



Chairman's notes

John Brunson

Happy new year!

After a long dry summer we are having to put up with the inevitable rain. The dry spell enabled the Tor pond to be cleaned out, revealing its ridged stone structure. Now the rain will help the newly planted trees to a good start, even if uncomfortable for the planting volunteers! No doubt climatic conditions have affected the Holy Thorn as well. Several specimens flowered in late summer instead of Christmas.

In the High Street, several owners of property have expressed an interest to redecorate. The removal of hoarding from the Heaphy building will be a great improvement (they have been there for two years). The new building in Archers Way is also an improvement, while the top of the High Street looks much better with shops open again and a major redevelopment plan passed for the site of the old Co-op (used by Seriously Scrumptious cakes for the past two years). Innovative ideas are being floated—for instance, to reopen the blocked windows of the crystal shop facing into Church Path.

Extensive work is progressing at Northload Hall and should present a good first impression of one of our most impressive buildings to visitors arriving from the relief road.

Alas, Southfield House is demolished. Every effort was made by the Conservation Society to save the building, but without listed status and cooperation of the owners it was not possible to achieve, and part of the town's social history has been destroyed. New houses are to be built on the site (Bere Lane at the junction of Old Butleigh Road)—one fewer than in the originally submitted plan. We can only hope that they will be of superior quality to match that of Southfield House.

A major problem has arisen at the Abbey Gatehouse, where the front elevation has parted from the side walls. Traffic thumping over the road-calming platform is under suspicion and must be investigated. A £25,000 repair has taken place. Men working on the scaffolding stated that they were shaken by passing traffic!

And we're glad to report that Joe Joseph, our Man in Basra (newsletter 109), is back home safe and sound.



Before and ...

A number of buildings around the Market Place in our town centre are medieval with later shopfronts. Either side of No 2 (the hemp shop, In Harmony with Nature), opposite the Market Cross, are medieval corbel carvings dating from 1470. One depicts a man's face—with toothache? The other depicts a boy and girl holding hands and known as the Betrothal Couple.

In 1978 our society campaigned to restore this corbel sculpture. It was flaking badly, having been painted, allowing water penetration and resultant damage. The repair work was achieved with small grants and donations. The late Helene Koppejan was particularly generous. And around 40 years ago the Pike family, who still own the property, themselves paid for work on the corbels.

Sadly, during the summer of 2003 the female figure lost her arm. This was almost certainly the result of vandalism,

A fresh embrace for the Betrothal Couple

Summer vandals broke an arm, and we are giving a hand to repair it *JB*

... after vandals



whereas previous damage was due to weather. Now that closed-circuit television has been installed, it seemed right to think about repairing the damage. To quote Russell Lillford, the county conservation officer for historic buildings, "These figures are important."

Quotations for repair have been sought along with pledges of grant aid. Mendip, county and town councils have all agreed to support financially, so we are off to a good start! The town council is already committed to a restoration of the Market Cross as a tercentenary project, 2005 being 300 years since Queen Anne granted a charter of borough status to Glastonbury.

The Betrothal Couple is much admired by residents and visitors alike that love Glastonbury. If you would like to help financially with this worthwhile conservation project, please send your donation to the treasurer or chairman.

Inspector approves 7 houses at The Hollies

Seven new houses are to be built at the top of the High Street, on the disused tennis courts belonging to The Hollies, 1 Bovetown. A government planning inspector supported an appeal by the applicant, Mr D Atkinson, on Christmas Eve. The local planning authority had previously rejected the scheme.

This is a precis of his decision:

The inspector noted that the site is in a distinct part of the town centre and prominent in views from the High Street. He noted also that the Conservation Area is of mixed character and development next to the site is relatively dense, with significant variety in size and type of buildings.

He took the view that the three-storey element of the proposal would provide variety and interest in this important location and would be consistent with the

existing neighbourhood. Most of the new houses would be near the pavement, like nearby buildings; although modern in style, their scale would be in keeping with their surroundings.

A few trees would be felled but the proposal has been carefully arranged to keep trees that are important to the character of the area.

The listed boundary wall, he said, has been realigned in recent times and removing parts of it will not harm the special interest of the listed building. The proposed iron railings to replace a fence along the top of the wall would be a considerable improvement.

The 11 on-site parking spaces are sufficient, he said, given the town-centre location. The inspector decided that as the

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Architect's photomontage gives an idea of what we will see from the top of the High Street

John Cannon and the church *Adrian Pearse*

John Money, a professor at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, is working on an academic edition of the memoir of John Cannon (1684–1744), and while engaged in research in the UK was able to shed light on religious aspects of this most unusual man at his lecture in St John's Church on October 31.

Cannon's memoir is overwhelmingly secular in content, and perhaps of greater interest because of this, but he could not dismiss the context of his life and times: religious and political upheaval for the 200 years up to his death had touched every town, village and family in the land.

Cannon was intimately involved in the religious and political turmoil around him at its lowest and most basic level, whether at Lydford or Glastonbury, yet as a result of his thorough grounding in both historical and religious literature he was able to view events around him in a way very few of his peers could match. He could consider circumstances from his knowledge of the Reformation, yet had to make decisions affecting himself, his family and neighbours which in the religious ferment of his times could have far-reaching and unpredictable consequences.

John Cannon had mastered the Bible in both English and Latin by the age of four, and when aged five was asked by Parson Jacob, at Lydford, "Who made you?" He replied: "God did, but my mother and father found the stuff." His reading grounded him in Tudor history and the Reformation, both in England and Europe, so that he came to regard the Anglican church as the apotheosis of Elizabethan reforms.

However, he had Quaker cousins and Papist neighbours, and must have been fully aware of the religious fanaticism displayed by zealots on both wings of the religious spectrum. He is sufficiently astute to conceal as much as he reveals

about his religiosity; but there can be no doubt that his knowledge was profound, as displayed by the use of hidden religious symbolism in the layout of parts of his text. His beliefs embrace the mediaeval world of superstition and magic as seen in his acceptance of portents and his belief in the efficacy of the cure arising from the touching of his mother for the King's Evil by Charles I when imprisoned in Carisbrook Castle in 1648.

He was an authority on the Abbey ruins at Glastonbury and deplored their destruction, and his very sense of history could justifiably lead to sympathy with the Catholic cause, and he was indeed accused of such. He was also aware of the growth of Nonconformist sects and with the recent memories of the extremes of Puritan zealotry could deplore the extremist views of either Catholics or Protestants as threats to a fragile established order. Indeed it was less than a year after his death in 1744 that the crushing of the Jacobite rebellion finally set the religious course that England was to follow.

The importance of religion to John Cannon can be illustrated by an event near the end of his life. In 1741 he and his family were impoverished and in distress. On Christmas Eve he walked from Lydford to Bristol to sell some of his precious books, and raised 7 guineas. Rather than buy needed provisions from this sum, he spent 1 guinea on a 1539 Great Bible, the first in English, and then walked home in the snow across the then unenclosed Mendips, lost his way and almost perished. He had to have the book; Tudor history was to him an obsession.

In many aspects of his memoir John Cannon is keen to present himself as a modernizing man; his treatment of his religious dimension reveals just how complex a person he was.

Death of Barbara Harland, Lady of the Manor *JB*

Barbara Harland, Lady of the Manor of the Glaston Twelve Hides, came from a Bridgwater family to marry George Harland, who was clerk to the old Glastonbury borough council. It was said that George Harland and the surveyor, Stan King, virtually ran the town. The Harlands lived at Edgarley Lodge and later at Stonedown, where they kennelled the Chilmark Beagles and entertained at memorable puppy shows. They also bred elk hounds.

Mrs Harland sat on the magistrates' bench in the town and was much involved in local affairs. She deprecated what she perceived as unacceptable lowering of standards of behaviour, especially in front of St John's Church, where she regularly worshipped.

Her elder son, Andrew, a solicitor for Gould and Swayne, sadly died young in 1970; her other son, Philip, works for the Canterbury branch of Cluttons. She has four grandchildren. Barbara Harland moved from Stonedown to Chalice Hill Close after her husband's death and lived out her final years at Butleigh.

The lordship of the manor had once been a major thing in Glastonbury but is now obviously an honorific. The title previously belonged to Mary Maclean, who had inherited it from her father and lived at Chalice Hill House to the age of 100. When she died in the 1950s she gave it to George Harland, and at his death it passed to his wife and now goes to Philip. "It is something that I value, in the old sense of the word," he said. He frequently visits friends in Glastonbury and considers retiring here.

Eric King

Readers will be sad to learn that Eric King has died. He regularly attended our meetings and wrote a valuable series of articles listing the Glastonbury shops and their keepers back in his 1940s boyhood [*newsletters 95–97 and 99*].

Born at 67 Manor House Road in 1927, he won a scholarship to Elmhurst grammar school and then had a spell as a messenger boy for the GPO. In the Army he was trained in the communications section and afterwards he was employed as a telephone engineer locally. Eric then moved with his job to Bournemouth and then to Essex.

On retirement in 1997 he returned to Street, and helped in setting up the Street Society for protecting the heritage of our neighbouring town. A public-spirited and interested person, he will be missed by his many friends and relatives.

Dates for the diary

- ✱ **January 30, Friday**—*Climate change in the Southwest*. Illustrated talk by Dr Lesley Rowan, sustainability officer at Mendip District Council. **C**
- ✱ **February 24, Tuesday**—David Parsons on *the history of worship in Street* **S**
- ✱ **February 21, Saturday**—The Alice Buckton film from 1922, *Glastonbury Past and Present* at the Strode Theatre, 2:30pm and 7pm **-**
- ✱ **February 27, Friday**—*Conserving Somerset's landscape*. Illustrated talk by Phil Stone, countryside officer at Somerset County Council. **C**
- ✱ **March 23, Tuesday**—Stephen Gooch on *the restoration of ancient buildings* **S**
- ✱ **March 26, Friday**—*Ancient woodland and woodland flora*. Illustrated talk by Roger Martindale on behalf of the Woodland Trust. **C**

When and where

- C** Glastonbury Conservation Society meetings are all on **Fridays** at 7:30 at St Mary's church hall, Magdalene Street—parking at rear, via Safeway.
- S** Street Society meetings are on **Tuesdays** at 7:30 at the Methodist church hall, Leigh Road, unless stated otherwise (secretary Ann Webb, 44 2214).

Horde of the wings: the starlings moot at Westhay *Gillian Booth*

Twenty minutes before sunset. We're closing in on the Westhay bird sanctuary as the light starts to fade.

Against the fat ridges of low cloud we can pick out the first formations coming in with us, curving and swooping fast across the long low plains towards the landing site. Long strips of elegant cloud, short small clusters, fat woggles, huge clusters, all flying, flying in to give us the best sideshow in town: the gathering of the starlings at Westhay, one of the biggest roosts in Europe.

We park the car fast and hit the ground, running. There are people just standing, children, dogs, tall thin men in green wellies with cameras on tripods, dogs roaring about excitedly. Tonight, the birds have chosen a roost close to the footpaths, and as they come in low overhead, undercarriage down, towards a reedbed just to our left, we are already almost deafened by the noise.

Black and thickened with raucous birds the reeds and trees sway and sag. We walk around the edge of a large reedbed near a bird hide. The hide is packed with gawping

people, madly excited in a very English way. Children, demented with joy and the total absorption of adults around them, are happily dismantling reedmace and covering one another with huge wads of glorious fluff. The grownups, openmouthed to a person, inhale the smell of a vast celestial chicken shed and observe the squadrons which are coming in fast and low over the trees from every direction.

The roost, growing by the second, heaves and stinks and shrieks. Posses of mavericks fly sorties back and forth a few feet above the heads of the settling thousands, rapidly becoming possibly upwards of a million, birds. They rush from end to end, then suddenly curve up in black arches to fall back down again as one in parabolic curves, flattening out into thick lines, again and again. And then, for no apparent reason, several thousand lift up as one and one not only hears it, like a long low primeval moan coming down a very wide tube, one feels it. The air thickens and warms with a million chattering, screaming, shouting bodies.

Every afternoon before sundown this is the show. Do it.

Controversial planning decision

>> *continued from page 1*

proposal is in accordance with national and local policy, the appellant's offer to carry out repairs to The Hollies is unnecessary. There would be no issue of loss of privacy to neighbouring properties.

Footnote *John Brunsdon*

This planning application proved very controversial, with a great deal of opposition from local residents.

The Conservation Society's view was that once the site had been declared "brownfield" because of the existing hard-surface tennis courts, some form of development would inevitably take place. We supported the plans put forward as a good solution for the site, although we would have preferred no development at all.

Virtually all the criteria put forward by the architects Carlisle and Jessup and supported by the planning officers are those upheld by the inspector at the public enquiry. One is left to deduce that the rejection of the scheme by Mendip's Glastonbury and Street Area Board was not soundly based. Furthermore, would a more experienced central planning committee, less vulnerable to local pressure, have decided differently?

There is a proposal to return to a central planning-committee procedure that operated previously for 20 years.

Another controversy

Plans by Mendip Housing and the Parsons family to build new houses in the garden of 41 Benedict Street, which the Parsons own, and the adjoining area of trees between Safeway and Fairfield Gardens, are the latest subject of heated dispute in the community.

The winter birds of Summerlands *Freda Williams*

"Here comes Whitey!" (our jackdaw with lots of white feathers)—"There is Robin on that plant pot"—"The starlings are late this morning." These are some of our comments as we enjoy breakfast in the conservatory. In living at Summerlands on Wearyall Hill for nearly 34 years, we have seen over 50 species of birds in the garden, ranging from the usual blackbirds, greenfinches, dunnocks, wrens, great tits, blue tits and coal tits, house sparrows (few and far between these days, and seasonal too), collared doves and wood pigeons, to the less common but still fairly frequent visits of blackcaps, goldfinches and great spotted and green woodpeckers, to rarer sightings of bullfinches, siskins, bramblings, goldcrests, and one-time-only visits of a reed warbler, red-legged partridge, wheatear, whitethroat and linnet, and a blackbacked gull on the bird table. Only once have we seen tree sparrows, a tiny flock.

As I write, at dusk on a winter's afternoon, the starlings are beginning to gather, ready to join the huge flocks flying out across the levels to their roosting sites at Westhay and Shapwick. If I am in the garden I sometimes hear the swish of their wingbeats before I see them. Another delight when gardening is to be suddenly surrounded by the excited twittering of longtailed tits as they flit from twig to twig. They seem blissfully unaware of human beings nearby and, by keeping still and quiet, one can observe them very closely.

One cold frosty morning we noticed a small bright yellow bird in the cherry tree: looking through binoculars we identified it as a budgerigar. It stayed a

while but we never saw it again, an escapee almost certainly.

Recently I saw a huge bird alight in a tree on the edge of the woodland where it stayed for several minutes. It was a buzzard: we quite often see them soaring high above Wearyall, but one had never before landed in the garden. Other birds

of prey we see are sparrowhawks and kestrels, and in our early years here we watched a barn owl as it flew stealthily by on the lookout for mice and shrews.

Pied wagtails seem more common these days—we often see them negotiating traffic in High Street, and now they peck about beneath the birdtable. We hear the chiffchaff but rarely see him and have caught sight of a jay now and again. A fieldfare has visited, and last year I saw mistlethrushes having a bath on the lower patio.

Two years ago we were dismayed to see a heron fly up from our pond. The water was like brown windsor soup and no fish to be seen! We feared he had eaten the lot but some days later I looked into the still murky water and saw a faint shadow and thought it looked like Jaws our "saddleback" fish, and as the days went by we discovered that many fish had survived—only the gold ones had been taken. Another day I saw the heron standing just outside our back door, staring into the bird bath. Herons come regularly now but we have a safety net over the pond.

It is dark now, 4:50pm, but a robin is singing a merry song: they and blackbirds are the last to go to bed.

• *Brian and Freda Williams planted a small copse on the north slope of Wearyall Hill behind their house in Hill Head.*



Alice Buckton's silent 1922 film comes to local screen again Jim Nagel

A long-forgotten movie made here in 1922 is to be shown at the Strode Theatre on Saturday February 21. The film, *Glastonbury Past and Present*, is a pageant starring local people in the costume of various ages, and familiar backgrounds include the Abbey, the Tribunal, the Market Place, the Tor and Wearyall Hill.

It was made by Alice Buckton with one of the top directors of the day, who came down with a crew from London. At 59 minutes, it was a full-length feature.

"It must have cost some money," said Liz Leyshon, manager of Strode Theatre (who grew up in Glastonbury), "and I'm trying to find out where that money came from."

Alice Buckton (1867–1944) was the author and playwright and pioneer of new teaching methods in primary

schools. Archdeacon Basil Wilberforce in London persuaded her to buy the Chalice Well at auction in 1912 and she owned it until she set up the Chalice Well Trust just before her death. She

was part of the "Avalonian" movement of a century ago, attracted to Glastonbury by the mystery and history—contemporaries included Frederick Bligh Bond, who excavated the Abbey with the help of psychic writing, George Bernard Shaw and Rutland Boughton, who produced operas in the Assembly Rooms. Boughton and Buckton soon fell out, perhaps because they were in competition for the same pool of local children to use in their prolific plays.

Eager Heart, a *Christmas Mystery Play*, is Alice Buckton's most famous work, as mentioned on the memorial plaque to her in St John's Church. Unlike many seekers for spiritual meaning at



Glastonbury, she did not forsake the church.

Alice Buckton lodged the only copy of the silent film with the British Film Institute in 1939, and the BFI recently produced a new print of it. A pianist who works for the BFI, Andrew Youdell, will accompany the two showings at Strode. Both screenings will be introduced by Dr Tim Hopkinson Ball, an historian and

the archivist for Chalice Well, who is following up leads on the life of Alice Buckton [left]. He has found a playbill for a lecture by Alice Buckton about the film, saying she would be showing magic-lantern slides from it—possibly the very ones rescued from a skip when the old Tor School beside Chalice Well was sold in the 1960s.



The 2003 AGM: a need to recruit new members

Some 25 people attended the annual general meeting of Glastonbury Conservation Society on November 21 at St Mary's church hall. Minutes from the previous AGM, on January 24, 2003, were approved. The chairman, John Brunson, gave his report, and Ian Rands reported on trees planted last winter and plans for this winter.

Dennis Allen presented the accounts. Paul Branson suggested keeping more in the current account to reduce bank charges. Income from subscriptions is falling due to an ageing membership, and it was suggested that everyone should be asked to pay £1 per lecture.

Officers were re-elected unopposed [listed below] and one new committee member was appointed, Theresa Levell Clarke. Due to other commitments Alan Levett, John Egan and Andrew Bond

have resigned and were thanked for their contribution to the society. Alan Fear coordinates work on local footpaths, and Terry and Anne Carmen organise our meetings.

Alan Fear thanked John Brunson for use of his house for committee meetings and Anne Carmen for providing coffee for tree-planters.

We were informed that much-needed toilets are to be built in St John's carpark and (in answer to a question at last year's AGM) that the fire brigade cannot lend its equipment to remove chewing-gum from pavements.

An entertaining talk about Street in 1896 by Muriel Mudie was to follow the AGM, but she was ill in hospital. At short notice, two members gave excellent slideshows: Adrian Pearse on old local buildings and Ian Rands on tree-planting.

Accounts for year ending July 31 Dennis Allen

Income		Expenditure	
Opening balances		Walton Press label	105.75
total £ 10,788.61:		Hall hire	75.32
Current account	95.42	Secretary expenses	85.40
Reserve account	45.87	T. Carmen expenses	63.38
Building society	10,647.32	Major Rands expenses	32.91
		Photocopying	67.50
Subscriptions		Postage	22.12
and donations	1,013.22	Tools repair	8.84
Trees	4,737.91	Trees	5,256.97
Footpath books	120.00	Newsletters	236.40
Footpath grant	120.00	Civic Trust	265.00
Meetings	6.01	Bank charges	37.54
Interest	105.80	Transfers	500.00
Transfers	500.00		5,191.76
	6,602.94	Closing balances total £ 10,634.42:	
		Current account	113.19
		Reserve account	46.15
		Building society	10,475.08
			£17,391.55

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

The society welcomes new members, and subscription is only £5 a year. John Brunson, chairman 83 1283 Dennis Allen, treasurer 83 2214 Ian Rands, vice-chairman 85 0504 Janet Morland, secretary 83 5238 The newsletter is published quarterly, edited by Jim Nagel 83 3603

• It is much appreciated when articles for the newsletter are sent in by email (consoc@abbeypress.net) or on disk—it saves considerable typing time! Please ask your word-processor to save as plain text (sometimes called Ascii).