

## Chairman's notes

John Brunsdon

**Appraisal** – The draft document from the Conservation Area appraisal and extension has been out to public consultation; it has been well received. Details are online at [www.mendip.gov.uk](http://www.mendip.gov.uk).

Thanks to Neill Bonham's collaboration with the manager of Conservation Studio, the approved "delivery agent", the project has come in under budget. Both the town council and our society agreed to be stakeholders in order to help with the funding. The involvement of Adrian Pearse was useful in the working group, as he had been involved in the recent appraisal at East Pennard.

The document not only lists what we have, our strengths and weaknesses and the extension details; it also defines "principal issues" where additional funding would be necessary. This could be a difficult to implement in the current economic straits.

Nevertheless there are "recommended actions" that councils could undertake individually or by working together, which would be feasible. If our society can help in, say, a further working group, we would be more than pleased to do so.

Do please visit the website or read a hardcopy from the library or Town Hall — you will find it most interesting. I hope to get hold of spare copies.

**Garden evening** – Don't forget that on Friday **July 30**, 6:30 to 8pm, we are invited to enjoy the gardens of Coombe House, the home of Alan Gloak and Colin Wells-Brown — always a delightful evening.

And congratulations to Alan Gloak on being awarded the MBE recently.



## Beckery chapel becomes a heritage site



A view from the mound back toward Glastonbury

The Beckery Chapel was formally opened as a heritage site on May 22 by Lady Gass, Somerset's Lord Lieutenant. The county council now owns the site, having acquired it from the Regional Development Agency.

Two interpretation panels greet visitors at the new pedestrian entrance, near the Tovey coal yard, off Old Beckery Road. (Road patterns have all changed in the Morlands Enterprise Park area, so the postcode will help with online maps: BA6 8NY.)

Lady Gass was herself involved in the archaeological excavation of the site by Philip Rahtz in 1967–68. Dr Malin Boyd also took an interest at that time. The present county archaeologist, Bob Croft, interpreted the site to visitors on the opening day.

Surrounded by wet floodplain, the small hummock at the west end of the Glastonbury peninsula became known as Beckery Island — possibly derived from "beekeeper's island" or from the Irish for

"Little Ireland". William of Malmesbury (c.1135) and John of Glastonbury (c.1400) record legends of a visit in AD488 by St Bridget of Ireland.

The monks of Glastonbury Abbey built the first chapel at Beckery sometime before the Norman Conquest in 1066. A small stone chapel stood there later, with a priest's house beside it. After the Abbey was dissolved in 1539 the chapel gradually fell down. John Collinson in the 1790s said ruins were still visible on the site. Then all traces of it disappeared.

John Morland rediscovered the site near his then-new tannery when he noticed parchmarks in the grass, caused by ancient wall foundations, and excavated in 1887–88. The 1960s archaeologists determined the floor plan of the chapel and house and the site of the cemetery with around 60 graves, mostly of men.

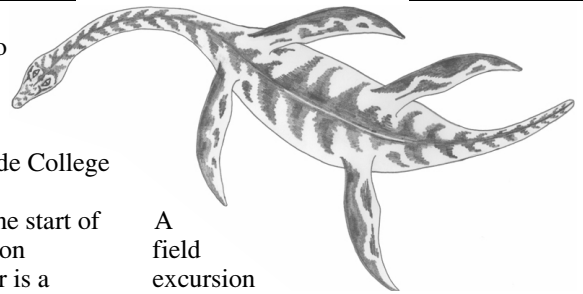
A voluntary group, the Friends of Bride's Mound, has cared for the site since 1995 ([friendsofbridesmound.com](http://friendsofbridesmound.com)).

## Street's sea-dragons and their discoverer: Strode seminar celebrates Hawkins' 200th

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Hawkins, who discovered the fossils of "sea dragons" at lias quarries in Street, is being marked by a gathering of geologists at Strode College this month.

A public lecture called "The start of dino-mania" is the first event, on Thursday **July 22**. The speaker is a world-renowned science historian, Professor Hugh Torrens of Keele University. He will look at the life of Hawkins and his contemporary Mary Anning of Lyme Regis, two of the pioneers of geology as a modern science. It begins at 7:30; admission is £6.50 (concessions £3.50; book via Strode box office, 44 2846).

The main seminar takes place on Friday 23. Experts will look at Hawkins' personal life, the fossils he collected (as they were at the time and as they are now), and possibly new vertebrate finds.



A field excursion on Saturday 24 will visit some local quarry sites remaining from Hawkins' time and a modern working quarry.

Fee for the full conference is £35 (£23 concessions) including the Thursday lecture. Enquires to Dr Leslie Noè at Cambridge, email [street.hawkins2010@googlemail.com](mailto:street.hawkins2010@googlemail.com)

Several geological societies held a similar joint seminar at Strode last summer, and the public talk then, by a Japanese professor, was declared "brilliant" by Susanna van Rose, who summarized it in Newsletter 130.

## Events in summer and September

**Archaeological fest** – A Festival of British Archaeology runs for a fortnight, **July 17 to August 1**. Bob Croft, the county archaeologist, leads a visit to the Beckery Chapel at Bride's Mound (see page 1) on Sunday 18 at 2pm, leading on into Glastonbury by foot. The many other events include King John's Hunting Lodge at Axbridge, Wookey Hole Caves, the Roman Baths at Bath, Charterhouse, Brean Down and Cadbury Hillfort. Details at [www.britarch.ac.uk](http://www.britarch.ac.uk)

**Open day at the youth hostel** – The youth hostel on Street Hill will be open to the public on **September 15**, a Heritage Open Day. It's an opportunity to go round a building that used to belong to the Clark family. Cream teas and a walk will be available as well as historical leaflets etc. The event runs from 10am to 4pm.

In another Street Society event, Elizabeth Oakley talks about her book on Clemence and Lawrence Housman and how they came to settle in Street. This is at 7:30pm on **September 28** in Street Library (also the society's AGM).

## Cycle Tour of Britain stops here in Sept

Glastonbury hosts the finish of the fifth stage of the Tour of Britain cycle race on Wednesday **September 15**.

Many of the world's top professional cyclists are competing, including Bradley Wiggins, winner of two gold medals for Britain at the Beijing Olympics.

Riders begin the Wednesday stage at Tavistock, cross Dartmoor to Ilminster, then pedal on to Curry Rivel, Langport, Somerton, Butleigh and Glastonbury.

Organizers hope to close the High Street for the whole day for a range of events and displays from all corners of the Glastonbury community and to attract thousands of extra tourists and visitors. Last year the two stages in Somerset and Devon attracted 250,000 spectators.

More information from Khush Jabble, 0798 991 1911.



Bradley Wiggins in the 2008 Tour of Britain

## Catching up on winter talks *Adrian Pearse*

### The late-mediaeval cultus of Our Lady of Glastonbury

Tim Hopkinson-Ball examined the cultus of Our Lady of Glastonbury at the Antiquarian Society's meeting on November 13. It flourished during the period from the Great Fire of 1184 to the Dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 and was an aspect of fundamental importance to the history of the Abbey.

So why has so little been heard of it? There were four main reasons: (1) prejudice against Rome; (2) the late middle ages were seen as less interesting than the earlier history of the monastery; (3) it is not usual to look at the ruins through the lens of religion; (4) the power of names.

The cultus of Our Lady focused on a statue or relic and concerned ritual observances based on a miraculous event. At Glastonbury, the Old Church of wood, the *ecclesia vetusta*, dedicated to St Mary, was not demolished as part of the Norman development of the site, but preserved and venerated. The fire of 1184, however, destroyed it completely. The replacement, completed by 1186 and built in an archaic style to echo the antiquity of the site, was a complete church in itself, while simultaneously a Lady chapel to the Abbey church. It was seen to be as sacred as the church it replaced.

But as a separate building it was inconvenient, so by about 1250 the east end was taken down and a "galilee" built to connect it to the great church, and containing an altar to All Saints. The galilee was a semi-private space, not merely a porch. In 1480 it was absorbed into the lady chapel: an altar blocked the door to the great church and small chapels were built to the north and south.

Beneath the original building Abbot Bere excavated a crypt dedicated to St Joseph of Arimathea, part of which was also built in Romanesque style. The floor of St Mary's chapel was raised to the level of the wall bench, making an elevated space and enabling a greater flow of pilgrims.

Within the chapel was an image of Our Lady, perhaps of Saxon or early Norman date. It evidently represented the seated Virgin with the Christ child sitting on her lap. According to William of Malmesbury it survived the fire of 1184, only blistered by the heat—and was thus the only surviving link to the old building. It was



The north door of the Lady Chapel in the 1860s shows the quality of the carving.

seen as a miracle, and the blisters evoked sanctity. In 1332–34 occurred a second miracle: the image moved. Abbot

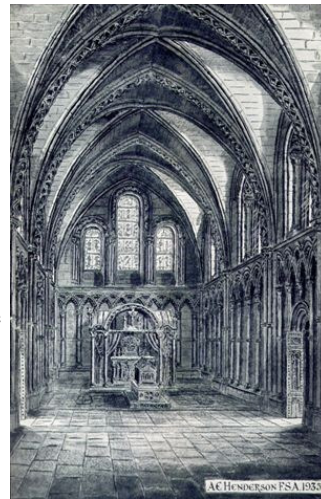
Chinnock clothed it in gold and gems, and it became a relic and reliquary in one; it was carried to be displayed on the high altar.

A monk in the early 1500s wrote that Joseph of Arimathea wrought the image at Glastonbury, giving the abbey pre-eminence as the earliest Marian shrine. The image was seen as not only miraculous but not made by human hands: it took on a new dimension and status as a unique object of pilgrimage. Its fate at the Dissolution is unknown. It could have been hidden or smuggled out of the country, but it was probably burnt at Chelsea in 1538.

Evidence of the liturgical life of the cultus survives. By 1333 eight secular priests served the Lady chapel, in vestments that signified their importance and status. By the 1530s there may have

been twelve priests, and the chapel had an inner precinct around it. Various sources show continued embellishment and gifts right up to 1539.

Thus the fire prompted the development of the cultus, which was of crucial importance to Glastonbury Abbey and the embellishment of the myths of its origin. As part of this process the Arimathea cultus was promoted, but it remained subservient to that of the Virgin, which was truly fundamental to the development of Glastonbury.



A reconstruction of the Lady Chapel (Henderson, 1935) and a photo looking west in the 1860s.



## 2,000 years of state and church in central Somerset

Religion is in our genes; beliefs lead to religion. All societies justify political power through divine authority—religion provides stability and central authority in large co-operative societies, said Neill Bonham at the Antiquarian Society on December 11. Christ's teaching in the Gospels brought a new morality based on the feelings of the human heart instead of obedience to supposed divine commands.

Christianity took tentative root in Somerset after the Romans had excised all strange religions following the Boudiccan revolt. By AD100 the first bishops were evolving and the first evidence of a British Christian church is from about 280, but it was followed by the Diocletian persecutions. After Constantine's conversion in 313, rules were established, and Christian symbols appear in villa decoration. In 380 Theodosius made Christianity the state religion.

Subsequent development was strongly influenced by the Celtic church, whose dioceses were based on Roman tax districts. Worship patterns evolved from the divisions of the Roman day, and the Eucharist was adapted from temple sacrifices.

### Glastonbury from the Romans to the Saxons

Glastonbury at the end of the Roman period was situated in a very prosperous area: moorland resources on one side, rich agricultural lands on the other and mineral wealth in the nearby Mendips, Nancy Hollinrake told the Antiquarian Society on January 15.

Furthermore, in uncertain times, the locality could be defended. The Brue was navigable; it reached the sea via the Axe at Uphill, where access was restricted to high water and protected by the Black Rock, giving a means of control. From here trade routes extended to the Atlantic coast of western Europe.

Glastonbury itself seems to have been well occupied: Roman pottery is found everywhere, and a Roman road passed through what was later the Abbey site, behind the Tor to East Street at West Pennard and beyond. Curving foundations found on the Tor make it very likely there was a temple here, and probably a villa stood before the abbey—high-status window glass has been found, and William of Malmesbury's description of the floor in the *Vetusta Ecclesia* suggests a mosaic or *opus signinum* floor surviving from an earlier building. There was also quite possibly a *hypogeum* (underground shrine or tomb) as at Wells.

Few traces of activity survive from the

Patrick's influence was significant on the Celtic monastery from the 430s, and Columba's mission to Iona in the sixth century consolidated Irish influence.

St Augustine arrived in 597, and in 635 Cynegils was converted at Dorchester. The victory of Cenwalh, a Christian, at Peonun in 660 brought Saxon control of Somerset, and after 664 and the Synod of Whitby the influence of Rome over the church became ascendant. King Ine granted estates to Wells and Glastonbury, and as landowners founded monasteries and minsters the framework for a parochial system was established. Endowments in the form of glebe, together with tithes, provided income for parochial clergy.

Under Norman rule the church was incorporated into the system of feudal obligations: abbots and bishops provided knights. Pilgrimages, purgatory, indulgences and chantries were all means by which the church amassed wealth, and the appropriation of parishes continued this trend to the benefit of central authority. Massive building schemes were undertaken at Wells and Glastonbury and continued until the Reformation.

post-Roman era, for the collapse of the economy meant the end of coinage and pottery production. But Mediterranean and Gaulish pottery and glass has been found on the Tor—perhaps it was occupied as an aristocratic stronghold—and at the Mount.

References to saints also provide clues. St Gildas was an important source active in the fifth century, and the life of St Collen mentions Glastonbury's connection with the Welsh. Of particular importance are references to St Patrick—though there is confusion as to whether they mean the younger or senior. St Benignus was a companion of Patrick, and Irish pilgrims would not have come to Glastonbury without good reason. There are also connections to St Indract and St Brigid.

Excavations west of the Lady Chapel have revealed an Irish church—characterized by distinctive projections or *antae* on the west and east ends—which is one of only three known examples outside Ireland. Dunstan's classbook survives, which includes the *Liber Commoneus*, or *Book of Cumine*, and the early-ninth-century Abbot Muca (a hypochoistic of Cuman) was Irish. Cormac's *Glossary* mentions Glastonbury as an Irish settlement in the eighth century. Thus it is likely that the Saxons on arrival found at Glastonbury a thriving Irish estate.

## Keep children busy at the Abbey Barn

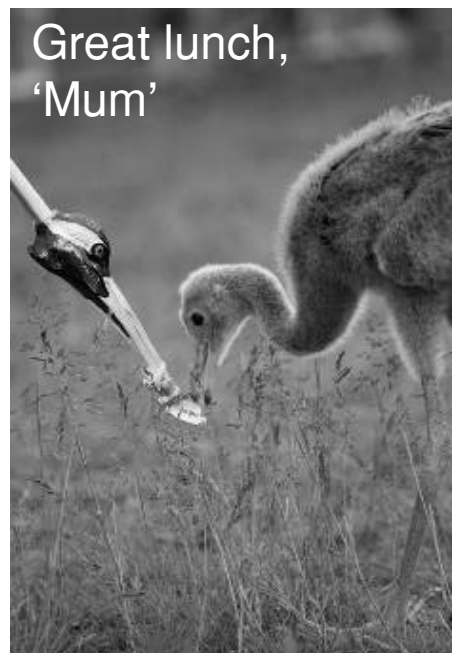
Archaeology and fossils are a theme for children's holiday events at the Somerset Rural Life museum this summer.

"Digging up the past" on Thursday July 29 is aimed at the 7-11 age group: "Get your hands dirty and be an archaeologist. Dig, sort and identify objects." Cost is £3 per child, 10:30 to noon and 1:30 to 3pm.

A similar day for 5-to-12-year-olds on Tuesday August 3 includes making a fossil mould and "travel back millions of years to touch real fossils." This is a free drop-in event, 10:30 to 2pm.

August includes "Meet the RSPB" on Thursday 5 and Friday 6. Have a go at making a rag rug on Tuesday 10. Make an animal mask and picture on a farmyard theme, Tuesday 17 (£3 per child). Birds of Prey from Secret World: displays on the hour on Thursday 19 and Friday 20. Donkey day on Friday 20. Make a puppet and perform in the puppet theatre on Tuesday 24.

Most events are free. For events that need booking, and for a full brochure, ring the Rural Life Museum, 83 1197.



Nearly two dozen young cranes are soon to be released in Somerset, in hope of re-establishing a population of these birds on the Levels.

Team members from the Great Crane Project traveled to eastern Germany in the spring to collect eggs from wild cranes with help from conservationists there. At the Crane School at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, 24 chicks hatched and were fed using a "puppet rearing technique" so that they will behave as wild birds after release rather than thinking their human handlers are their parents.

Damon Bridge at the Greylake nature reserve, off the A361 on the way to Taunton, has more information: [www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk](http://www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk)

(Photo by Laura Whitehead)

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To email, use [chairman@](mailto:chairman@), [trees@](mailto:trees@), etc—for example, [newsletter@glastonburyconservation.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@glastonburyconservation.org.uk)

## The Porch family saga continues

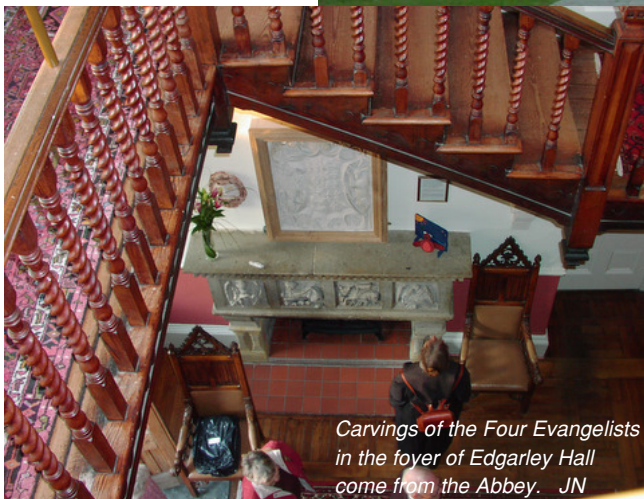
Roger Parsons is to give a second talk about the Porch family — Glastonbury's most prominent name for well more than a century but now vanished — on **September 24** at St Ben's school hall, 7:30pm. This one is called "Monty Porch: a charmed life" and will focus on the man who became Winston Churchill's stepfather.

Roger then plans to publish his researches in booklet form.

He filled the auditorium at Millfield Prep School for his first talk, on April 16. The Porch family fortune was made through banking: at one time they held mortgages on half the property in Glastonbury;



*The Hermitage at Edgarley is a miniature of the Abbot's Kitchen.*



*Carvings of the Four Evangelists in the foyer of Edgarley Hall come from the Abbey. JN*

they owned the Abbey, and built Abbey House and Edgarley Hall, preserving many fine pieces of carved Abbey stone. Infamy and downfall came in the early 20th century when a Porch heiress married a ne'er-do-well playboy, poisoned him in Japan but was spared the gallows — it was international headlines at the time, and the Porches never returned here.

## Trees total 45,000 as planters rest *Alan Fear*

The Conservation Society's 2009–10 tree-planting season began with 10 trees in Bushy Coombe, including sweet chestnuts and a red oak. We also erected cages around the trees to protect them from cattle.

Due to the late frosts the nursery could not lift the hedging plants until late November. We then set to planting 680 hedge plants in two weeks, for Mr & Mrs W. P. Latta, at East Pennard.

Early in the new year we planted an oak drove for Robin Lawford of East Pennard. While there we also planted a further 20 trees around his land.

Back in Glastonbury, Mr N Brooks asked us to plant a small orchard of apples, pears and plums, 20 trees in total, on his land in Cinnamon Lane. This was a two-week project.

In between this, my wife and I, plus Martin Butler, a Conservation Society member, helped Sustrans pollard the willows along the cycle track between Glastonbury and Sharpham that was built some years ago by Sustrans, the national organization for sustainable transport.

To finish the season we travelled to West Pennard, where Frank Naish (the oldest cidemaker in the country) asked us to plant 14 apple trees for him. He also wants more done next year.

Our grand total for our 28 years of planting around Glastonbury now stands at 45,000 plants.

As coordinator I thank all the volunteers, who turned out in all weathers to help with these projects. Well done!

Due to cutbacks the county council will not make grants for private plantings this year, although there is still hope of grants for community projects.

## Moving mountains to restore St Margaret's chapel and almshouses

Thanks to strenuous fundraising work by the project's architect and the diocesan secretary, the first phase of restoration work on St Margaret's Chapel and Almshouses is closer.

Johnny Heriz-Smith and Nick Denison set themselves to hiking up and down 15 mountains in Snowdonia in one day and raised more than £4,000 in sponsorship. They began at 4am on June 19, and Johnny finished at midnight. Nick slipped on scree around 9pm on his way up mountain 13, hurt his back and had to come off.

The effort brings the restoration fund to within about £3,000 of the target £40,000 for phase 1. The Mary & Margaret Charity, set up two years ago with Nick Denison as chairman, is applying for grants for the remainder. Contributions can be made online ([justgiving.com/stmargaretschapel](http://justgiving.com/stmargaretschapel)) or by cheque to the registered office, 148 High Street, Street, BA16 0NH.

The first phase of work on the ancient buildings off Magdalene Street involves mainly repair and conservation,



*St Margaret of Hungary and Scotland in the bellcote. She founded almshouses up and down the country.*  
[www.stmargaretschapel.org](http://www.stmargaretschapel.org)

especially for a recent crack in the chapel's west wall, then new guttering, wiring, plaster, external pointing and redecoration. The almshouses are due for internal wiring and limewash, new guttering and minor repairs. In the garden, a stone wall will replace a shabby wooden boundary fence.

Phase 2 will add a toilet and small kitchen — bringing these facilities to the complex for the first time. This will be a small new building behind the door at the end of the garden path, where Mendip council donated a strip of land for the purpose. (The council flats, built in the 1960s in the former almshouse gardens, were recently refurbished.)

"The total cost should be under £100,000 — not a large sum for historic-building restoration," the trustees say. "The plans represent a realistic and worthwhile project."

They intend to continue opening the buildings daily; more volunteers are needed for the rota. "There is no value in a beautifully restored group of buildings that is always locked!"