

Chairman's notes

Alan Fear

For the Abbey Retreat House open day at the beginning of September we were asked if we could do a display about the Conservation Society. So during the Sunday morning John Brunson and I put our display together in the lovely gardens of the house, which backs onto the Abbey ruins. We manned our display during the afternoon with the help of other committee members. This proved a good afternoon for the society, as we received some new members. A big welcome to you all!

Abbot's perambulation – A guided walk on Saturday July 27 was organized by Natural England to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Abbot Bere's walking the Twelve Hides of Glastonbury. The route began at Bretoneux Road, then continued along Cinnamon Lane to the footbridge at Edgarley, over and through the Millfield playing field to Wick.

We stopped at Norwood Park for a quick bit of history about what had been the Abbot's house and deer park. Next we made our way to Gog and Magog. From here we walked to Paradise Lane, with views out to Wells and surrounding areas. We made our way along Bulwarks Lane to Bushy Coombe, where we had views over a lot of the Twelve Hides of Glastonbury. Then back to Bretoneux Road to finish.

Colin's garden – A big sadness at the start of August was that the annual open evening for the society at Coombe House gardens was cancelled at the very last minute due to the loss of Colin Wells-Brown. I send our condolences to you, Alan Gloak, for the loss of your partner and friend.

AGM and tree talk – The society's annual general meeting will be on **Friday November 1**, starting at 7:30pm. It will be held at St John's Centre (which hosts the Bay Tree cafe) in St John's Square. The AGM is usually short.

Immediately after it we are to hear the talk about tree diseases, including ash dieback, by Guy Litchfield of the Sussex agricultural college at Plumpton. This is the talk postponed from March 1 due to a date clash with the Antiquarian Society.

Allen Cotton, OBE

Congratulations to Allen Cotton of West Bradley, a Conservation Society member, who went to the Palace on October 23 to receive an OBE for "services to agriculture and to the community in Somerset". (See page 4.)



Sweet chestnut blight is characterized by cankers that spread all over the surface of the tree and eventually kill it. The cause is a fungus that began in eastern Asia. In the first half of the 20th century it eradicated sweet chestnut from eastern North America. In 2011 it was seen for the first time in Britain, and threatens thousands of acres of woodland in southern England where sweet chestnut is the dominant tree species. (The horse chestnut or conker tree is an unrelated species.)



Chalara fraxinea, another fungus, causes a lethal disease of ash trees—ash dieback. It was detected for the first time in Britain in 2012 at a number of sites. Black blotches appear, often at the leaf base and midrib, and leaves wilt. It affects ash trees of all ages. These fungi are notifiable pathogens: suspected cases must be reported to the Forestry Commission.

New fungal diseases threaten yet more of our trees *JN*

We all remember how Dutch elm disease devastated the landscape by wiping out thousands of elms in the hedgerows all around us. Today it seems our trees are suffering an epidemic of a new disease every year.

It's a big concern to the Conservation Society, having planted nearly 48,000 trees in the area since its inception. How will these diseases affect us?

The pictures show just three recently confirmed diseases that Guy Litchfield, of the Sussex agricultural college at Plumpton, will inform us about at the society's AGM on **Friday November 1**.



Red band needle blight is so called because of the colourful symptoms the Dothistroma fungus causes on pine until the tree dies. It affected only the Southern Hemisphere until in the 1990s it began to spread rapidly in both Europe and in Canada, with major economic impact.

(Sources: Royal Horticultural Society, Forestry Commission, Uniprot)

Almshouse flowers win Mendip trophy

Magdalene Street seemed to win more gold than any other area of Glastonbury in the 2013 Mendip in Bloom competition. St Margaret's Chapel and Almshouses in Magdalene Street won the gold award and trophy for best community garden. Glastonbury Abbey won a gold in the category for best public building, and the town hall won silver gilt. More, for best commercial premises, went to Magdalene House and to the adjoining Market Place.

But overall, the town came second. The judges awarded gold and trophy as best town to Wells. Frome was third. Prizegiving took place at Glastonbury town hall on September 27. Street and Shepton Mallet did not enter this year.

The future of Mendip in Bloom is in doubt until someone steps forward to replace the two mainstays. Alan Gloak is stepping down as chairman after 18 years, and Christine Potter of Frome as president after 21 years.

"When the district council ceased to run the competition we became an independent group reliant on our excellent sponsors and judges," she said at the prizegiving. "Representation on this group has gradually diminished, and these last two years Alan and I have continued the competition more or less on our own."

• Glastonbury and Frome were the only Mendip towns to enter Southwest in Bloom and both won silver gilt.

Two Bovetown members: farewell *JB*

Colin Wells-Brown – We record with great sadness the death of Colin Wells-Brown at the age of 86. He and his partner of 40 years, Alan Gloak, were generous in inviting Conservation Society members to their fabulous garden in Bushy Coombe on many occasions. This year's event on August 2 had to be cancelled at short notice, for Colin died on that very date, just short of his 87th birthday on August 14.

Colin was a gentleman of impeccable taste and artistic skill, from painting a picture to decorating a Christmas tree. Perhaps his greatest capability was in garden design and horticulture—and the grounds at Coombe House will live on as a memorial to him.

Colin enjoyed retirement in Glastonbury, stopping to chat and admire other people's efforts on his walks into town. Our sincere condolences to Alan Gloak.

Derek Hankins – It is again with sadness we report the death of Derek Hankins, one of our long-standing members, on October 12. Derek was in the past a regular tree-planter for the Conservation Society, and many mature trees record his good work.

Living in the Conservation Area, he was careful to build a new garage that was deserving [*Newsletter 96*], and the Hankins garden at Blake House was well cared for.

In his working life Derek taught at the Board School in Street, then at Brookside and finally Avalon School.

Our condolences go to Sylvia and their children Trish, Simon and John, and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A celebration of Derek's life took place at Lambrook Street Methodist Church on October 24.



Martin Godfrey's bright idea to move the disused railway-station canopy to Glastonbury's main town-centre carpark won the Conservation Society second prize in the Civic Trust's Pride of Place competition in 1984. (Ian Rands, one of the society's volunteer labourers, tells of pulling millions of little nails.) After 30 years, the canopy had a thorough refurbishment this summer and now sports the authentic colours of the Somerset and Dorset Railway. Photographed at work are (from left) Mike Carter, Nick Payne and Nigel Petvin of J. Bailey & Sons, Wells.



The roofscape between the High Street and the Abbey ruins was a fascinating aspect of the tour of Burns the Bread which Conservation Society members enjoyed on June 1. Maggie Stewart, Adrian Pearse and Debbie Fear here are standing on the fire-escape behind the bakery's upper floor, the Assembly Rooms are at left and the tower of St Benedict's Church in the distance. One wall at the back (off the left of photo) might be pre-Norman; Neill Bonham thinks it was part of a building that was old even in Abbey times.

The bakery has been owned by only three families since the late 1700s. Robbie Burns (demonstrating an oven, below) took over from Raymond and Barbara Janes 30 years ago.



Dates: AGM and talk on tree diseases

- * **November 1, Friday**—AGM followed by *Tree diseases and what they will mean for us* by Guy Litchfield of Plumpton Agricultural College, Sussex. C
- * **November 15, Friday**—*John Dee, St Dunstan and the Glastonbury "Elixir"*, a talk by Paul Ashdown about the Elizabethan polymath and his mysterious book. A
- * **January 31, Friday**—*Postal history of Glastonbury and district*: illustrated talk by Allen Cotton, OBE, whose researches are becoming a book. C
- * **February 14, Friday**—*West Front and Galilee*: Jerry Sampson on links between building at Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey in the 1230s. A
- * **March 14, Friday**—*The future of the Glastonbury Lake Village*: Richard Brunning, the Somerset Moors and Levels archaeologist. A

Where and when

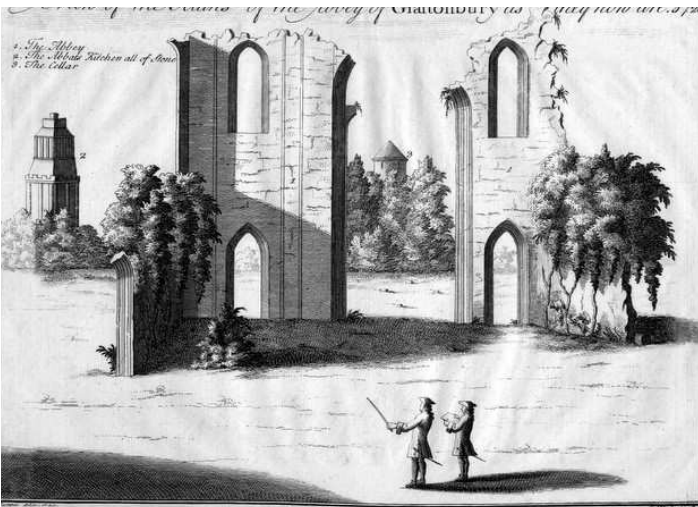
C = Glastonbury Conservation Society. Meetings are on **Fridays at 7:30pm** at St John's Centre (the Bay Tree cafe), just by the church tower.

A = Glastonbury Antiquarian Society meetings are on **Fridays at 7:30pm** at the library, Archers Way. Website: glastonburyantiquarians.org

Abbey afterlife, 1538–1825 *Adrian Pearse*

Adam Stout is preparing a paper for the *Somerset Antiquarian and Natural History Society Proceedings* outlining the post-Dissolution ownerships of the Abbey enclosure, the progressive demolition of the buildings and the factors that influenced this process.

He told the Antiquarian Society on March 1 (postponed from January because of snow) that the precinct, after forfeiture to the Crown in 1539, was leased to Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset 1547–52, and to Sir Peter Carew in 1559. In 1572 the Earl of Sussex assumed the lease, obtaining the freehold in 1582; his nephew sold the site to William Stone, a clothier, who in 1599 sold it to William Cavendish, later Earl of Devonshire. A far-flung possession of the family, it was recorded in a map of 1628, and eventually in 1733 fell into the hands of Thomas Bladen, Governor of Maryland 1742–47. His two daughters sold the Glastonbury estate in 1799, when it comprised 900 acres, to George Cox and Richard Hart Davis. The precinct was split: the major portion, including the Abbey church, was acquired by John Down, and the Abbot's Kitchen was purchased by J. Rocque. Down sold his portion to John Fry Reeves in 1825.



Burgis again: "A view of the ruins of the Abbey of Glastonbury as they now are, 1720." The building at left is labelled "The Abbot's Kitchen all of stone", and the strange tower seen between the two great piers is "The Cellar".

The stages by which most of the structure was demolished is rather more difficult to ascertain. Apart from minor damage, the Abbey seems to have remained intact until 1549–50, when lead from the Chapter House roof and other buildings was taken to Wells and the bells melted down.

The establishment of Somerset's colony of Huguenot Protestant weavers on the site under the supervision of Henry Cornish involved modifications to some of the buildings, but their departure in 1553 on Mary's accession was followed by a plea to permit restoration of the structure, evidently a still feasible project. However, the reign of Elizabeth heralded serious demolition, though it was not complete. St Joseph's Chapel was treated differently, perhaps because of the Arimathean legend and creation of a Protestant mythology.

Hops may have been introduced to the site, and in 1573 a treadmill was built to promote work and industry. The alchemist Elias Ashmole prospected for an elixir in the ruins. Quakers used the Abbot's Kitchen as a meeting house in 1683, which may have enabled it to escape destruction, but the Great Hall was demolished and the materials used to build a Market House for the town. The Abbot's Lodging was largely demolished in



This bizarre rendering of especially the Abbot's Kitchen was produced in 1720 by William Burgis for Stevens' two-volume supplement to Dugdale's Monasticon.

1712–14, and the leaseholder Thomas Prew built a new house for himself nearby while undertaking considerable destruction of the surviving stonework.

The drawings by Hollar in the late 17th century and by Stukeley in the 1720s show the progress of destruction but also suggest a degree of landscaping, with avenues of trees and orchards. Demolition was somewhat sporadic, and it was not until the later half of the 18th century that owners instituted a more commercial attitude, raising rents and capitalizing on the value of the stone that could be sold. Much was cleared from 1791 to 1796 to provide material for the road from Glastonbury to Wells.

A belief grew locally that misfortune befell those who profited from the destruction of the religious buildings, as witnessed by Henry Spelman's *The History and Fate of Sacrilege*. John Cannon and Stukeley both mention the downturn in trade said to be a consequence of using Abbey materials for the Market House, and the ill-luck attending those who used monastic material.

Tourists and antiquarians began to visit, and the curative properties of water from holy ground resulted in a short-lived boom in 1751. Increasingly, Gothic ruins were seen as attractive assets in the later 18th century, and "improvements" were even suggested. After 1825 the Glastonbury ruins were indeed to become the ultimate in garden features.

Visitors like Glastonbury walks and new edition of footpath booklet

Glastonbury is becoming more popular for its walks. Visitors to town are even coming as groups intending to walk the country footpaths here, John Brunson said, citing increased sales of his booklet *Glastonbury Footpath Walks*.

An update of the booklet came out in early summer. It is available at £5 from the Tourist Information Centre, Dicketts bookshop and other outlets. Illustrations have been improved, thanks to Neill Bonham's finding the originals. Routes

remain basically the same, but details such as stiles, kissing gates and field gates have been updated, especially in the West Pennard direction. The relevant parts of the Ordnance Survey map are provided for each route. The booklet was

first published in 1976 and a new edition has appeared every few years.

Thanks to hedgecutters and trimmers being provided for volunteers, "we think the footpath network is in better order than it has been for some time," John said.

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Glastonbury's listed post office marks 75th anniversary *Jim Nagel*

This year—the year Royal Mail became a private corporation—is the 75th anniversary of Glastonbury's neo-Tudor post office building at 35 High Street.

According to a possibly apocryphal tale, the Revd Lionel Smithett Lewis, who had been High Church vicar of St John's since 1921, saw builders starting work on an inferior design in the mid-1930s and ordered them to stop. He immediately rang Whitehall—he probably knew the Commissioner of Works from a previous life—and protested that Glastonbury deserved a design in keeping with the town's heritage. The powers-that-be conceded, and townspeople and tourists today still use the fine edifice that first opened its doors on August 17 in 1938.

Henry Seccombe, architect to the Office of Works, chose Bath stone ashlar, mullioned windows, oak doors and a steeply pitched tile roof with a parapet and a fanciful tall stone chimney. The double gate at right has a swept tile roof on wooden brackets.

The building (not including the red-brick sorting office behind) was listed Grade II in 1989, amid the campaign to keep it as Glastonbury's post office.

The interior, with its moulded plaster ceiling, is much as it always was, except that the glass across the counter was added in the security-conscious 1970s, the indoor public telephone and its oaken booth disappeared in the mobile-phone 90s, and the postmaster's panelled office has become a card shop.

The two original clocks—one in the High Street window and one inside the office—still show what looks like original time, presumably because to repair them would require Grade II original parts and cost more than stamps.

The text of the listing at English Heritage calls the building “a notable and virtually unaltered example of the Post Office's willingness to design buildings to fit their historic environment. This building is one of several attempts to build in character with the two genuine 15th-century buildings in Glastonbury High Street.”

Eric King, in his recollections of the High Street of the 1940s (*Newsletter* 99), wrote: “One or two firms went bankrupt over the building of this office, caused mainly by flooding in the basement. The

telephone exchange was built at the same time behind the post office but the opening of the new exchange had to be delayed until after the war.”

The site at 35 High Street was previously occupied by London House, an impressive two-storey shop. (Seccombe, the post office architect, disagreed: he felt it “spoiled the fine buildings around it”.) London House was owned by the Brooks family and sold dresses and millinery. As Neill Bonham discovered in research

roused the town and the Residents Association to send a coachload of protesters to London. Mike Free, the mayor at the time, had to get special permission to wear his chain of office beyond the borough. They called at Buckingham Palace and 10 Downing Street to hand in petitions and lunched at the Post Office Union headquarters. “And we managed to get them to change their minds,” he said today.

Nevertheless, the status changed to that of sub-postoffice. Ken Watkins was

the last proper Glastonbury postmaster and would have been in charge of the front-office counter as well as the sorting office behind. On the verge of retirement anyway, he took up the new role of sub-postmaster, and the postmaster's panelled office became a card shop. John Oberholzer took over from him in 1993 and is still on the counter staff under the present sub-postmaster, Gerald Cross.

The Royal Mail sorting office at the back has a staff of about 40 today, including 36 who deliver letters in Glastonbury, Street and surrounding area. Matt Alford is delivery-office manager and reports to higher-ups in Bath.

In June this year, a new inquiry office opened. It has a separate entrance off Archer's Way so that customers do not need to dodge vans in the busy yard. Under the wooden floors are cable ducts, a

reminder that the town's phone exchange was located here in the days of GPO Telephones; the present exchange behind Manor House Road was built in the 1960s.

More to come

Just before going to press I rang Allen Cotton for some extra details for this article, knowing that he has vast knowledge of postal history in Glastonbury and surrounding area—he gave a talk to the Conservation Society on the subject in 1996.

As a result of that phone call we learned about the OBE he received only the day before. And, because he's done a lot more research since his last talk and is writing a book on the subject, we booked him to give another talk: on **January 31**.



It's only from this angle that the ornate tall stone chimney at the back of Henry Seccombe's 1938 neo-Tudor addition to Glastonbury can be seen.

requested by the Lewis family, the elder John Lewis, born in Shepton Mallet in 1836, did his apprenticeship at London House in the 1850s before going on to found his own department store in London.

Before 1938 Glastonbury's post office was farther down the High Street in the building that is now Barclays Bank. The upper floor was occupied by an auctioneer. The building's Victorian facade, dating from 1897, was completely removed when the bank moved in.

More recently

In 1989 the government proposed to downgrade Glastonbury from a Crown post office, close the building and locate postal services into the then-new Safeway supermarket. The proposal