

Beneath the Vale

Published on behalf of the Upper Marshwood Vale Parish Council

Autumn 2016: Issue 21



Jo and Dan Stover with Ben Jones (right) at the Stoke Knapp fingerpost sign near Stoke Abbott .

The traditional wooden and iron fingerpost signs are a distinctive and attractive feature of our parishes.

Some years ago the county council switched to plastic signs as a cost-saving measure. Many of the original wooden signs are now broken or missing. But we don't have to resign ourselves to plastic imitations.

Villagers across Dorset have been restoring their originals. In our parishes, Stoke Abbott is leading the way with the restoration of three signs so far.

A group of villagers led by Jo and Dan Stover of Lower Brimley Coombe Farm restored the Stoke Knapp sign at the top of Norway Lane.

'We had a coffee morning and donations and free local help made it happen. We are going to restore the fingerpost in the middle of the village next,' says Jo.

The villagers were pleased to discover that the Bridport foundry still had the original mold for casting the finial – the piece at the top of the sign. They salvaged the iron letters from the old sign and cleaned and painted them for use on the new one.

'Our costs were just under £350. That was £180 for the finial, £100 for repair of post, £50 for paint etc. The oak boards were made by Ben Jones for free. Chris Coles and Richard Puzey were also very helpful,' Jo adds.

Marshwood, Stoke Abbott, Pilsdon and Bettiscombe



Continued from page one.

Jo initially contacted the Dorset AONB, (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which offers advice to people about fingerpost restoration. But she felt that most of their contacts were too North Dorset based and she wanted to keep things local.

‘It’s a labour of love’

‘I actually got all my tips about restoration from Peter Bailey from Salwayash. He is responsible for all the fingerposts around Netherbury.

‘He gave me such good advice about the practical bits. For example, cleaning off the letters, what paint to use, making the oak board arms, cleaning the post, etc. It’s a labour of love.’

Mr Bailey is a Netherbury parish councilor and champion of fingerpost signs. As well as restoring more than 12 signs in and around Netherbury, Salwayash and Melpash, he has helped villagers in other places renovate their signs. He restored the Horsehills sign in Stoke Abbott.

‘It doesn’t cost as much as you might think, especially if you salvage as much of the old sign as possible to restore and reuse. The finials are the most expensive part, but not every sign had them,’ he explains.

Jo hopes that other signs in the Upper Marshwood Vale will be restored: ‘It would be wonderful to see the fingerpost at the Broadoak/Shave Cross junction restored. It looks so sad and Stoke Abbott is on one of the arms.’

Signs of disrepair across Upper Marshwood Vale

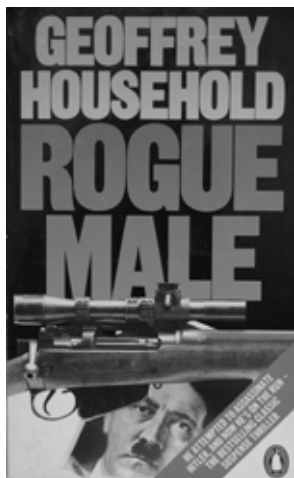


A selection of fingerpost signs from around our area. Should we salvage what remains? The CLT is considering using some of its funds for repairs - see story on page 10.



Relentless suspense: will Cumberbatch be filming here?

Next year the place on many people's lips should be the Marshwood Vale, says Ali Cameron. For *Rogue Male*, the classic thriller written by Geoffrey Household, should by rights be coming to a location near you.



The unnamed hero is first observed as he aims his sports rifle at an unknown foreign leader relaxing at his country estate. Although never stated, we are in Germany, just before the Second World War and the person he targets, and fails to assassinate, is Adolph Hitler.

Back in England our hero is pursued by a Nazi agent. To escape, he flees to Dorchester and Weymouth, then through Powerstock (where Household later lived) and westward to a hillside in the Marshwood Vale. He visits Beaminster for supplies, makes friends with a feral cat and eventually makes his way to Lyme Regis to collect books sent by his solicitor, which sets off a police hunt.

He returns to his dugout but the cunning German is too clever and traps him underground. How our hero, buried in his earthen coffin turns the tables, kills the agent and flees abroad is best left to the reader to discover. It's giving nothing away to say this is a relentless tale of suspense.

Rogue Male was published a few months before war was declared in 1939 and

became an instant best-seller. Household was unable to profit from its success as by the time it came out, he had been dispatched to Romania as an intelligence officer. He remained in the Middle East until 1945 and after the war he had to almost start again as a writer. He died in 1988.

Now actor Benedict Cumberbatch is to take the lead role and produce a new film of the book. Michael Lesslie is working on the script so it is not yet known how many – if any – locations will be filmed here in the Marshwood Vale.

Two previous film versions of *Rogue Male* have been made; one starring Peter O'Toole was made for TV in 1977 with a cast including Alaster Simm, Harold Pinter and John Standing as his nemesis and is available on YouTube.

The other, a Twentieth Century Fox production called *Man Hunt* was made in 1940 by Fritz Lang and starred Walther Pidgeon but was banned as too anti-German by US authorities. It was finally released in 1943 after the US joined in the fray.

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Deadline for winter issue is the end of November. Next parish council meetings are 17 November and 15 December at 7.30pm in Bettiscombe Village Hall. See the website at www.uppermarshwoodcouncil.org for minutes.



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Rural bus service updates

Route 688, Thorncombe to Axminster, every Thursday

It is now confirmed that the subsidy from Devon County Council will continue for this service until the end of March 2017. This will enable the 688 to run unchanged until this date. We are hopeful that the subsidy will continue beyond March 2017. Concessionary Bus Passes can be used on this service. Passenger numbers on this route continue to be very good at between 80% and 100% each week.

Route 14, Marshwood to Chard, via Thorncombe, every Thursday

This bus now runs on Thursday in conjunction with the 688, (as previously reported). The switch to Thursdays has been generally well received. Passenger numbers remain good at between 75% and 85%. Concessionary Bus Passes can be used on this service.

Fund-raising activities have started in order to provide the financial support needed. The Father's Day Breakfast Club, in Thorncombe on 19 June was extremely successful, raising a total of £340. With other donations this rounded out to £450. A collection jar is in place at Perry Street Social Club, (South Chard), with plans for other locations, starting with Thorncombe Village Shop.

Dorset County Council has agreed to match funds raised locally (up to £2,000) from the Community Transport Grant.

Dorset Community Transport's Plus Bus services, every Wednesday

The passenger numbers continue to be very encouraging with between 65% and 90% loading. Passengers seem more than happy to pay the £5 return fare.

The first service starts in Marshwood, (after the school run in term time), reaching Thorncombe at 8.55am, then via Blackdown, Kitwhistle, Drimpton, Broadwindsor, Salwayash and Bowood, arriving in Bridport at 9.40am.

This same bus then runs out to Catherston Leweston by 10.30am, then via Wootton Fitzpaine, Whitchurch Canonicorum, Symondsbury and back into Bridport by 11.15am.

The runs are then done in reverse, starting in Bridport at noon. The Bowood to Thorncombe run is first, followed by Symonsbury to Catherston.

We hope that corrected timetables will be available from Dorset Community Transport for both the 14 and 688, as the current versions on the Dorsetforyou website are unfortunately not accurate. The PlusBus will have the routes with approximate times, as these are not registered services. We hope to display these at all relevant locations as soon as possible.

Cllr David Marsh, (on behalf of the working group of Tatworth/Forton and Thorncombe Parish Councillors and Bus Supporters)

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Marshwood's Openreach saga

It was a Thursday – 21st of July, to be precise – when the digger driven by an employee or perhaps a sub-contractor of BT's independent subsidiary Openreach lowered its blade and applied power. What happened next is subject to a great deal of confusion and even more misinformation. It is quite possible that a small explosion announced the end of a section of mains power feed to Marshwood village and the death of a section of a BT cable.

It was also the start of wild rumours and an amazingly complex chain of official communications due to the simple fact that Openreach are not 'public facing' but only deal with their 'customers'. Not those directly affected, that would be too obvious, but only the internet service providers (ISPs) who now provide internet and phone services. These are the only people allowed to deal with Openreach. Even BT users are out of the loop.

That was also the day Charles and Ann Somers left the country on holiday. As readers of *BTV* well know, it is Charles' tireless work that not only flagged up that Marshwood was the largest area completely bypassed by Superfast Dorset's county-wide plans for the future of internet coverage, but also organised much of the funding to infill this hole. Just the man with the contacts to sort this out without delay. Only he was on holiday.

We came home from shopping to find we had lost power and the phones were out.

Marshwood resident Ali Cameron tells how he lost phone and internet service for three weeks.

This has happened before and normally it is a temporary problem that cures itself.

Western Power detected the fault on their circuit and promptly repaired, or at least got round it. Power was restored about an hour later without a fuss, but the phones were still out. As part of Openreach's efforts to bring us the best of superfast broadband, it seems they had accidentally dug up the power cable and cut off many phone users.

I went to where Openreach were still working, coincidentally right outside Charles Somers' home. A team of men were busy watching another man working on a bucket lift that reached to the top of one of the original phone posts.

One of them answered my plea: 'Not us sunshine, we were not here yesterday!' he told me. 'It was another lot doing a different job that you want to talk to,' said another. Nonplussed, I tried a different tack: 'If this is for superfast broadband, why are you putting things onto the old post? That's the new darker post for broadband!' I said pointing at the second post four feet away.

That got the whole team's attention as the man in the bucket lowered himself into the conversation and the rest gathered round me, suddenly becoming much more interested. 'That makes much better sense!' summed up Bucket Man, the others all agreed.

Openreach started to repair the fault but managed to muddle up their wires. This meant further loss of internet in the village and even to the phones of those who had not lost service before.

Another week passed. A friend who had worked for local MP Oliver Letwin insisted he could and would help, so at the end of the third week of loss of service I emailed his office. Although Sir Oliver was on holiday, the result was immediate. His secretary contacted senior BT officials.

Within 24 hours a team was organised. On Monday after breakfast I discovered a couple of Openreach workers with a huge drum of replacement cable. Another team were booked for the next day to connect up the replacement cable. At lunchtime an Openreach engineer announced that he was there to prepare our line for reconnection as soon as the cable was ready. He checked our line, left briefly, returned once more, left again and finally picked up our phone and dialled out. Our engineer told us that he had connected us to a temporary pair of cables pending a final solution when the new cable would be connected the following day.

Marshwood's saga was followed by a debacle at Bettiscombe where one missing pole caused loss of service to a whole community. Another call to Sir Oliver again got some action.

These events do call into question why BT's Openreach with their almost complete monopoly on internet and phone engineering nationwide, is not allowed to deal directly with customers – you and me – the people who pay the eye-watering bills.

Stephen Lee
Landscape Gardening
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Should the CLT fund repairs to Marshwood fingerpost signs?

Since the affordable houses were finished, all manner of subjects find their way onto the CLT table.

At a recent meeting of the CLT Board a number of these issues were discussed. We had a reply to our letter to Dorset County Council Highways department about traffic calming on the B3165 to help children walking to and from Marshwood School.

The gist of the reply was that the narrowing near Foxdown Farm would have to become a single-lane carriageway in order to make room for a footpath and that due to excess traffic speed in the 30mph zone and being on a bend, they felt a head-on collision was likely and therefore they were unable to recommend any road improvement.

Members felt that if the traffic speed was the reason the improvement was rejected, then that same speed issue makes it dangerous for the children.

The board is considering spending some of the ground rent from Bramblehay on repairing some of the fingerpost signs in the area. We were advised that the cost of a complete replacement with new post, arms, letters, painting and labour would be near £1,000. Members felt that some improvements to only one or two posts a year might be acceptable, leaving some funds for other small projects.

Our AGM will be held at Blackdown Hall on 10th October at 7.30. Among the items to be discussed will be how we spend our income. West Dorset District Council would like us to consider a further housing development.

I hope that people will attend and let us hear what you think. Do we build more houses and do we improve the fingerposts?

David Hitchcock, Chairman, CLT

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Autumn apple recipes

Sausage and apple stuffing

This recipe is intended to be for stuffing the turkey at Christmas but can also be put in a dish as a separate stuffing and is delicious made into a loaf and served with a tomato sauce. Serves six.

Ingredients:

500g sausage meat
1 large onion finely chopped and sautéed
1 heaped dessertspoon parsley
3 tablespoons dried breadcrumbs
1 large cooking apple, peeled and chopped
Salt and pepper

Method:

Set the oven to 180°C/350°F
Gas Mark 4.

Combine all ingredients. If using as a stuffing, either place into turkey or flatten into a dish to serve separately and cover with foil.

For a tasty meat loaf, shape and place in a dish, cover with foil and cook in a moderate oven for about 45 minutes. Serve with a spicy tomato sauce.



Red cabbage with apple

The perfect autumn dish. Goes well with roasts, especially pork. Serves six.

Ingredients:

1 kg red cabbage
50g butter
2 large cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped
½ level teaspoon salt
¼ level teaspoon black pepper

Method:

Set the oven to 180°C/350°F
Gas Mark 4.

Shred the cabbage, wash and drain. Melt butter in casserole dish, add ingredients and mix. Cover and bake for 1-1½ hours or until tender.

Recipes by Joy McClellan

Upper Marshwood Vale Parish

Council meeting: 21 July

A glance at the agenda produced by Parish Clerk John Vanderwolfe did not threaten an extended meeting but as coucillors assembled in the freshly painted hall, it soon became obvious that we would not have either of our two county coucillors present.

Chairman Matthew Bowditch soon dealt with the preliminaries and called for reports from our district coucillors. Jacqui Sewell told us that to avoid road congestion, Highways would undertake the planned batch of resurfacing of many local roads at night.

In another good idea, resurfacing of roads in the Beaminster area was retimed to avoid the Melpash show day, when the Beaminster tunnel was to be closed. Although not quite taking place in our parish, this foresight has saved all of our Vale from self-inflicted congestion.

Moving towards a unitary council, Cllr Sewell said a one-off planned cost of £25m should generate savings of £20m per year.

Since the Neighbourhood Plan is about to spend funds on a questionnaire which will need printing and distribution as well as analysis, Mike Robinson gave the council an update. At present he is Neighbourhood Plan chairman but is to retire in favour of Charles Somers. The council approved these plans.

Also speaking as a member of the public, David Hitchcock gave details of some of the next options for the Community Land Trust which he chairs. Considering new ideas for the CLT to pursue, he gave as an example the state of fingerposts around the Vale.

One such sign has two spelling mistakes and many others have deteriorated since being erected. Dealing with the costs of such a project, it seems that some funding for the repairs might be available from senior councils but David asked the parish council for a contribution; a figure was discussed but this would have to be subject to a future vote by the council.

The new owner of Manor Farm, Stoke Abbott, applied to fell of a number of trees to open up views. Cllr Bob Wyatt pointed out that a number of the trees were subject to Tree Preservation Orders, so members agreed to leave the decision to the experts and support the Trees Officer who has the necessary knowledge to decide.

Matthew Bowditch left the chair to vice-chair Eddie Rowe as he had an interest in the next planning application to erect a machinery store. Coucillors agreed to support the application. Members heard that the developers of the controversial Bottle Lane site have launched an appeal.

Coucillors' reports included the low level of work for the lengthsman during the summer and the imminent review of the address list for Beneath the Vale. Mr Vanderwolfe discussed the problems of poor quality plans as the district council planners go all electronic.

Although this seemed like a comprehensive list of items for discussion, the proceedings were briskly dealt with and the date of the next meeting was reached in just under the hour.

Editor's note: The next meeting on 15 September was held after our deadline. The report will be in our Winter edition.

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Bettiscombe Village Hall gets spruced-up

People of all ages helped re-paint Bettiscombe Village Hall this summer. Sheila Johnson organised the effort and cooked a meal for the volunteers. John Brown supervised.

Marshwood Young Farmers and their younger brothers and sisters provided the labour. All in all a great job was done in plenty of time for the wet weather this winter.



Superfast broadband hits a slow patch

As detailed in the previous issue of *BTV*, works are ongoing to complete our superfast broadband upgrade and many of you will have seen new trenching with ducts being laid underground.

Progress is slower than predicted. What is missing is the installation of the optical fibre (OF) cable and connection boxes and the latest news from BT Openreach is that these works will be undertaken in phases over about the next two months. A coverage map and diagrams have been posted on the parish council notice board outside the Marshwood shop and anyone who hasn't registered yet should do so on www.dorsetforyou.com

Go to 'broadband' and click on 'keep me informed'. That way you will be informed when the new service becomes available; but remember, nothing will happen unless you ask your ISP for an upgrade.

Charles Somers

Neighbourhood Plan latest

The Neighbourhood Plan committee is setting up a website, which will go live in a couple of months. The site will bring together all the information about the NP and what it means for the area.

The committee is also planning a questionnaire to seek the views of everyone who lives in the Upper Marshwood Vale. The aim is to distribute this online and to post copies out with the Winter edition of *BTV*.



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