between the national regeneration agency English Partnerships and the Royal Bank of Scotland. It specializes in speculative development of high-quality new-build industrial and "hybrid" workspace. It has completed a number of successful schemes in the Southwest, totalling 200,000 square feet and creating 550 jobs.

The local Beckery Island Trust will not as a result be involved in the conservation of the larger buildings on the Morland-Baily site. There might still be a role for the trust at the Northover Mill Cottage.

The RDA said at the end of November that work to clean up contaminated land at the site is now complete. More than 10,000 cubic metres of soil were cleaned after boreholes, trial pits and monitoring wells were dug to identify areas polluted by a thousand years of tanning. The tests showed considerably more areas to treat than were first envisaged.

Up to 40 workers from the contractor Edmund Nuttall Ltd have been busy on the site since infrastructure work began in March. 35,000 tons of crushed concrete from demolished buildings was used to build new roads on site. Widening of the A39 and the new junction for Morlands Enterprise Park—as the site is now called—is due to finish in spring.

### • January 26, Friday—at St Mary's

10 years of nature conservation in the east Poldens—Geoff Brunt (winner of English Nature award)

# Talks in summary: end of the line on film, green men, an A39 curiosity

## Evercreech to Burnham on the S&D *Adrian Pearse*

John Coles provided a capacity audience after the society's AGM on December 1 with an evocative glimpse of the final years of the Somerset and Dorset railway in moving pictures. An additional bonus was coverage of the fate of some of its few surviving features in the four decades since closure in March 1966.

Optimism still prevailed in the film showing the centenary celebrations of the opening of the Somerset Central Railway from Glastonbury to Highbridge held on 28 August 1954, when a special train with guests in costume traversed the route viewed by a multitude of spectators and recorded for a celebratory brochure.

However, the situation had

deteriorated considerably by the time the BBC filmed John Betjeman's journey from Evercreech to Burnham in 1963. Many stations were semi-derelict and overgrown, the rollingstock rusting and shabby, and passengers few. The

sense of decay was highlighted as Betjeman sought out the monuments from better days: the extensive deserted locomotive works, silted-up wharf, and even the bronze war memorial and ornamental cast-iron benches at Highbridge. Neglect was apparent in all departments for at least six years before the line closed—freight had been transferred to road as distribution needs changed (Clarks shoes were a particular example, in contrast to the founding Clarks as keen backers of building the railway); there was no feeling of a future in the railways and staff morale had collapsed. The slow death of the line was even exacerbated by the reluctance of civil servants to give the closure order.

Finally, film of constructing the Glastonbury relief road in 1993 showed some of the remaining sections of trackbed near the town being removed and replaced by tarmac. While the occasional relic from this now-remote era has been preserved, its disappearance is now as complete as the majestic elms the films showed once bordering its course.

## Green Men decoded *AP*

Richard Raynsford recently attended a course at Sheffield University where Dr David Borthwick contended that representations of the "green man" were *not* fertility symbols related to local customs and developed from the "wild

man of the woods", evolving from pre-Christian pagan beliefs—contrary to general opinion, which stems largely from the opinions of Lady Raglan in the late 19th century.

At our meeting on October 20, Richard presented a considerable arsenal of slides from his peregrinations the length and breadth of the country to illustrate that there was a clear pattern of development in the representation of green men as essentially related to Christian symbolism.

Green men are not seen in Saxon carvings, even though heads can be portrayed among foliage, as at Codford St Peter. They begin in Norman churches as "beak heads", thought to represent evil spirits—Lincoln Cathedral possesses numerous examples. Beak heads, often also possessing horns, evolved to the familiar

form of green men, with branches and leaves emerging from the mouth and occasionally ears or eyes; they are considered to represent a head speaking evil, the leaves representing the evil, and their purpose being as an admonition not to do

evil. Examples with protruding tongues are thought to portray stupidity.

Consequently, most green men are to be found inside churches, where similar forms are sometimes seen being crushed below fonts—baptism being a way of negating evil spirits. They are normally carved in stone or wood (Devon is a county with particularly numerous and fine examples) and do not seem to appear in glass or in painted form.

Their significance became more obscure in the post-Reformation era, and green men appear as a purely decorative feature even in non-religious contexts, as seen for example in the carving on the facade of Lloyds bank in the High Street.



Heading for Glastonbury from West Pennard station, 31 May 1965—ten months till the end.

## Chilton Priory *AP*

Generally viewed in haste from the A39, Chilton Priory is normally dismissed as a minor Victorian folly—but closer inspection reveals an interesting history. It was the subject of a talk on November 10 after the Antiquarian Society's AGM by Tim Hopkinson-Ball.

Chilton Priory was the creation of eccentric William Stradling, 1788–1859, an antiquary, freemason and deputy lieutenant of Somerset. In 1830 he was living at Roseville in Chilton Polden and had become an obsessive collector of antiquities, architectural fragments and furniture from a wide local area, including Glastonbury Abbey.

The original portion of Chilton Priory, being the tower, refectory and oratory, was built in 1839 to incorporate and house his collection, and also to serve as an eyecatcher from his residence, which was a Masonic meeting place and a guesthouse; one Halliday was installed as a warden.

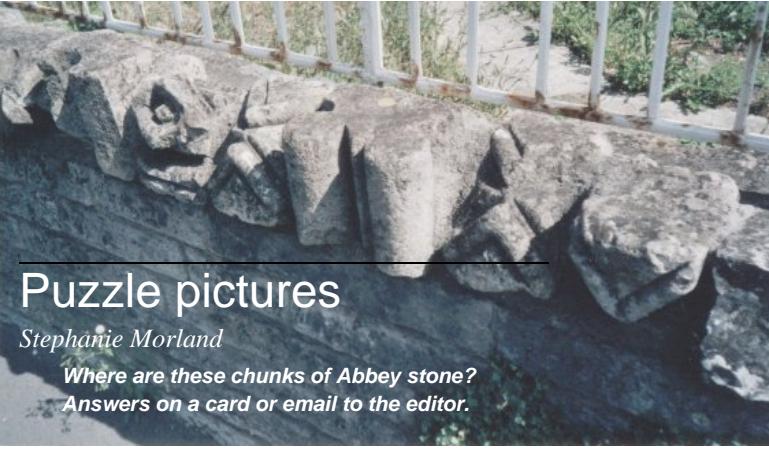
On Stradling's death his collection—of which a catalogue survives—was dispersed and the building allowed to deteriorate. In 1902 a Mr Kennedy bought it and selected Frederick Bligh Bond in 1909 to build an additional domestic wing in Tudor domestic style. Kennedy lived there until 1918.

In that year it was purchased by John Maltwood, whose wife Katherine was a noted sculptress; she is better remembered today around here as the and promoter of the Glastonbury Zodiac. Bligh Bond was again commissioned to make alterations and to improve the gardens.

It was sold again in 1939, by which time the amount of traffic on the A39 was significantly detracting from its attractions, and falsely attributed by the estate agent to mediaeval origins. Having passed through various ownerships, it has been long unoccupied but remains well maintained and preserves some interesting stone sculptures and stained glass from Stradling's collection.



Dick Green brought along a "rake" of five passenger coaches with a locomotive he made to match, all done up in the old Somerset & Dorset livery of 1870: dark Prussian blue with gold lettering. He bought the coaches, badly damaged, from an executor's stand at a Gauge O Guild show in Telford in September and refurbished them. Dick's other models were mainly of the Great Western Railway.



## Puzzle pictures

Stephanie Morland

Where are these chunks of Abbey stone?

Answers on a card or email to the editor.



### The Chilkwell Street fragment AP

Tim Hopkinson-Ball went on to talk about an interesting carved fragment from the Abbey that he spotted in 2005, used to decorate a fireplace at 43 Chilkwell Street. It had been rescued from a rockery in the garden, and had previously been removed from an interior wall of the house.

It comes from a late-mediaeval screen, dating from 1490 to 1520, and consists of the top left portion of a two-light opening. The spandrel, though weathered, contains a branch with foliage—perhaps a wild rose—and a shield containing a ragged staff and two cruets: the arms of Joseph of Arimathea.

Another fragment from the same screen is in the Glastonbury Abbey museum. This one was discovered by

Bligh Bond in his excavations at the Abbey. Precisely where has not been recorded, but it is believed to have been found in the north transept where it may well have formed part of the Loretto chapel that was mentioned by Leland.

[And no, this is not the solution to the puzzle pictures!]

### Cathedral development project JB

The administrator of Wells Cathedral, John Roberts, gave a most competent illustrated talk to a rather depleted Antiquarian Society gathering at the library on December 8. Road closures for the Frost Fair probably did not help.

He stressed that the development was not just about providing a new restaurant in the Mary Mitchell garden (albeit on the

footprint of an old building). It was about much more: the provision of choristers' rooms, a meeting room and new toilets for a start.

Furthermore, areas of the cathedral at present never seen by the public will be open to all, and the cloisters will again be a complete unobstructed walkway. To enable this to happen, a blocked doorway will reopen and unworthy modern buildings will be removed.

Much money has to be raised for this project. Unlike other countries where the state owns and funds cathedrals, our cathedrals have to fund themselves. Recent surveys show how our cathedrals are attracting increasing numbers for both worship and admiration.

More information is on the web at [www.wellscathedral.org.uk/development](http://www.wellscathedral.org.uk/development)

## Glastonbury submerges in Levels for World Heritage bid

Anthony Ward

The hall was packed—a terrific turnout of more than 120 for the first public presentation of the proposal to declare Glastonbury and the Levels a World Heritage Site. It clearly surprised the Somerset County Council team, who arrived in Glastonbury on October 13 with enough handouts for only 50. They also arrived without the county heritage officer, Tom Mayberry, and with a computer projection system that refused to display the prepared text and pictures. Bob Croft, the county archaeologist, had to improvise a run-through of the nature of the proposed bid and where it had reached in consultations.

He had to cope with protests from a Levels farmer, Mervyn Sweet, who saw the World Heritage bid as just another attempt to interfere with owners' managing their land as they wished. Mr Sweet scorned suggestions that farmers might benefit from schemes to promote sustainable farming mentioned by the co-presenter, Richard Brunning, the Levels and Moors archaeologist. Eventually Mr Sweet's somewhat bloody-minded intervention led to discussion and concern from the audience about the future of farming and land use on the Levels. A special consultation with farmers and landowners over the proposal was suggested.

Mr Croft explained why the wide-ranging Somerset Levels and Moors had been chosen as opposed to just Glastonbury. "Cultural landscape" was a new type of designation increasingly favoured by Unesco and the government, and competition was likely to be less fierce than for a town bid. The SCC team had just visited the Cornish and Devon Tin Mines cultural landscape—the first World Heritage Site of its kind in the UK.

Curiously for a public discussion in Glastonbury itself, that was the only time in the whole evening that the town or its heritage rated even a mention, whereas Mr Croft and Mr Brunning extolled the virtues of areas of the Levels and Moors.

Mr Croft said one of the most contentious issues would be

setting the exact boundaries of a WHS bid, and it might take many years. The audience expressed concern about who might be in or out and the consequences for communities of these decisions.

The only serious applause was for Roy Proctor's firm belief in the shaping of the local landscape by spiritual forces and its continuing importance as a place of pilgrimage.

At the end of an evening of heated, passionate and sometimes sceptical public discussion, Mr Croft's call for a show of hands on a number of questions was illuminating—the overwhelming majority of attenders were from Glastonbury or within five miles; and only around a fifth were born in Somerset. The vast majority were in favour of pursuing a World Heritage bid, but a handful were clearly opposed, and several wanted to sit on the fence.

For myself, there was not just disappointment in the inevitably archaeological focus of the presenters but concern about the low level of resources and priority being put into research and consultations on the bid. Mr Croft explained that part of this resulted from the SCC's focus on the Somerset Waterlinks Big Lottery bid—much the same area as the Levels and Moors. SCC is competing for a £50-million "pot of gold" with five other UK areas. I am astonished that five months after the first consultation with invited local organisations at the Town Hall (on May 26) the National Trust has yet to be approached by the Somerset team about the World Heritage bid. SCC is publicly committed to a bid but seems to be largely going through the motions. When English Heritage and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport fire the gun to start the public review of the Tentative List of World Heritage sites for real, County Hall may have to scramble for the manpower and resources to put together a serious bid.

As for Glastonbury and its rich heritage, the size of the area of the current proposal means that SCC has no obligation to be particularly responsive to any of the towns or villages within it.

# A trainload arrives for the 2006 annual meeting

Attendance was excellent at the 2006 annual general meeting of Glastonbury Conservation Society, on December 1 at St Mary's church hall—numbers were bolstered by railway enthusiasts of all ages who came to see films by John Coles shown after the meeting (*report on page 2*).

The chairman gave his report of the year (*see page 1*) and then read notes from Ian Rands, who was unable to attend.

Officers and committee were re-elected to continue to serve. (During 2006, Roger Forsey was co-opted onto the committee. Anthony Ward resigned in November.)

The treasurer's report was agreed.

A donation of nearly £300 has been received to be used specifically for tree and hedge projects on the Tor. Many thanks for this generosity! The National Trust's current stewardship scheme comes up for renewal in 2008, when new projects will be included. We shall propose a reinstatement of old hedgelines in "Carters Field" off Basketfield Lane to recreate the mediaeval field pattern currently marked by old banks and ditches.

And under "any other business":

- Making a photographic record of the town—like the one done in the 1950s—was suggested as a project. Anyone with a

camera to help should please contact the chairman.

• The People's Trust for Endangered Species is conducting a national survey of old orchards to find a rare native beetle, the noble chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis*). Ian and Carol Tucker have made their orchards available if our society would like to get involved. Volunteers should please contact the chairman.

## Accounts for year ending July 31 Dennis Allen

<i>Income</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>
<i>Opening balances</i>	
total £ 8,218.84:	
<i>Current account</i> 416.50	
<i>Reserve account</i> 24.24	
<i>Building society</i> 7,778.84	
<i>Subscriptions and donations</i>	
<i>Trees</i> 1,273.50	
<i>Footpath grant</i> 6,275.11	
<i>Bank interest</i> 120.00	
<i>Bank refund</i> 133.30	
	60.00
	7,861.91
	75.00
	128.00
	45.63
	49.07
	220.00
	41.28
	6,656.21
	105.91
	26.65
	7,347.75
	<i>Closing balances total £ 8,733.00:</i>
	<i>Current account</i> 659.05
	<i>Reserve account</i> 24.24
	<i>Building society</i> 8,049.71
	<b>£16,080.75</b>
	<b>16,080.75</b>

## Chairman's report for 2006

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especially useful, since one of the society's roles is to comment on planning issues to the local authority. The Local Development Framework, replacing the local Mendip-wide plan, is in the process of formulation; it covers proposals for the next 20 years. The committee has discussed the Preferred Options Report.

We have encouraged the county council to progress a bid for World Heritage status. A public meeting in October indicated the county's preference for a bid based on the Somerset Levels but embracing both Glastonbury and Wells. Discussions will be protracted.

We have held our usual winter lectures, which have been quite well attended at St Mary's church hall, and also with the Antiquarian Society at the library. Inevitably there are clashes with other events on the same evenings. Suggestions for future meetings are

welcome (and we are looking for a volunteer to co-ordinate speakers).

As vice-chair of Mendip District Council I hosted a meeting at Frome covering 20 years of grant funding of historic buildings in Frome. I was able to draw some comparisons with our town.

It has been an interesting year, with a steady membership. More could be achieved with your help.

**Ian Rands adds** that last year was the best ever for tree-planting—more

than 3,700, of which 1,000-plus were sizeable saplings—and brought the best turnout of helpers. Newsletter 119 (June) has more details. So far this winter we have concentrated on maintenance of trees at Bushy Coombe, at the south side of Bretenoux Road, at the settlement pond alongside the relief road, and at the carnival sheds at Common Moor Drove.

Contact Alan Fear (83 3185) if you'd like to help. Hedge-planting and other activities are planned for 2007.

## Dates for your new 2007 diary

- ✿ **January 17**—A celebration of *Old Twelfth Night* and entertainment by the Langport Mummers (£6, £3 children; please book ahead), 7–9pm (a Wednesday). Display called "*Wass hael*" of wassailing and winter customs runs until March 3 **R**
- ✿ **January 19**—*The history of Glastonbury over the past 45 years*: John Brunsdon reflects on changes since he arrived in town in 1952 [Julian Egan's advertised talk on the Knights Templar is postponed] ... ... ... **A**
- ✿ **January 23**—George Chedburn, an architect who was involved with the recent *refurbishment of Street parish church* ... ... ... ... ... **S**
- ✿ **January 26**—*The east Poldens: 10 years of nature conservation*. Illustrated talk by Geoff Brunt (winner of English Nature award) ... ... ... ... ... **C**
- ✿ **February 9**—Vicky Dawson on *Glastonbury Abbey: assuring the future* ... **A**
- ✿ **February 27**—Alan Ripley talks about *Victorian Overleigh* ... ... ... ... **S**
- ✿ **March 9**—Neill Bonham on *Georgian Glastonbury: contemporary descriptions and views* ... ... ... ... ... **A**
- ✿ **March 10 to Apr 22**—"*Rhynes, reeds reclaimed*": photographs by Kim Aplin **R**

### When and where

- C** Conservation Society meetings are on **Fridays** at 7:30 at St Mary's church hall, Magdalene Street (parking at rear, via Morrisons).
- A** Antiquarian Society meetings are on **Fridays** at 7:30 at the Library, Archers Way.
- S** Street Society meetings are on **Tuesdays** at 7:30 at the Methodist church hall, Leigh Road (events secretary Barbara Cowell, 44 3397).
- R** Rural Life Museum events at the Abbey Barn (details from 83 1197).

### Are you on email?

If you would like an email reminder in time for Conservation Society events, please send a quick message to [terry.carmen@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:terry.carmen@tiscali.co.uk) to give him your address.

## Officers for 2007

chairman	John Brunsdon	83 1283
vice-chair	Ian Rands	85 0509
treasurer	Dennis Allen	83 2214
secretary	Janet Morland	83 5238
trees	Alan Fear	83 3185
footpaths	Nathan Pritchard	0775 221 3128

committee: Ena Allen, Neill Bonham, Roy Coles, Bill Knight, Adrian Pearse, Neil Stevenson, Martyn Webb

The newsletter is published four times a year, edited by Jim Nagel 83 3603 [editor@glastonburyconservation.org.uk](mailto:editor@glastonburyconservation.org.uk)

New members welcome: subs only £5 a year

Glastonbury Conservation Society, founded in 1971 in appreciation of our built and natural environment.

