

GLASTONBURY CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Newsletter 117

www.glastonburyconservation.org.uk

2005 November–December

Chairman's notes

John Brunsdon

Tree man moves

David Colman, Mendip council's trees officer for the past 20 years, is leaving to take up a new post at East Devon district council. This is a larger authority, and David will be part of an environmental team. The change comes at a good time for his children's schooling. He will commute at first, but hopes to move soon to near Sidmouth. It has been a pleasure to cooperate with such a skilled and conscientious officer, and we wish him and his family well.

Hollies refurbishment

At last the Grade 2 listed building known as The Hollies has had an overdue redecoration inside and out. This significant late-Georgian house was until recently used by Millfield school as a boarding house.

It stands on an important site at the bottom of Bovetown, which was the medieval route to Wells. Archaeologists found evidence that confirms human settlement at Glastonbury in prehistoric times. They also found Anglo-Saxon features of a sort that can give radiocarbon dates—which is actually quite rare (*see page 4*).

Dr Bill Pinneger lived here in the 1950s and 1960s and ran his surgery from the premises in the days before the health centre. Dr Pinneger was a slightly built man with a glass eye. This commanded great respect from children, since he could "look" in two directions at once! He began practice on a motorbike and retired driving a large Humber saloon. Once he slipped and broke his thigh on the lias-slab floor. He nevertheless completed the surgery and then called an ambulance.

Bushy Coombe path

A further grant of £2,500 has been awarded to the Conservation Society from the county council's Community Access fund to upgrade the footpath up Bushy Coombe. This work has now been carried out—so this popular route to the Tor can now be used winter and summer alike. Caines of North Brewham is the contractor, and we are indebted to Rory Weightman as landowner for his cooperation.

FRIDAY AGM December 2

A proposal to have Glastonbury listed as a World Heritage Site is one of the main items on the agenda for our society's annual general meeting on December 2.

The motion is that the Conservation Society support the setting up of a steering group of community organizations in Glastonbury to look into the feasibility of getting Glastonbury and the Somerset Levels to "tentative" status as a World Heritage Site in the coming review of potential sites in 2006-07.

The motion was proposed by Anthony Ward after conducting six months' research, and seconded by Nathan Pritchard. (*Fuller details on the Conservation Society website.*)

The chairman, John Brunsdon, has been in communication with the Civic Trust and county officers about the idea.

Glastonbury to become a World Heritage Site? Discuss at Friday's AGM

He reports that should this proposal be accepted, it would be usual to request Somerset County Council to action the matter. World Heritage Site status brings considerable kudos but not necessarily any additional funding or legislative protection.

The AGM will also elect officers and committee members for the coming year and is a chance for you to raise other issues of concern—so a good turnout of members is essential. The meeting is on Friday December 2 at 7:30pm in St Mary's Church hall, off Magdalene Street. There is parking at the rear (enter from Street Road, via the supermarket driveway).

After the business, Peter James is to give an illustrated talk about the Butleigh Revel of 1906.

Assuring the future at the Abbey *Vicky Dawson*

The trustees of Glastonbury Abbey took delivery of a Conservation Plan for the site earlier this year—the abbey ruins, the grounds, the Gatehouse, Abbey House—and for the collection of excavated artefacts in their care. The plan is the product of two and a half years of hard graft by a team of researchers led by Dr Jo Cox, of the Exeter firm Keystone.

A symposium on October 8 launched the plan. Among the contributors:

- Rosemary Cramp, a leading expert on Anglo Saxon archaeology, described

how Glastonbury's record of monastic life and teaching, unbroken from the earliest days of Christianity in Britain to the Dissolution in 1539, is unique. It is one of the few great monastic sites to have been subjected to extensive excavation.

- Dom Aidan Bellenger, of Downside Abbey, gave a presentation about the place of Glastonbury in the spirituality of the nation and identified five strands that might be important for the future.

(*The full version of Vicky Dawson's article is on the society's website.*)

Our monthly talks in crisis *Terry Carmen*

The Conservation Society runs a series of Friday-evening talks every month from September to April, usually in St Mary's Hall, Magdalene Street, with speakers on a wide range of interesting subjects.

Consoc members make the arrangements, including booking, advertising and catering. Usually a speaker's fee applies, or a donation in lieu. We charge a nominal entrance of £1 to help defray the costs.

Information about the talks is listed in the newsletter, and notices appear in

both the local newspapers as well as the Fosseway Magazine. Posters also appear in Glastonbury shops, library etc, and email reminders are sent to those who separately register their details (membership forms don't include email addresses).

Typical attendance is in the mid-teens; the last talk was supported by only nine persons.

The future of the talks is under review. If you would like to comment, the AGM on Friday 2 December is a good opportunity.

**Our
meetings**

(details, p2)

☛ **December 2, Friday**
AGM and
"Butleigh Revel of 1906"

☛ **February 4, Saturday**
Visit to RSPB
at West Sedgemoor

☛ **February 24, Friday**
Muriel Mudie on
"A family holiday in Street, 1896"

Talks in summary: a transformed tip, and local food to your door

Landfill and environment

Terry Carmen

Standing on windswept hills with spades and heartily heaving lumps of earth seems to amuse a band of the Conservation Society's members. These winter antics may seem deranged, but the actors are undeterred by weather or even soil composition, as long as they can stand back and admire the extent of planting achieved and enjoy hot coffee and (even) mince pies.

For the last two years the tree-planters' schedule has included work with the Carymoor Environmental Trust at Dimmer, near Castle Cary. The most recent project entailed planting very young trees ("whips") in a defined area on part of the clay-capped waste landfill site there. The planting was experimental, carried out using old vehicle tyres as enclosures, filled with compost. The results may have resembled a motor-racing pitstop, but the CET later won an award for the project.

The Environmental Visitor Center at Carymoor presents an overview of the trust's work, and its education officer, Graham Jennings, talked to the Conservation Society on September 30 about "sustainability and conservation from landfill".

The CET manages the 100-acre site, filled with waste over 30 years and then capped with the local blue lias clay. Wyvern Waste Services operates the whole Dimmer site, and the company has supported the CET's work to restore the capped area right from the trust's

formation in the late 1990s. The vision of a few keen and knowledgeable enthusiasts led to a highly successful and widely respected organization. It has become a beacon and example to others dealing with the results of massive landfill operations.

In its aim of promoting sustainability in the green and built environment, the CET boasts a remarkable timber-framed visitor centre set up as a genuine eco-training facility. There is a fascinating house built of straw bales, sustainable sewage treatment and clean energy-generation arrangements (wind and solar), extensive land-management and associated wildlife conservation, and many long-term research projects with a number of universities, and much more.

Of signal importance is the education programme run as part of the Somerset Waste Action Programme, with national curriculum elements at all levels. Getting the young generation interested in waste issues is vital. The cultural shift needed to care about and husband earth's resources can't happen easily: laws, regulations and procedures will work only if people are convinced; corporations will change their packaging habits more quickly if consumers are informed and engaged. Alerting people to the waste problem, its implications and solutions, is a worthy cause.

• Prospective volunteers for tree-planting can contact Ian Rands on 85 0509. For information about Carymoor's open evenings on the first working Monday of each month (4–6pm) ring (01963) 35 0143.

Farmers' markets *Adrian Pearse*

Roger White, a former pig farmer, outlined the growth of Somerset Farmers' Markets. The one held in Glastonbury on the fourth Saturday of each month is a thriving example. The concept originated with the Rio Earth Summit and Agenda 21 promoting local sustainability, an initiative adopted by local authorities.

Farmers' markets also arose in California, where special rules were introduced to permit sales of peaches and other produce to local communities. A similar system was adopted in Britain: it came to Somerset in 1999 and now operates in towns across the county.

The idea has been a great success and was particularly well timed. The remorseless rise of the supermarkets, public disillusionment with standardized produce, dietary deficiencies, the organic movement, and the relationship between food and the landscape have been popular media issues. They coincide with seismic changes in farming support. Many farmers have been forced to adopt

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A visit to wildlife in winter *Terry Carmen*

The Society has arranged a visit to the RSPB reserve at West Sedgemoor on **February 4**, a Saturday. The visit will start at 10am and last about two and a half hours.

The reserve is of international importance for its wintering wildfowl and waders, and has the appropriate international protection. The RSPB controls the use of the farmland so that it is used in the best interests of the diverse wildlife found on the Levels—not just birds, but flora, insects and mammals (otters breed in the area).

The RSPB needs to know numbers by January 20 in order to ensure sufficient guides and refreshments (coffee and biscuits). The maximum is 25 persons. Warm clothing is essential, plus wellingtons or stout walking boots (it can be muddy). You will want to bring a telescope or binoculars, although the RSPB has a few that can be borrowed for the visit. The RSPB asks for individual donations of £2.50 (discounted for RSPB members).

West Sedgemoor is near Curry Rivel. Detailed directions will be sent individually, and a Glastonbury rendezvous point will be arranged so that transport can be shared.

Please book your place by mid-January through Terry Carmen (22 4486 or terry.carmen@tiscali.co.uk).

Dates for the autumn and winter diary

- ✱ **December 2**—*AGM* of Glastonbury Conservation Society, followed by illustrated talk by Peter James about the *Bulleigh Revel of 1906* C
- ✱ **December 16**—Jerry Sampson speaks about "the construction of the Great Church of Glastonbury" A
- ✱ **January 20**—speaker to be confirmed A
- ✱ **January 24**—Paul Hodge, from Wessex Water S
- ✱ **February 4, Saturday**—Visit the RSPB reserve at West Sedgemoor (*see right*) C
- ✱ **February 17**—Neill Bonham and Jerry Sampson speaking about "the trail of the displaced carvings from Glastonbury Abbey" A
- ✱ **February 24**—Muriel Mudie talks about "A family holiday in Street, 1896" ... C
- ✱ **March 17**—On St Patrick's Day, Nancy and Charles Hollinrake speak on "the Irish monastery at Glastonbury" A

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-Morrisons.
- A** Glastonbury Antiquarian Society meetings are all on **Fridays** at 7:30 at the library, Archer's Way (chairman is Neill Bonham, 83 2657).
- S** Street Society meetings are on **Tuesdays** at 7:30 at the Methodist church hall, Leigh Road, unless stated otherwise (events secretary Barbara Cowell, 44 3397).

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.

Blocked pipe asphyxiated fish *JB*

Back in September, a large number of fish died in the lower round pond at the Abbey. Rudd were badly affected, but other species suffered as well, including some fine large carp.

The cause was a dramatic drop in water's oxygen level: it was down to only 6%, as against 70% in the new upper pond. A complex of factors brought this about: low rainfall, overgrowth and decay of weeds, possibly too many fish, and, to cap it all, a reduction of water flow from Chalice Well, caused by rocking-up of the pipeline.

The fire brigade made an emergency visit to spray and aerate the pond water. Two small pumps were installed for several days, and a specialist firm cleared away a lot of weed over and above what ground staff raked from the side. Ironically, this work had been ordered before the catastrophe started. County highways have been jetting the pipeline, and it was not easy to clear. In years gone by, the waterway ran open along Chilkwell Street.

Lessons have been learnt, and preventive measures will be in place in future. The visiting heron and seagulls did very well out of the incident, but it was a sad sight.

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alternative strategies to survive; farmers' markets are often a vital option.

Somerset Local Food Direct was established with a warehouse in Glastonbury, to expand the concept of farmers' markets to home deliveries. It has now more than 220 customers and a range of about 500 items. Using the latest technology to process orders, an efficient distribution system has been developed to support rather than compete with village and traditional shops, as well as providing a valued service to both customers and producers.

Roger White spoke to an evening meeting of the Conservation Society on November 4. Somerset Local Food Direct can deliver locally produced food direct to your door—order by Monday midnight for delivery on Thursday. Ring 83 0801 for further details, or have a look at www.sfmdirect.co.uk.

Mendip in Bloom

Glastonbury came runner-up in this year's Mendip in Bloom competition, beaten by Wells. Street was third, scoring a "highly commended".

The Abbey Gatehouse was highly commended in the public-buildings category.

Congratulations to all!



A rare photo of Gog and Magog taken in about 1903 by W. Tully when the ancient oaks were in a healthier condition than today—Gog, which looked the healthier of the two in the 1980s, seems now to have died. The two trees, at the edge of Wick Farm, at the eastern foot of the Tor, are all that remain of an ancient oak row. Adrian Pearse procured the postcard via eBay, the online auction, where it was hotly contested. He wonders when the trees first received their appellation; it is already in use on the century-old postcard.

Second-brood butterfly spotted on Tor is another sign of changing climate *John Brunsdon*

A freshly emerged clouded yellow butterfly, flying and taking nectar on the south side of the Tor, caught my eye on October 21. The clouded yellow—not to be confused with our native brimstone—arrives from the Continent in the spring, laying eggs on clover and vetch, to be seen again on the wing in August.

The progeny from this brood would die off at the caterpillar stage with the onset of colder weather. But because of our warmer autumn, some are reaching maturity and producing a second brood in October.

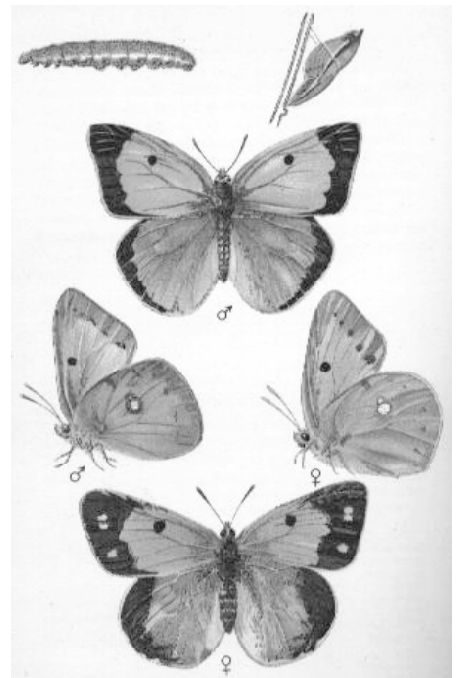
Other evidence of global warming is demonstrated by native species extending their range. The attractive speckled wood butterfly, for example, previously confined to southern England, now extends into the Midlands.

Several species of butterflies have suffered a decline over the last 60 years. We no longer have the large tortoiseshell, whose larvae fed on elm. The pearl-bordered and high brown fritillaries have become endangered, and the closely related silver-washed fritillary was abundant in Butleigh woods this year.

Butterfly conservation groups are actively protecting habitats. The rare large blue has been reintroduced from Sweden at two sites on the Polden ridge. The decline of the chalk hill blue has been halted, thanks to habitat management by stalwarts Geoff Brunt and David Lester and helpers. This year

record numbers were counted east of Butleigh monument on the ridge. They need horseshoe vetch as a food plant for the larvae.

This year I planted a butterfly garden and look forward to the results. The garden already attracts a range of species: orange tip, common, holly blue and, once, to great delight, the pale female form of the clouded yellow (*helice*).



The clouded yellow butterfly (Colias croceus). The wingspan of the male, shown top and left, is about 2 inches from tip to tip.

• Past pupils of the former St Louis convent school in Magdalene Street, which is being converted to retirement homes, have set up a website: <http://stlouis.atspace.com>

Seven houses are to be built at the bottom of Bove Town—planning permission was given two years ago (see Newsletter 110), and one of the conditions was an archaeological investigation. Charles and Nancy Hollinrake, consultant archaeologists who happen to live just across the road, began digging on July 27 and finished on October 7, with a team of up to eight people. This is their preliminary report.

The site was filled by gardens until tennis courts were laid down in the 1950s. The Hollies, the house at No 1 Bove Town, was leased to Millfield School as a boarding house until recently and will now become flats.

Some of the features discovered on the site show that Anglo-Saxon people were living in Glastonbury in planned streets, said Charles Hollinrake. "There was some planning; it was not just higgledy-piggledy."

We first investigated by means of a series of evaluation trenches in 2004. These revealed that the site contained not only evidence for medieval occupation, including boundary ditches, but also features and finds dating to the late Anglo-Saxon period—broadly the 10th and 11th centuries.

The survival of archaeology from the 10th or 11th century in medieval towns is rare, so the county council recommended a full archaeological excavation of the development area. This we did during the summer of 2005.

The finds are still being processed, and the phasing of the site is still to be completed, but this article outlines the main finds and occupation periods.

A very large number of archaeological features were recorded on this site, predominantly boundary and drainage ditches, gullies, rubbish pits and post-holes. The sheer density attests to continuous occupation from at least the 10th century.

The earliest feature was a pit from the Late Bronze Age, probably from around 1200 to 1000bc. A few features seem to contain Late Iron Age pottery shards (the features themselves may be of later date). Roman pottery shards were discovered, as residual finds in Anglo-Saxon and medieval features.

Anglo-Saxon occupation on the site has been proved beyond doubt. Property ditches and drainage gullies indicate that pre-Norman settlement was probably contained within regular, laid-out plots running off the west end of Bove Town. The Anglo-Saxon property alignments seem to share orientations slightly different from those of the 12th-century and later planned town.

We did not find Anglo-Saxon buildings. They probably

stood on the Bove Town frontage, not investigated during the excavation, and they were probably more-or-less destroyed when the end of the road was widened during the 20th century. Anglo-Saxon finds include a considerable quantity of pottery shards, an iron-link chain and an iron or steel pruning sickle used for harvesting grapes.

Medieval occupation seems to have continued through to at least the 16th century. Notable finds include a 10th-12th-century stone lamp, a late-12th-century silver coin of King

Roger II of Sicily (found in a 14th-century layer) and a number of very large pits whose backfill included many fragments of pottery kiln waste and rejected pottery shards—kiln wasters. These indicate the presence of a pottery kiln in the vicinity, although not within the excavation area: it operated from at least the 13th century through to at least the 15th century. This is the first unequivocal proof of medieval pottery production in Glastonbury.

No medieval building foundations were seen during the excavations. Again, these probably lay above the Anglo-Saxon buildings on the Bove Town frontage. During the 16th or 17th century, most of the property reverted to a deeply cultivated garden, although it was still divided into long, medieval, burgage plots with buildings standing on the street front. These buildings were demolished in the second half of the 19th century, when the area was landscaped and an orchard planted.

The medieval pottery shards appear to contain a high proportion of elaborately decorated glazed wares, possibly

indicating that the site was occupied by well-to-do inhabitants.

Dr Lynn Marston, in her PhD thesis [Leicester University, 2003] on the town, covering the years 1086 to 1400, suggested that this part of Bove Town, and this particular plot, may once have been occupied by hereditary abbey servants or customary tenants from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards. She further suggested that this area might once have formed the eastern end of the pre-Norman High Street area.

The 2004 excavations offer strong support to her theory: finds such as the Anglo-Saxon sickle and the Sicilian coin. The plots themselves also seem to reflect the same orientation as those on the High Street.

The Bronze Age pit is the first known prehistoric feature found within the town (about 1000bc). Along with the ditch from the late Neolithic period (2200bc) found at the Chalice Well in 1999, this pit does indicate that prehistoric occupation features are present and can be found in Glastonbury. ~||~

Bove Town dig confirms prehistoric human settlement in Glastonbury

Charles and Nancy Hollinrake



The archaeological team at work—in September, before the rains began—on what was the tennis courts at The Hollies, No.1 Bove Town. The mound at top right is hundreds of years of garden soil. Stretching diagonally from it to the bottom of the photo is evidence of a boundary ditch that lasted from as early as AD1000 until the 19th century, when the present big house was built and the Bove Town cottages were demolished. Wells Road is behind the hedge at top.



Architect's photomontage of what we will see from the top of the High Street.