

Chairman's notes

John Brunsdon

The housemartens departed south in October from their collection point at the Tor, a little later than usual, and already the weather was colder.

We had an excellent afternoon at Glastonbury Spring Water's new bottling depot at the foot of the Tor, at Park Corner Farm, now fully operational. Many thanks to Ian and Carol Tucker for the look round, and to their son David, who manages the operation—and to Jan Morland (*page 3*) for recording the event on camera.

Somerset Life magazine did a Glastonbury article in which our society gained an accolade.

Winter meetings have been arranged (*see the list on page 2*). Please attend if you can, especially the annual general meeting on November 30. We need replacement skills: Dennis Allen wants to step down after many years as treasurer, having given most loyal service. We are sorry too to lose Neil Stevenson from the committee, as he finds his new career in education demanding. New younger committee members are particularly needed.

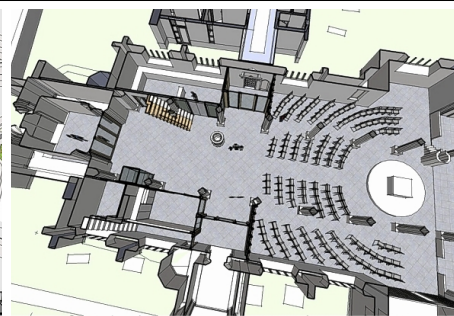
Congratulations to all involved in the now completed Sedgemoor Way development. The large building (inexplicably named *The Tanneries*) fits comfortably on what was an ugly gasworks site. Vehicles are accommodated off the road in a landscaped carpark. This, along with fresh tree-planting, has significantly enhanced this entrance to the town.

The Beckery Island Trust won its bid to the RDA to restore Abbot Bere's mill at Northover for a community not-for-profit use. We have been asked to help by clearing the small garden surround, and possibly some landscaping. Little of the medieval structure remains, but it is Grade II listed. In its prime, the mill's income supported the "poor little women" who lived in the almshouses where the Abbey shop now stands. It will be great to see this interesting little building restored at the town's entrance.

AGM 2007

Friday November 30
St Mary's hall, 7:30pm

After the business, John Coles takes us on "*A ride from Bath to Bournemouth on the main line of the Somerset and Dorset Railway*"



Change in the churches, old and new *Jim Nagel*

Both of Glastonbury's parish churches are proposing the most extensive interior reorderings that have taken place in 150 years. In both cases the idea is to clear away the fixed Victorian pews, leaving a flexible space that would allow a range of community activities.

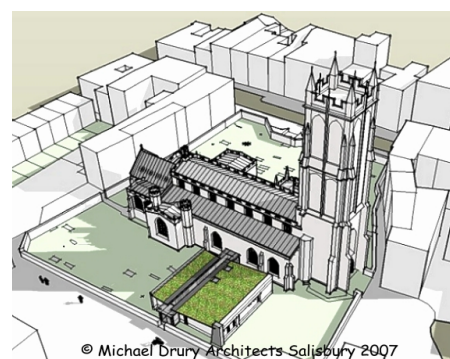
This would return the buildings to the open appearance they had several centuries ago. Cathedrals and most Orthodox churches have never had pews.

Traditionally, the rector (in both Glastonbury parishes that was the Abbot, and now the Church Commissioners) is responsible for the upkeep of the chancel, set aside for worship, and local people built the nave, the main body of the building. The nave was the town's largest covered space and was used for everything from festivals to markets till the Reformation and Victorian reserved-for-religion attitude set in.

St John's and St Benedict's PCCs (parochial church councils) have both decided that changes today are essential if the church buildings are to survive for future generations. Small congregations and other financial supporters cannot alone bear the burden of maintaining a Grade I heritage building; moreover, the church's purpose is for all in the parish.

After several years of discussion, architects showed proposals in October to church and public meetings. Detailed

measurements at St John's enabled computer-generated views from all angles. Pews would be removed and the floor made level throughout. The movable altar could be placed more centrally. Glass inner doors under the tower would let the great west door be open for a view down the whole length of the church. A gallery floor in the west end would have rooms for interviews and offices, with glass walls to let light through. A new low-level vestry outside



the north door—for robing, choir practice, storage and accessible loos—could have a turf roof.

Proposals at St Ben's are at an earlier stage. Acoustically, the building is better than St John's for concerts, and flexible seating would be an improvement over pews. Kitchen and loos would be made in the tower and present vestry.

It's happened before

Neill Bonham put a historical context to the proposals in his illustrated talk, "Five centuries of change at St John's", in the church on Friday (November 9). Neill has been part of St John's for 46 years, for many years as a churchwarden, and studied his predecessors' records going back hundreds of years.

The theme of his talk was how attitudes to worship and life after death have shaped what people do in churches and why successive ages furnish them as they do. The medieval church had many chantry altars with priests paid to pray for souls in purgatory—more was spent

than on modern insurance. The Reformation swept altars away, along with rood screens, frescoed walls and stained glass. Box pews and pulpits and organs and a gallery in the tower came and went, and John Cammell's tomb trekked to all corners.

The last major refurbishment was in 1857 by George Gilbert Scott (in the news as his St Pancras station reopens, high Gothic and hi-tech). His pews have stayed put but his pulpit and font and the organ, and Mr Cammell, have moved often.

Friday's talk was to about 60 members of the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society plus visitors. A fuller report will appear in the next newsletter.

Summer outings and talks

Butterfly walk *Richard Montagu*

Geoff Brunt had agreed to lead a walk in the Great Breach Wood area of the Poldens to show us the various species of butterflies that inhabit the area and explain about their behaviour, requirements and conservation. I was looking forward to this outing, but the weather had been far from suitable for butterflies and I spent the morning of July 14 wondering whether it was going to be worth the trip. Just before lunch the cloud began to break and a warm sun appeared. This was all that was needed.

Nine of us met Geoff at the Fountain Forestry carpark and were given a fascinating tour of the wood. The most delightful butterfly, in my opinion, was the *silver-washed fritillary*: a large orange-coloured butterfly, with black markings on the upper wings. To this is added a silvery colouration to the lower part of the wings, from which it derives its name.

We were able to contrast this species with the *comma*, a smaller butterfly but with a superficially similar wing pattern. However, side by side the size difference was obvious, as was the scalloped effect on the comma's wings.

I now know the difference between the *small* and *large skippers*, tiny butterflies that resemble Concorde when at rest and

with very different underwing colouration.

Geoff explained the work that had been done to create the right habitats for these various species and explained how plants had returned to the woods after glades had been formed—plants that were required for certain species to breed successfully and which had been lying dormant in the ground-held seed bank, waiting for the right environment for their regeneration. The *large blue* butterfly is now breeding in the area.

I have mentioned only a few of the species we saw, together with the moths and many plants. This was a fascinating and instructive walk, in good company. If Geoff can be persuaded to repeat it at some time in the future, I will be there again and I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone with an interest in nature and wishing to understand more about ecology.



Carymoor: Members toured the former Dimmer dump, which has been returned to nature. Our society helped plant some of its trees.

Carymoor visit *Debbie Fear*

The weather was disappointing this summer, but on August 4 the sun shone for our tour of Carymoor Environmental Centre. This is a working landfill site 13 miles southeast of us near Dimmer, where completed areas have been returned to nature and used for educational purposes. So successful have they been that the Somerset Wildlife Trust approached the Carymoor trust and is now working in partnership.

Our guide for the day was Julia Percy. She showed us first the trust's Somerset wildflower collection, planted in used tyres, all labelled and much visited by local schoolchildren. It's constantly being added to and it's hoped it will become the "county collection".

We toured a private wetland site alongside, where Carymoor volunteers helped plant the present reedbeds and built an artificial kingfisher bank. A kingfisher has already been seen in the area and there are high hopes that it and others will burrow and nest in it next year. We have been invited to help plant further reedbeds in the autumn.

We were privileged to view three deer come down to the water to drink as we headed on up to the now recovered landfill site.

Refuse is buried in clay-lined pits, where it will remain indefinitely. The methane gas it gives off is tapped, and generators supply the national grid. Any liquid residue (leachate) is filtered, aerated and returned to the nearby river—actually cleaner than the river water. The area of completed landfill is sown with grass and wildflower seeds and becomes a wildlife haven.

We spotted some trees that we had planted experimentally in old tyres some years ago. Although healthy, they have been kept in check by grazing deer.

About 150 lorries a day empty their contents at Carymoor. The Carymoor trust does great work, but we must all think

Autumn and winter dates for the diary

- ✱ **November 27**—*The portable antiquities scheme in Somerset*: Naomi Payne ... S
- ✱ **November 30**—Glastonbury Conservation Society AGM, then *A ride from Bath to Bournemouth on the main line of the Somerset and Dorset Railway*: John Coles ... C
- ✱ **December 7**—*Neolithic structures at Walpole (Pawlett)*: an illustrated talk by Charles and Nancy Hollinrake, archaeologists ... A
- ✱ **December 12**—*Reflections on serving the National Trust for a third of its history*: Tom Burr, MBE, who worked at Westminster and Stourhead ... W
- ✱ **December 14**—*From Austria to Zimbabwe via Outer Mongolia—by rail*: Graham Vincent. In the council chamber at Glastonbury Town Hall ... C
- ✱ **January 9**—*Thales, the international company working for Britain*: illustrated talk by Ian Walkerdine, marketing manager ... W
- ✱ **January 18**—*Regency Glastonbury—contemporary descriptions and views*: an illustrated talk by Neill Bonham ... A
- ✱ **February 13**—*Being mad in Wells, 1838–2008*: Dr Lavinia Byrne talks about the care of the mentally ill and in particular about the old Mendip Hospital ... W
- ✱ **February 15**—*The 18th-century Glastonbury spa*: Adam Stout, researcher ... A

Where and when

- C** Conservation Society meetings are on **Fridays** at 7:30 at St Mary's church hall, Magdalene Street (parking at rear, via Morrisons), unless stated otherwise.
- A** Antiquarian Society meetings are on **Fridays** at 7:30 at the Library, Archers Way, unless indicated otherwise.
- W** Wells Civic Society meetings are on **Wednesdays** at 7:30pm in the Wells Museum, Cathedral Green (visitors £1). (secretary Kim Robinson, 01749 68 9037)
- 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 to give him your address.

about the amount of rubbish we throw out. By 2020 there will be no more landfill sites available in this country. What will we do then?

Our walk finished back at the environmental centre, which is a “green” building powered by its own wind turbine. We ate our picnic on the veranda of the adjacent cob house, a pleasant end to a very enjoyable day. Thanks to Julia Percy, our tour guide, and to Alan Fear for arranging the event.

The relics of Abbot Whiting

Adrian Pearse

Richard Whiting, as Abbot of Glastonbury 1525–1539, was one of the great magnates of the land, with a seat in the House of Lords, palatial residences, and a retinue of at least 100 when travelling. With his execution on 15 November 1539 came the dispersal not only of his remains but also of his numerous personal possessions.

Dr Tim Hopkinson-Ball explained to the Antiquarian Society and visitors on October 5 the background to the Roman Catholic cult of relics. They are classified into three groups. Primary relics are the physical remains of a saint; secondary relics are clothing and personal possessions; and tertiary relics are items that were in contact with the saint. Relics are normally sealed in a tamper-proof reliquary, ideally with documentary authentication, though many depend on tradition alone.

Various secondary relics associated with Richard Whiting have existed, though in most cases there is no real connection. The well known chair in the Bishop’s Palace at Wells could have come from Glastonbury, but the pall in St John’s Church has nothing to do with him. Another chair at Kings Weston has the initials “RW” incorporated in the



The watch and ring, now lost, said to have been Richard Whiting’s. The watch was made a century too late.

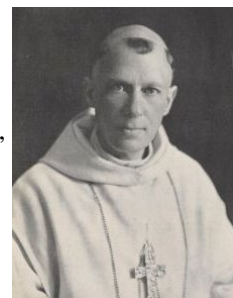
panelling, probably merely a coincidence. There is no way to confirm that a spoon at Stonyhurst belonged to Whiting, similarly a pewter plate. A pottery dish formerly at Taunton is now lost, as is the watch attributed to him, which was in fact made in the 1630s.

Genuine relics include a small repayment slip for £10 in the Somerset Record Office, and part of Whiting’s bed from the Abbot’s Lodgings, which during the 19th century was at Chilton Priory as part of the Stradling collection, and subsequently at Aston Hall Museum at Birmingham; it cannot now be traced.

Primary relics of Whiting soon became significant, as by the 1580s he was venerated in Rome, and interest grew in the 19th century; he was beatified in 1895. Although the elderly Abbot’s body had been dismembered on execution—his head was placed over the Abbey gate and quarters displayed at Wells, Bath, Ilchester

and Bridgwater—bones from a grave discovered in the retroquire of the Abbey ruins during the excavations begun in 1908 by the architect Frederick Bligh Bond were “revealed” by “automatic writing” to be those of the martyred Abbot, collected and deposited there by the faithful.

Bond did not mention the find in his official excavation report, though a contemporary plan shows the location of the discovery. He sought the opinion of a surgeon, who considered that the degree of damage to the bones was consistent with the process of quartering. He presented most of the bones with an affidavit concerning their discovery in 1910 to Dom Aelred Carlyle, the Anglican Abbot of Caldey; in 1928 they were moved to Prinknash Abbey, where in the 1990s they were stored in a chocolate box (bizarrely, the brand was Black Magic).



Abbot Aelred Carlyle

Unfortunately the context of the original discovery has been destroyed, and the remains of the “coffin” containing them lost, and detailed forensic examination has not been permitted. It is almost certain that the bones are not genuine, Dr Hopkinson-Ball said.

Modern architects 60 years on *Stephanie Morland*

CIAM, Docomomo, Mars: What are these organizations? Who are they for?

They’re all about architecture, and who it’s for and what it can and should do for us. They’re all involved with the language of architecture to achieve a physical environment enriching for us all, through such means as recording, conservation and promotion of ideas, methods of building construction and so on, around the world.

CIAM is the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne. Docomomo stands for Documentation and Conservation of Modern-Movement Buildings and Sites. And Mars is the Modern Architecture Research group. The first two are international organizations with active UK branches. CIAM was founded in 1928, Docomomo in 1989.

In September I went to a 60th-anniversary celebration of CIAM’s sixth congress, the first postwar congress, to which architects and planners came from all over the world, to develop and record their contribution to rebuilding it. Le Corbusier was one of them, among all the architects well known to us then.

And where did they all converge in September 1947? At Bridgwater Arts Centre, of course—where else? The “class photo”, 100 or so of them, was taken in the Bristol Aeroplane Company factory—which,

appropriately, was then producing aluminium temporary housing. The arts centre was hardly big enough for the group.

And where was our 60th-anniversary gathering? At the same arts centre, of course!

As conservation is involved, of modern architecture yes, I thought this might still interest our Conservation Society. We have at least two examples of modern architecture in Glastonbury: the “Bauhaus” building on the Morlands site, dating from the early 1930s, and the houses designed by Jack Hepworth in the 1960s round the top of Bushy Coombe.

His impressive, and modern, warehouse building for Morlands, near the surviving “Bauhaus” building, was unfortunately demolished in 2005.



One of the modern Hepworth houses in Wick Hollow, seen from across the coombe



The last in the series of summer walks arranged by Ian Rands took us to the new Glastonbury Spring Water bottling plant at Park Corner Farm, on the southeast slope of the Tor. Ian Tucker showed us the borehole that collects water flowing to the White Spring on the other side of the Tor, and the eco-friendly new buildings for purifying and bottling the water.

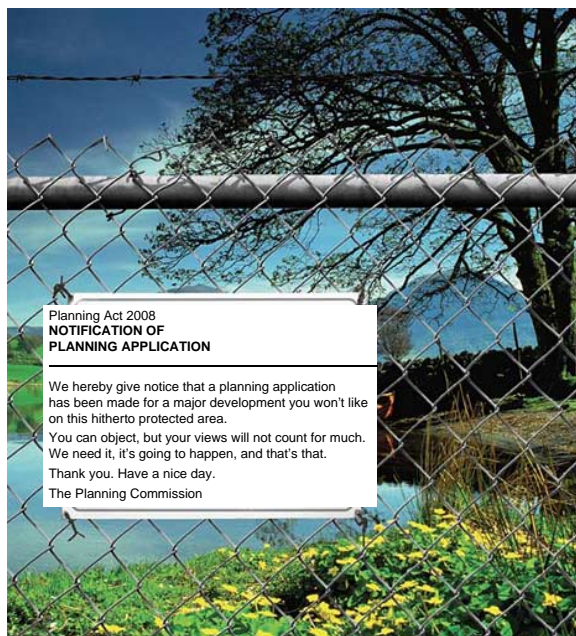
Civic Trust fights loss of local voice

Major new developments including nuclear power stations and airport runways, not to mention roads and housing projects, could soon be forced through as part of a major overhaul of planning procedures.

The Planning Reform Bill, announced in the Government's legislative proposals in the Queen's Speech on November 5, is a "developers' charter" that will leave affected communities with no meaningful say in how their area is developed, says a coalition of civic, social and environmental organisations representing a total of more than five million members.

The Civic Trust—of which Glastonbury Conservation Society is a member—is part of the coalition calling on the Government to rethink its plans. The proposals, which follow the recent Barker Review of Land Planning, will have an adverse impact on the natural and built environment, the coalition says.

At a Parliamentary reception on February 7 the coalition will explain its views to MPs. The public can email its concerns to the Prime Minister from its website, planningdisaster.co.uk. More details at www.civictrust.org.uk; see Campaigns page.



A coalition poster against the Planning Reform Bill: "It's going to happen and that's that," says the mock notice about a planning application to "develop" a green site.

Abbey and Abbey Barn in brief

■ **The Abbey** is cataloguing and scanning the records of the Raleigh Radford excavations in the 1950s, on loan from the English Heritage archives in Swindon. Would you like to volunteer to help with the work?

■ A pre-Christmas craft fair—ideas for gifts—runs at the **Rural Life Museum** from Nov 24 to Dec 16. Traditional Somerset recipes cook on the Victorian range on Dec 1; medieval Christmas fare on Dec 15.

Magdalene almshouses go to church *JN*

The 13th-century almshouses off Magdalene Street are to be given to Bath and Wells diocese by Mendip Housing, which nearby has emptied the hostel-type Magdalene Close flats—built in the former almshouse gardens by the old borough council in the 1960s—for redevelopment.

The Quest Community Trust leased the almshouses from Mendip from 1993 until dissolving last year. An offshoot group, Friends of St Margaret's, still keeps the adjoining chapel open day-to-day, under the auspices of St Benedict's Church, which has responsibility for the ancient chapel simply because it lies within the parish boundary, but has no resources to maintain it.

Mendip did restoration work on the old almshouses in 1993 before the lease to Quest. A new project to use them is being planned.

Young energy rallies for the building of Bridgwater *Bernice Lashbrook*

We are all familiar with the problem of engaging young people in local projects. However, there is a great deal of truth in the cliché "if you don't ask, you don't get". Well, we asked and we got!

Early in 2006, the Bridgwater civic society and other local organisations were invited to participate with the Bridgwater Arts Centre in bidding for Heritage Lottery funding. The bid won, the society embarked upon "The Building of Bridgwater" project.

The plan involved providing and mounting blue plaques on buildings and at sites of historic importance, updating existing interpretation boards and commissioning new ones. Research needed to be done, drawings for the proposed plaques prepared and much else besides. We approached Bridgwater College and young student volunteers came forward to help, bringing energy and genuine interest to

whatever they were asked to do.

This was not a one-off project. 2007 marks the 350th anniversary of the death of Robert Blake, "the father of the

English navy", born in Bridgwater. He was one of Cromwell's naval generals. As part of this year's programme of events some of those same students produced two films about Blake. On their own initiative they applied for and were granted funding; they mastered the equipment to film at Blake-related sites and arranged the printed publicity and all the other aspects of putting together a project of this kind. As a result they engendered an interest and support from fellow students and friends aged 14 to 19 and

the wider community. These films were screened by September. The students have also been supportive of many other events in and around the town.

The society is now publishing a book illustrating the plaques installed,

containing some of the broader historic facts unearthed when wording for the plaques was being considered. Again Bridgwater College students are helping us to achieve this. It has been heartening to work with young people who have rewarded us with hard work, enthusiasm and their fresh ideas.

You can see the work on the society's website, bridgwatercivic.org.uk.

Ancient mill

One blue plaque is in Blake Street, formerly Mill Street, on a building that was once Bridgwater's mill. "Situated over a main watercourse, it has survived in different forms at this site for over 800 years at least," said Siobhan Wilson. "In its early days, it would have been used to grind grain for feeding the townsfolk."

"In James II's time it was used to pump water for the town's piped supply at the High Cross in Cornhill; in Victoria's time it was a sawmill."

A decade ago the old mill caught fire, ruining plans to convert it to an extension to the Blake Museum. It now languishes as a forlorn listed building in the care of Sedgemoor council.

• *Bernice Lashbrook is secretary of Bridgwater and District Civic Society.*



Miles and Alex, two of the young volunteers with Bridgwater and District Civic Society by the town-centre statue of Admiral Blake