



# GLASTONBURY CONSERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 152 – Summer 2019

## Chairman's Report

It is time yet again for our annual Garden Party at Coombe House, Bovetown, Glastonbury. This year Alan Gloak will open his garden for us on June 28th at 6.30. If you have not been before it is well worth a visit, Alan and his team have worked hard since last years visit, adding a Temple plus loads of new plantings. So please make an effort to come along and help us celebrate our President John Brunson reaching the age of 90 and also being made a Alderman of Glastonbury.

If you have seen the Central Somerset paper in last few weeks, you would have noticed that the Holy Thorn has been pulled up. I was contacted by Edward James asking if I would go and have a look at the Thorn as it was very unstable. The stump of the tree was very rotten, so Edward and I decided to take the Thorn down (all in good faith). The Society have had a replacement Thorn donated to us by Bill Knight, which we are planning to plant on Wearyall hill in the Autumn. We are planning to make this into a

community affair. There is to be a meeting in the Town Hall on Monday 10th June to clear the air about what has been done to the Holy Thorn and what we as a Society wish to do to replace the Thorn.

Now that the days are longer and the weather warmer some of you will be out walking the footpaths. Could we please ask you to either help by cutting back brambles or contact Kevin Mitchell at Knights Chip shop, if there is a problem with a footpath.

## Number 11 Chilkwell Street

Amanda Montague, our secretary, has recently purchased the old solicitors building along Chilkwell Street. Amanda managed to contact Nick Gooding, a former Solicitor who worked there, he has given her a brief history of the building.

Number 11 Chilkwell Street distant history the pre-registration title deeds (being the deeds that used to be required to prove title to a property before it was registered at the HM Land Registry about 1842). This document transferred the property from the trustees in bankruptcy of two brothers by the name of Prat to a Mr. Stephen Holman. Both the Prat brothers and Stephen Holman were solicitors: so, that fact, combined with the wording of the description of the building as (from memory) all those offices or building recently erected or constructed led me to conclude that the building was purpose-built at that time as a solicitors office- something which would have made it quite a rarity then. The other piece of evidence about this is the existence of the three strong rooms which, as well as being interesting from a social history point of view appear to be part of the original structure: only two of these strong rooms now exist, the third one was on the ground floor at the rear of the building on the left- hand side, you can still see the remains of the very thick wall in the arch between there and the front room, and also the small barred window on the left. I believe this was carried out by Mr Hamilton-Miller sometime in the 1960s to enlarge the reception area when the rear window was also put in.

So what about the Prat brothers and that intriguing bankruptcy? And this is where, it seems, 11 Chilkwell Street became involved in some dramatic events involving the much heralded but ultimately disastrous Glastonbury Canal.

For the story of this ill-fated project I can do no better than refer you to the book: 'The Glastonbury Canal' by Geoffrey Body and Roy Gallop. The book relates that as well as being respected local solicitors with a 'highly respected firm', one of the brothers was also Town Clerk and that they were both influential in raising investment in the scheme which, although completed in 1833, ran into difficulty almost straight away through various structural and other problems, thing came to a head in 1840 when the whole enterprise folded leaving a huge amount of debt. Then, as the book relates; 'In the first month of 1840 the Prat brothers disappeared leaving behind them financial chaos that was to spell ruin for many of their clients. . . the Prat brothers were declared bankrupt and their effects sold off. . . they eventually surfaced in America'- it seems that one of these assets was 11 Chilkwell Street. Added to the drama was the fate of another canal shareholder, namely John Bullied, who had also acted as guarantor for some of the debts- 'In dramatic fashion he put an end to his problems by leaping from the tower of St. John's Church, Glastonbury.

As to what happened then, I believe this building is unusual in that, in a sense, it has only ever had one occupier, namely a firm of solicitors, these being 'Prat

Brothers'- 'Stephen Holman'- 'Holman and Bath'- 'Bath and Austin'- 'Austin and Bath'- 'Bartlett Gooding and Weelen'. The importance of this is that up until 1978 this firm had, as far as I know, only operated from 11 Chilkwell Street without any subsidiaries or branch offices- and so, it may be said that the building and the solicitors are inseparable in terms of their histories. And then to make the following remarks:

- 1 When I took over in 1978 I chose not to change the old, established name of 'Austin and Bath'; it was changed, with much regret by me, to BGW in 1995 as there was a merging of three small firms with different names; my predecessor, Cecil, felt the same, as he had a been a sole practitioner following the departure of the formidable and slightly intimidating Major Bath in the early 50s - Major Bath is not the same as the Bath of Holman and Bath but presumably the same family.
- 2 Perhaps the family with the most fascinating history is the Austin family. The tale of the local boy (James Austin) from a poor background who, lacking the necessary money to fund his transport to the fabled riches of Australia, conspired to commit a theft so that the court sentence of transportation would provide him with a free ticket.
- 3 It appears, therefore, that it was money from Australian sheep that enabled Stanley Austin to live in Abbey House with just a very short walk across the road to his work place at 11 Chilkwell Street.



Glastonbury Conservation Society

*presents:*

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# 'Glastonbury At War'

The memories of

**RICHARD SQUIRE**

during the Second World War

(2018)

## *Part Two*

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### **The night the invasion did come**

The Observer Post on the top of Wearyall Hill saw signals on Godney Moor. The Observers called the police, the police called the Home Guard and the Home Guard called the Military. As they went to the moor they could see flashing, they gradually got closer and closer when they found it was a cow rubbing against an electric post with a loose connection.

### **My memories of the War**

Holes in the ground. There was an aircraft gun in the depression on Wearyall Hill another at Beckery and at Porchestal Drove where there was a search light. The Observer post on Wearyall Hill stayed in position for many years, there were Nissan Huts in the Abbey Park and in dry summers you can see where they once stood.

### **Vehicle Accidents**

Jack Checkley the Ironmonger lived at 3 Bere Lane, a tank came up Fishers Hill, around the corner and ran straight into his wall. The Armoury at the bottom of Fishers Hill facing along Street Road a lorry one dark night ran straight into the houses there and if you look to this day you can see where the new bricks are.

### **Schooling**

The sound of the siren would go which was a straight forward siren sound that would indicate raiders were approaching, the siren would sound a continuous sound and on radars past an undulating noise. At St Benedict's School next to the Police Station the siren would sound

and all the pupils would assemble in the cloakroom area which is now the main entrance. I myself lived in the Market Place would run home to be looked after and return to school when the all clear had gone. The teachers at the time were: Mrs Adlarn, Mrs Edwards and a Mrs Baldwin.

### **Schooling continued**

We as children were shown pictures of bombs by the Police and during Air Raids silver metal strips were dropped by the enemy, we as school children were told these could be poisonous and not to touch (AND WE DID NOT TOUCH THEM). We school children would go out collecting old iron from anywhere. All iron railings were removed in the front of premises, the only bits that were left were small decorative nobles were left on the wall, these could be seen in various houses in the town including the Copper Beech and in Benedict Street opposite Rapsons Garage.

### **No invasion yet but large cities bombed**

The house where I live is Number One Bere Lane, one day a visitor called and said during the war she said she stood in one of these windows and watched Bristol being bombed. As my Mother was in the Council she dealt with the evacuees and as London was being bombed they would arrive on the last train at Glastonbury Station, as we lived in Benedict Street she would take various children in late at night, so it meant that sometimes I would wake up in a different bed to which I went to sleep in. One story she told was one of the evacuees all he could say "Jerry bombed his greenhouse and he lost it", another one had lost his false teeth imagine what a state he must have been in having no teeth.

Boys of my age would come and stay with the relatives from the large cities and we would only know them by name by calling them either Bristol or London. A boy from London which must have been an Eastender my mum would say he went to sleep in an ordinary bed but during the night he would move his bed to the centre of the room, my Mother asked why and he said because bugs would climb up the wall.

## Collecting

We as children would be sent out in the country to find whatever iron we could for bomb making. We would collect rose hips from the hedges when they were in season. Paper bags would be used over and over again. Various places in the road "pig bins" would be placed so that all the food scraps would go to feeding pigs.

## Firewatching

Even at my tender age of about 8 I played my part in the war, I used to take Dad's fire book to a different member of the fire watchers. For years after stationary ladders could be seen on church roofs. We lived at 95 Benedict Street which had a large rear window and for blackout all windows had to be covered, during the day the blackout would be rolled up and tied with string, then one time during the day there was a big bang, the string broke and we were suddenly in darkness.

## Toys and Games

Comic annuals were ordered in August as only 3 were allocated to the newsagent. Christmas presents were second or third handed down toys, but they were still toys and we enjoyed them. We had pen pals from America and they sent us toy parcels and in one of these parcels I can remember various coloured writing pads, they were so precious to me I kept them for years and never used them. The cardboard milk tops off of bottles would be used as toys by throwing them to see how close to the wall you could get. I also remember a son of an Ironmonger playing with live ammunition and it was said that he nearly lost a finger.

## Rations

Gradually everything became rationed, sweets were on ration and my Mum and Dad said I was not allowed to buy chewing gum. Families with a lot of children would have extra coupons and these would be exchanged with my Mum which was very useful for extra rations. Five inches of bath water were allowed per person but Mum and Dad were clever and we all took our bath at one go. Dad kept chickens and you had to have somebody registered with you to take eggs. There was a terrible time when for two weeks chickens did not produce eggs, a farmer came to look to advise Dad and he said "have you moved their water?" Dad said yes, and the farmer said chickens are a bit silly and they could not find the new water, they had developed "a croup" in the end everything was alright.

## Perhaps Jerry is not coming but the Americans arrived

Their main headquarters was in a building in the station yard and they loved drawing everywhere, years after when I was an apprentice electrician I worked in these buildings and can remember seeing the drawings on the wall. The Americans had plenty of supplies and we as children would wait outside their headquarters waiting for sweets, oranges and this time chewing gum.

## American training

The Americans trained in what was the Fairfield which is now houses and a supermarket and the way they would march, they would sing "hipp""haw", 1,2,3,4 1,2-3,4. They dug trenches in the Fairfield and they stayed there for a long time and we boys really enjoyed playing in them.

## The Americans

We lived at this time at 95 Benedict Street and one hot summers evening, Mum and Dad had the radio on with the windows open, they were curious as an American stood outside for a long time, they asked him why he was there and he said he was listening to the news through the window. My family made friends with a soldier Karl and he was very very homesick, we also made friends with an officer called Brue, he stayed in Glastonbury for a long time training soldiers, he was billeted at the Lodge in Coursing Batch and he borrowed Mums bicycle to cycle to the station. Disaster? He came to Mum one day and said he had lost his bike, later on as I was walking around Glastonbury I found her bike and all was forgiven, when he left on D-Day a Shaffer pen which he treasured very much he gave to Mother, he did not expect to return and he did not.

## Army vehicles

More and more Army vehicles arrived in Glastonbury, these vehicles were all parked in Benedict Street and they had guns and we children were allowed to sit upon them. ONE DAY THEY WERE ALL GONE.

## News

June 4th D-Day. My family missed the announcement on the 9 o'clock news in the morning, they listened again at the 10.00 news and I was told to keep VERY QUIET. The D-Day landings had taken place. Two days after the Daily Express produced an European map with cardboard pins and flags, this map was pinned on the wall and for the rest of the war these cardboard pins and flags advanced into Germany.

## Local War Effort

Torpedo's (Whiteheads) were manufactured at Clarks, leather flying equipment at Morlands and various other small industries helped the war effort.

## Advancing Armies

The pins on the map of Europe began to advance until they had a hiccup at the "Battle of the Bulge", one person I worked with who came back from the war said that they were ordered as they entered Germany to destroy all in sight, and he says he can remember a brand new bungalow just over the boarder being completely destroyed. Then came the Rhine crossing, a local dignitary Major Bath had a long map of the Rhine and this was pinned up in the window of the Gas Showroom. Later on my Mother asked if she could borrow it to have a good look, he said that was quite alright and that she could keep it forever, this map is still in my possession.

## After five years the battle is won

Germany surrenders. VE-Day. At last a happy circular was sent out from Mr Smeathes office and this included two days holiday, immediately after I can remember things that took place. A grocer had an illuminated sign "get your groceries at Ganes". A gas lamp was erected by the fire brigade in the Market Place so as to illuminate the Cross. Celebrations A policeman's son obtained a thunderflash and he brought it down to Fairfield Terrace, lit it and there was a massive explosion, doors opened and everyone looked out wondering what the noise was. In the Town Hall there were celebrations for us children. Cecil Dowdney on the accordion played tunes. "Lay little hen" and "You are my sunshine". The caretaker at the time was Bill Sharp and he had a daughter who said she went to London and shook hands with Winston Churchill and Mother and Father said she did not wash her hand for six days after.

## Men who returned

Denis Vine (Rapsons Garage), as a despatch rider he visited 14 countries. Jack Tucker when he returned he was manager of Avalon Orchards, Mum and Dad said after the life he had lead it was probably to mundane of a job for him. Jack Dowdney along with Denis Vine operated Avalon Scramble. Alan Dowdney he was a Japanese prisoner of war and he came home very weak, the other brother Michael Dowdney I think just missed the war. Ted Wright who had an ironmongers shop in the High Street, it was said he was decorated for the magnificent way he organised the stores. As an apprentice I worked with Joe Rogers from Street he said he never expected to come back, but he did but he said

two days to the end of the war his best friend who had gone with him through all the war was killed by the German youth. Another friend he had he said would shoot any German on site but I don't think Joe liked that idea much.

## Men who did not return

On the cenotaph there are 21 names of the Second World War such as Chivers, Brass, Linham and others, but at the base of the cenotaph one can read "Also in grateful appreciation for those who returned".

## Lasting Memories

A sailor climbed a pinnacle on St John's Church and tied a Union Jack Flag on it, the vicar at the time, Lionel Lewis offered a reward for anyone who would climb up to remove it, but I remember it stayed there for a long time gradually disappearing.

## Pill Boxes

Some are still standing. They said that Henry Tinney kept a tractor which he used long after the war. The Borough Surveyor Stan King and my Mother stayed in their jobs with the Borough Council for a long time.

## That was Glastonbury during the War

Before I end let us think of the American GI's, young men came to Britain, came to Glastonbury probably very religious as many are, they probably knew the hymn Jerusalem relating to Glastonbury. From Glastonbury they went to the south coast, Dorset, Devon looking back after embarkation to go to war and seeing England the green fields of Dorset and Devon, many never to return.

This was a long time ago now, but all those who lost their lives in the war should never be forgotten, so whoever reads this just remember what took place a long time ago

Richard Norman Squire

Born 1936

1 Bere Lane  
Glastonbury

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