

Chairman's report to AGM 2001 *John Brunsdon*

Happy new year! 2001 was again an active year for Glastonbury Conservation Society. Your committee met regularly to discuss items and comment to Mendip District Council on planning issues. We met with the Antiquarian Society at public meetings. Quarterly newsletters were delivered to members even if sometimes a little late (we are always looking for interesting articles, please). We celebrated our 100th issue this summer.

Our guidebook *Glastonbury Footpath Walks* continues to sell well, and we continued to keep the definitive public footpaths clear under the Parish Scheme. This proved extra hard work after the paths had been closed due to foot-and-mouth disease, and Alan Fear is still looking for more helpers.

A day-long exhibition about the EU's Single Regeneration Budget was held at St Dunstan's School and we had a photographic display of our work. A grant from the Community Chest helped us survey and maintain amenity trees about the town.

Tree-planting continues as our major activity. We welcomed and assisted the creation of the new Street Society. Your chairman was awarded an MBE for services to conservation in Glastonbury, and Bill Knight got a prestigious award for his quality fish and chips.

Joe Joseph represents us at the Mendip-sponsored Environmental Forum, which Alan Gloak chairs. I represent the society on Mendip's conservation advisory committee and am the Civic Society's representative on the Somerset Buildings Preservation Trust.

[Update: Joe has to give up this seat due to a new job — can anyone volunteer to represent us? It's an interesting forum.]

I thank the committee members for their support, especially the key officers and Ena Allen as newsletter secretary and John Morland as photographer and artistic adviser.

All may seem well, but we are an ageing society in need of new members willing to actively participate in a number of roles. We have tended to contract into a situation where a few key members run the society, and it would be better if more of the membership were involved.

We are an active amenity society, but we need to be more proactive in finding new members who would like to do something for Glastonbury. For instance, why not each member influence a friend or neighbour to join the society? Ask for copies of the newsletter to give them.



*Market Place
"redecoration"*

The Victorian listed building at the corner of Benedict Street, gutted by fire before Christmas, makes a sad sight. Police are investigating possible arson. The building—Heaphys department store until 1970—is owned by Malcolm Slocombe. We must hope its condition will allow complete restoration with minimum delay. Written on the boards is the same hope: "Grafton's Café is closed for redecoration—see you in 2002." >>> page 4

Annual meeting represents 165 members

About 22 members and friends attended the society's annual general meeting on November 30 in the Archers Way library.

Trees: Last year we planted 901 trees including cider apple trees and forest trees. This year we have planted withies and will plant more trees and hedgerows. Ian Rands thanked tree-planters for their hard work.

Accounts: The financial year showed a slight increase in reserves from £10,323 to £10,950. There are 165 paid-up members.

Officers: All were reappointed unopposed: chairman John Brunsdon, vice-chairman Ian Rands, treasurer Dennis Allen and secretary Janet Morland. All committee members were reappointed.

Other business—Flyposting: We should rip down illegal posters and send any address or phone number on them to the district council's enforcement officer. There should be one organisation responsible for cleaning up—at present it may be Mendip, Somerset or the bus firm.

Tatty flags: A member complained that old flags outside the Market House Inn make a poor welcome for tourists. John Brunsdon will see to it.

Arthurian centre: Two designers hope to turn the old Co-op building at

the top of the High Street into a King Arthur exhibition, having done a similar project for *Canterbury Tales*. Martin Lofthouse said this has been ongoing for two years. They need to raise £1 million.

Tribunal: A member complained that the Tourist Information Centre is very dull. However, many overseas visitors like it and it is a suitable use for the Grade I listed building.

Morlands site: Stephanie Morland emphasized the need to rescue and preserve memorabilia still on the site. John Brunsdon is on the steering committee.

Oaks: Some oak trees on Butleigh Road are being strangled. A Street project, this will be referred to Richard Clark.

John Brunsdon then talked about going to Buckingham Palace to receive the MBE for his conservation work and showed a video of the occasion.

Accounts for year ending 2001 July 31 *Dennis Allen*

<i>Income</i>		<i>Expenditure</i>	
Opening balances		Postage	59.25
total £ 10,546.22:		War memorial	110.00
Current account	177.73	Secretarial expenses	20.20
Reserve account	45.38	John Morland expenses	15.58
Building society	10,323.11	Civic Trust	151.50
		Bank interest	0.29
Subscriptions		subtotal	356.82
and donations	913.04	Trees	5,760.96
Trees	5,383.28	Newsletters	303.00
Footpath books	180.00		6,420.78
Footpath grant	120.00	Closing balances total £ 10,950.34:	
Interest	228.58	Current account	177.32
	6,824.90	Reserve account	45.74
		Building society	10,727.28
	£ 17,371.12		£ 17,371.12

Tor fund gets boost

The Heritage Lottery has awarded £314,000 for conservation work on the Tor. This news is a big boost for the National Trust's appeal for the Tor. The lottery amount has to be match-funded; £100,000 must still be found.

Already work on the footpaths is nearing completion, with new seats installed as well as entrance gates on the east side. Work will continue at the western entrance to make it more suitable for disabled visitors.

The National Trust is now well placed to tackle major restoration of St Michael's Tower and the area around it. The appeal is still open, so please contribute.

Also, have you purchased your raffle ticket for the painting John Morland has donated in support of the fund?

Death of Cecil Hamilton-Miller

Cecil will be remembered as a quiet-spoken gentleman who practised as a solicitor in the old firm of Austin and Bath in Chilkwell Street. He was first elected to the old borough council in 1958; as mayor in 1969 he wore his full robes to climb the Tor for a meeting of the Druids.



On the committee of our society, he gave invaluable advice during early difficult times. He lived at Parkside, Bere Lane, later retiring to West Pennard and then to live near his daughter Juliet Smith near Norwich. He died at age 91 in early December, and his ashes are to be scattered in Glastonbury.

Many, like your chairman, have had cause to be grateful for his professional help. His pleasant face continues to look down from his portrait at meetings of the town council.

A walk on frozen Splotts Moor

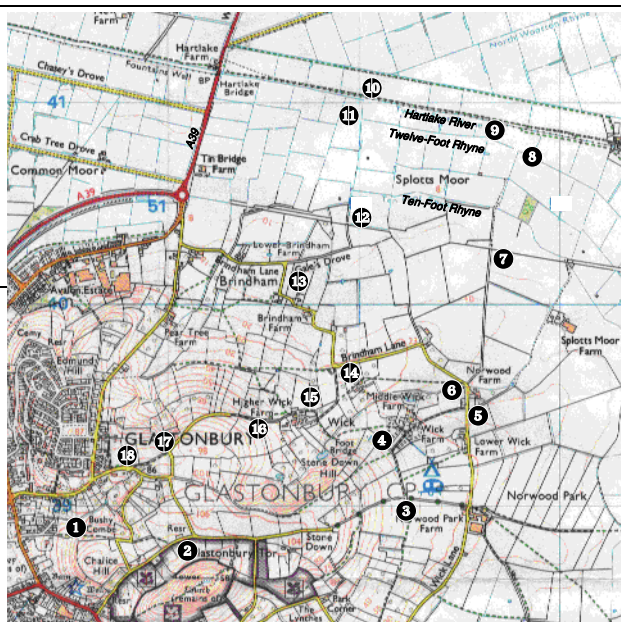
John Brunsdon

*Distance 4–5 miles.
Best walked in summer
or when ground frozen.*

Start from Dod Lane ①, go up Bushy Coombe, past the Tor via Wellhouse Lane ② and continue straight on down Stonedown Lane. Take the first left (a green lane ③, almost all the way down the slope) and just before the ancient oaks Gog and Magog ④ turn right along a public footpath through Wick Farm. Go left into Wick Lane ⑤. Then, just past Norwood Farm, turn right ⑥ down the drove.

Continue straight down this drove over the dismantled railway ⑦ straight over fields and a new sleeper bridge over the Twelve-Foot Rhyne ⑧ and a further field to reach the Hartlake River (which the OS *Explorer* map mistakenly calls Twelve-Foot Rhyne). Turn left ⑨ along the bank until you reach an obstructing rhyne with shutter control ⑩, then turn left 20 yards to a field gate. Go through the gate ⑪ and left along the rhyne with the Tor and Stonedown ahead. Recross the old railway line ⑫ to join Gales Drove, which takes you to crooked Brindham Lane (the continuation of Wick Lane); turn left ⑬. Carry on to Maidencroft Lane, where you turn right ⑭. Walk through the Paddington Trust farm ⑮ and up the slope through the oak avenue ⑯ (which our society planted). Where Maidencroft Lane bends sharp left ⑰, continue straight ahead into a footpath. Past the second stile you come to Wick Hollow. Turn right ⑱, bringing you into Bovetown.

Choose a good day, and you will have fine views to Wells with a real chance to see deer and birdlife. Use an Ordnance Survey map.



The role of Mendip's conservation team

The primary aim of Mendip's conservation team is "care of listed buildings and conservation areas by dealing

with them via direct action or to give advice through the development process."

This was the definition reached by Bob Ladd, Mendip council's services manager for heritage and conservation, after a fundamental review of the district council's development control services.

The aim is supported by national legislation to protect the historic environment, but delivering it depends on external funding and match-funding.

The conservation service is well regarded—as shown by consultations during the review. However, over the past two years the group's budget and staff time have declined.

Mendip has a rich heritage: in 1999 the district ranked 26th of all English districts in the number of listed buildings (Frome was 80th for number of listed buildings, and Priddy had the sixth highest number of ancient monuments within its boundary). But in terms of grant aid Mendip was at number 30 in 1999; in the past two years it is beneath the top 50.

Mr Ladd's report concludes: "As local resources decline, the emphasis on ... the Heritage Lottery and the Regional Development Agency will increase."

Our speakers—do come and hear them

***January 25**—**Richard Raynsford** has been with Mendip District Council's planning department since its formation in the 1970s, both as senior planner and as conservation officer (as well as a tree-planter!). He was involved in the work leading to the Street Conservation Area—hence the title *Street's distinctiveness*. This talk was recently well received by a large audience of the new Street Society. Richard has kindly agreed to repeat it for our benefit—don't miss it again!

***February 8** (note new date)—**Patrick Brown**, a university lecturer and chairman of Wells Civic Society, speaks authoritatively on *Why buildings are listed*.

***March 15**—Brig. **David Morgan** followed a distinguished career in the Brigade of Gurkhas with an equally successful custodianship of the Abbey. Much has happened, and he recalls *My time at the Abbey*.

***April 26**—**Michael Orchard** looks forward to hosting us at the *Chalice Well* gardens. There is much to see and talk about.

When and where

The above meetings are all on **Fridays at 7:30**. Other than the Chalice Well one, all these take place at St Mary's church hall, Magdalene Street (parking via Safeway). This is a comfortable, warm venue.

***Tuesday January 22**—Forum about the *Morlands site*, organized by the Street Society. Glastonbury councillor **Ian Tucker** will present his scheme. 7:30pm at the Methodist hall, Leigh Road, Street. (Postponed from the Jan.8 date given last issue.)

Saplings from Beechbarrow thrive at Sunnyside *Cathie and Alardus van den Bosch*

Nearly a thousand feet up above Wells, on the Bristol Road by Cleopatra's needle or the Pen Hill TV mast, live a charming retired couple under the shade of some magnificent beech trees. Pat and Tommy Todd of Beechbarrow have kindly allowed the Glastonbury Conservation Society to collect saplings from under their trees.

Ian Rands had arranged for us to collect about 70 small trees to transplant to our hedgerow in East Pennard. We were the last of the lucky ones, as more than a thousand trees have been replanted from Beechbarrow to places around Mendip.

Tommy, who was once a Grenadier Guardsman, and his wife Pat used to live in Whitstable, near Ramsgate in Kent, where Tommy's dad was known as Cockle Todd, having sold cockles from

his barrow there. Tommy had hundreds of relatives living in the area. About sixteen years ago to be closer to their son, his wife and five grandchildren, they moved to Beechbarrow.

Beechbarrow has a fascinating history. Around 1942, Italian prisoners of war came up from their camp near Wookey Hole (the present EMI site) to repair the stone wall alongside the road. Even after their release many prisoners decided to stay and work in the area. One such Italian loved the beautiful scenery around Beechbarrow because it reminded him of the seven hilltops around Rome. If one takes time to look one can count seven hills from there.

The Italian asked if he could make a statue with the leftover muck (cement) from the day's work—he had been a stonemason in Rome, and wanted to

mark the spot with a statue dedicated to Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers who were the legendary builders of Rome. The story goes that they were brought up by a wolf, and this wolf is what he sculpted there, which still stands by the road, on a tall Roman-style pillar.

So now when we plant our beech grove at Sunnyside, East Pennard, there will be a story to tell; maybe one day someone might tell the tale under the shade of a beautiful glorious beech tree. All thanks to the Todds: what goes round comes around.

As the plantations grow here, there and everywhere, tomorrow will show that people really do care and will share when there is plenty. With thanks to all who have helped us put our orchard back together, and especially to the indispensable Major Ian Rands.



An ATU student inspects damage to this black poplar before removing the tree guard.

Rare black poplars set free to grow *JB, JN*

Damaging tree guards have been removed from black poplars at Clyce Hole weir, on the river Brue halfway between Pomparles Bridge and Cow Bridge. The guards were necessary to protect the trees from cattle but were not checked to allow for growth. The work, by the Advanced Training Unit, took two days and enabled further pruning; trees should now recover well.

Our society made a bid to the EU's SW Region budget to fund this project.

Black poplars (*Populus nigra*) are Britain's "rarest and most splendid native timber tree." Only 2,000 to 3,000 remain, many near the end of their lifespan; in 1993 environmental scientists predicted the species would be extinct in 20 years. Reaching 100 feet in height, it was once as common as oak, a distinctive feature of lowland river valleys. But now the scattered remaining trees do not seem to

be regenerating from seed. So much suitable habitat has been drained since the 19th century (roots require dampness all year). Other threats are hybridization with non-native poplars and indiscriminate felling of "unsafe" trees.

This is a fast-growing deciduous tree with broad green leaves a bit like ivy. Flowers appear in spring before leaves: small yellowish-green flowers in catkins; predominant colour is their red stamens.

Traditionally, black-poplar wood, slow to burn, is used for matchsticks, Dutch clogs and Camembert cheese boxes. Folklore said the water dripping from hollows "takes away warts, wheals and breakings-out of the body". Modern herbalists use ointment from its flower buds to treat haemorrhoids, arthritis and bronchitis.

The *Telegraph* invited readers to help list all black poplars. This and other efforts to save it: <http://pages.eidosnet.co.uk/prod>

A tale of twins in the forest *Ian Rands*

About thirty years ago I came across an unusual sight in a forest in the Taurus mountains east of the Rhine. Several times between then and now I have returned to keep an eye on its progress. Last September I took my camera so that you might be able to share this phenomenon with me.

On the corner of a large plantation of ash and oak and beech, and by the side of a well-worn track, I spotted a damaged young ash sapling. It had been slit through from north to south, and also from east to west, and then bound up for the wounds to heal and for the tree to carry on living.

Now who had done this, and why? I had heard that children of families who lived and worked in the woods were, when small babies, passed through a split tree as part of their initiation rites, and that the practice was not uncommon. If you read Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* and enter a large forest, you will understand.

Was my tree, with its double split, used to initiate twins? The tree survived, as you will see by the photographs below. Did it bring good luck to the twins? When they die, will the tree die also?



Ash split east to west and north to south

Victorian department store gutted; police suspect arson Jim Nagel

Builders are currently working on the fire-damaged Heaphys building at the top of Benedict Street, carrying out burnt timbers and making it safe. Insurers, structural engineers and conservation experts will then have to decide about restoration work on the listed building.

A neighbour rang the fire brigade at 3:15am on December 6, and 44 men turned out with both engines from Glastonbury, two from Wells and one from Street plus a hydraulic platform from Bridgwater. They had the fire under control by 4:47am.

The blaze appears to have started on the first floor and spread upwards, the staircase acting like a chimney. Upper floors and the roof were gutted but the ground floor suffered surprisingly little: water damage and ceiling ruined but café fittings and plate-glass windows intact.

Grafton's Café had its kitchen on the first floor along with some seating, and used the second floor and attic for storage. Upper floors had been cheap flats in previous decades, but luckily were unoccupied at the time of the blaze or there could have been deaths. By good fortune the fire did not spread to the flats next door in Benedict Street, where residents had to evacuate — nor to the huge stock of second-hand books on three floors of the other neighbouring building.

Police are treating the fire as arson. Among other suspicious recent cases, firemen were twice called on January 2 to a barn in Godney Road. First they found burning bales of hay and put them out. Responding to another call a few hours later, they found the barn itself blazing and were unable to save it.



Heaphys in its heyday—note the curved glass and grand lamp by the main door.

Malcolm Slocombe (of Four Seasons), who owns the burnt Market Place building along with the adjoining one in Benedict Street and numerous other properties around Glastonbury, repaired upper-floor windows to conservation standards some years ago.

When vandals smashed the curved glass on the ground-floor corner, a reminder of the building's glory days as Glastonbury's department store, it was replaced with a compromise: three flat panes of plate glass. In the rebuilding, perhaps curved glass will be restored.

Heaphys department store—the name survives in mosaic tiles at the entrance—was still in business when I first came to

Glastonbury in 1970. I recall a half-flight of stairs leading to departments in an adjoining building, presumably the one in Benedict Street.

A Hong Kong family lived upstairs in the building in the later 1970s and ran the China Garden take-away restaurant. Among short-term uses in the 80s and 90s the shop sold oriental carpets. For a brief while the name Heaphys was resurrected as a wine bar until Grafton's Café opened two years ago.

Café vows to thrive again

Lynn Bastian (née Grafton), the café proprietor, in a letter to the *Central Somerset Gazette* on January 10 catalogues the vandalism, graffiti and other criminal acts that have plagued town-centre businesses. She vows to fight back and reopen as soon as possible.

In this fire, Glastonbury was lucky not to have lost its entire marketplace, she writes. As it is, 16 staff and weekend musicians lose their jobs, and local suppliers lose custom from the café.

"Grafton's had successfully rejuvenated a run-down corner of the Market Place. Instead of a thriving café with tourists enjoying the sunshine on our outside tables, residents and visitors this year will face a boarded-up eyesore in the very heart of the town for at least six months.

"If we as a town let the criminals win, Glastonbury will become a graffiti-strewn ghost town of empty and boarded-up shops, and none of us want that.

The sad thing is that the lawless element are a small minority in a town that has a very big heart."

Continental conservation: Bonaparte's battlesites Major Ian Rands

This autumn, while following Napoleon, I took myself to the battlefield of Austerlitz (known now to the Czechs as Plavkov). As you will remember: 2 December 1805.

The small bus which serves the surrounding villages dropped me off, with large-scale map, near the hill called Zuran, where Napoleon made his initial reconnaissance and declared his formations' "dispositions". Across to the southeast stand the Pratzen Heights, the key to the whole battle. Down in the valley below me is the Goldbach, the stream which separated the French forces from the allied Russian and Austrian armies. Consider my delight when I discovered that the whole valley had been taken over as a plantation nursery for forest trees and hedgerow plants. There must have been tens of thousands of them — all in little pots ready to be moved.



Behold, by the bridge which carried the road over the stream, a large sign-board saying *Reklamaci*. The arrows pointed to the area known as the Santon, where Napoleon sited his artillery, and where I was heading with my sandwich.

At the top of the Santon hill is now a small white-painted chapel with onion spire and many memorial plaques to fallen generals, and to regiments of the French and Russian armies.

Also on this hilltop, where the commander of Napoleon's artillery must have been positioned, is one of Napoleon's guns, faithfully preserved by a local conservation society. Looking over the edge of the hill I could see the recently replanted trees and, near me up the surrounding slopes, a mass of dogwood and, most spectacular

of all, a thick fringe of spindle bushes with their fluorescent orange and pink seedheads shining brilliantly in the strong autumn sunshine. What a place to sit down and have lunch!

My next battlefield was near Ulm, in southern Germany not far from Stuttgart, where Napoleon thrashed the Austrians under Mack and took 30,000 prisoners. Oh yes: 14 August 1805.

In the more recent war against Hitler, Ulm was badly bombed but its cathedral was hardly damaged. The town hall (left)

was gutted but they have put it all back together exactly as it used to be, thanks to the survival of its architect's plans. The extensive medieval paintings on the outside walls have also been faithfully repainted, thanks to a comprehensive collection of photographs which survived. What a magnificent achievement.

