

# Char Chat News

For residents and our guests in  
Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine, Morcombela  
Stanton St Gabriel, Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld

April 2022

## Welcome to the Char Valley Parish Council newsletter

April 2022

The sun shone and snow fell, the wind blew and rain poured, and the lawn needed cutting in February! Covid is still with us and there's a catastrophic war in Ukraine that is important to, and affects, all of us. We are much more connected through human actions world-wide than we may have thought, and your contributions are invaluable and greatly appreciated.

In this edition we have some important information about local activities that affect you and need your input.

First, CVPC, with Dorset Council, are carrying out a survey to assess the need for local affordable housing in Char Valley. This is a very long term project but critical to provide opportunities for local people including younger families and ***we need your input within the next 4 weeks***. See page 3 for details of the survey.

Second, the River Char Community Project (RCCP) has been very active and we're excited that our neighbouring parishes (Charmouth and Upper Marshwood Vale) are becoming involved in their own investigations of the river. Work continues on the River Char itself, but a major cause of pollution to the river and water courses is from waste water and sewage. Almost all of us have private sewage systems and the enclosed leaflet outlines what we need to do to reduce the damage.

Third, as you probably all know, it's the Queen's Platinum Jubilee year. There are local committees in place planning activities, and there's a note on page 4 about gifts for local children.

You may have seen the tree felling and clearing in Charmouth Woods. We have an article from our new tree officer to explain the reasons and dangers that Larch Die Back represents. *It's not just Larch that's threatened*—please read and check your trees.

As always, we have a couple of articles on our local history. This time we move on from pubs, in our last edition, to grave diggers, graveyards, and saints. (No social comment implied)

Finally, to Hedgehogs—give them a gentle hug—and what we can do to protect and encourage them.

Enjoy...

*The Editor*

**Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC)** is a group council made up of the civil parish councils of Stanton St Gabriel, Whitchurch Canonorum (North and South), and Wootton Fitzpaine.

Because each separate council is small, we join up for meetings so we can take decisions together and achieve more.

The combined civil parish stretches from the Jurassic Coast to the Marshwood Vale, all falling within the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

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Opinions expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily represent the views of CVPC as a whole.

## CVPC Meetings

CVPC meets monthly except in August and December. Being a group council, our meetings are normally held in each of our village halls in rotation—James Hargreaves Hall in Morcombelake (JH), Whitchurch Canonorum village hall (WC), and Wootton Fitzpaine village hall (WF). The meeting minutes and agenda are posted on parish notice boards and website. All our meetings are open to the public and we welcome public participation.

Our meetings start at 7:30pm, with the following schedule:

*2022 Meetings:* 9<sup>th</sup> May JH 13<sup>th</sup> June WC 18<sup>th</sup> July WF 12<sup>th</sup> September JH 10<sup>th</sup> October WC  
21<sup>st</sup> November WF

## CVPC COUNCILLORS

[www.charvalley.org](http://www.charvalley.org)

### Representing: WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM (NORTH)

Sylvia Creed-Castle	07876 820585	E: <a href="mailto:sylviabluntshay@btinternet.com">sylviabluntshay@btinternet.com</a>
or	01297 489064	
Sue Johnson	01297 489375	E: <a href="mailto:cardsmillfarmholidays@gmail.com">cardsmillfarmholidays@gmail.com</a>
Hilary Joyce	01297 560298	E: <a href="mailto:hjoyce@charvalleypc.com">hjoyce@charvalleypc.com</a>
Juliet Busby	07976 369323	E: <a href="mailto:julietbusby@gmail.com">julietbusby@gmail.com</a>

### Representing: WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM (SOUTH)

Christine Bailey	01297 489714	E: <a href="mailto:chris--bailey@live.co.uk">chris--bailey@live.co.uk</a>
Julia Eager	01297 561688	E: <a href="mailto:juliaeager@me.com">juliaeager@me.com</a>
Clare Mahaddie	01297 489813	E: <a href="mailto:cmahaddie@charvalleypc.com">cmahaddie@charvalleypc.com</a>
Chris Noon	03333 030963	E: <a href="mailto:chrisnooncvpc@outlook.com">chrisnooncvpc@outlook.com</a>

### Representing: WOOTTON FITZPAINE

Tara Hansford	01297 560624	E: <a href="mailto:taz.hansford@gmail.com">taz.hansford@gmail.com</a>
Nick Ziebland	07831 898366	E: <a href="mailto:nick.ziebland@gmail.com">nick.ziebland@gmail.com</a>

### VACANCY

### Representing: STANTON ST. GABRIEL

Andrew Carey	01297 560057	E: <a href="mailto:acarey@charvalleypc.com">acarey@charvalleypc.com</a>
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### Representing: DORSET COUNCIL: Councillor for Marshwood Vale ward

Simon Christopher	07798 833715	E: <a href="mailto:cllrSimon.christopher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk">cllrSimon.christopher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk</a>
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### CLERK

Tamsin Ely	07786 086038	E: <a href="mailto:charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk">charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk</a>
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<b>Footpath Officers:</b>	Wootton Fitzpaine	Sarah Dewe	<a href="mailto:sarahdewe@mac.com">sarahdewe@mac.com</a>	07973920001
	Whitchurch	Christine Peat	<a href="mailto:christine_peat15@yahoo.co.uk">christine_peat15@yahoo.co.uk</a>	

<b>Tree Officer:</b>	Emma O'Bryen	<a href="mailto:emma@obryen.co.uk">emma@obryen.co.uk</a>
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We have two new councillors—please see page 7 for their introductions!!

The April meeting of CVPC saw a change in the way the council is working. Please see the minutes of our April meeting for detailed description of roles and responsibilities of your councillors.

# Housing Needs Survey for Char Valley Parishes

*Closing Date May 31st*

Please submit your responses online at  
[www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Char-Valley-Housing](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Char-Valley-Housing)

Or contact our Clerk for a paper copy

**07786 086 038**

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN CHAR VALLEY?

**A Survey to find out how much is needed.**

### BACKGROUND

We all know that property in West Dorset is becoming more and more expensive to rent or buy, pushing costs well beyond the means of most local people. Also, properties for long-term rent are almost impossible to find because owners can make more money from short-term holiday lets or B and B.

About 9 years ago Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC) in conjunction with Hastoe Housing Association, built 9 affordable homes in Whitchurch. The families who live in these houses are fast growing up and the children of the present occupants as well as other young people in Char Valley may well want to form new households while remaining in the parish. There may also be demand from other, older people, typically farmers, living in larger houses, who want to move into smaller homes, leaving their farmhouses to the younger generation. There may also be other people needing affordable places to live in Char Valley for other reasons.

**We need to find out the scale of potential demand before we can embark on efforts to improve the situation.**

### FIRST STEPS

It can take a long time to get affordable houses built (at Whitchurch it took almost 10 years!) but there is now a recognised way to do it with the support of Dorset Council's Housing Enabling team. First, a **Community Land Trust** (CLT) needs to be set up to manage the project, made up of people from the community. The process typically takes about 5 years and requires a great deal of hard work by a dedicated group. In Upper Marshwood Vale, for example, the effort has paid off and 8 houses were built for local people about 7 years ago.

However, before anything can be started, we, need to know the likely scale of the demand.

### A SURVEY OF LOCAL HOUSING NEED.

CVPC is promoting a survey to be carried out by Dorset Council's Housing Enabling Service.

Those of you with internet connections can use this link [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Char-Valley-Housing](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Char-Valley-Housing)

to an on-line questionnaire which aims to quantify the need in our area. If you don't use the internet, the Parish Council can provide hard copies for you to fill in and return directly to the Dorset Council Enabling Team. If you need a hard copy, please contact our Parish Clerk on 07786 086 038. The survey will run from 13th April to 31st May 2022.

**Do, please, take part in the survey, and encourage your friends and neighbours to do it too.** Even if you are unsure of what your situation will be in 5 years' time, you can safely take a guess at how much you would be able to afford because the figures on the form are not a commitment of any kind, simply an indication to help in planning. Alternatively, if you are really unable to think of a figure, you can simply leave the financial questions blank and carry on with the rest of the survey.

Dorset Council will analyse the results and pass the overall conclusion but not the details, back to CVPC.

**No personal information or names will be available to the Parish Council, just the figures for the number of homes of each type needed.**

**It is important to remember that completing this survey does not put your name on the DC housing register although ultimately you would need to be registered in order to get a house.**

***Nothing can happen without your responses—please take part***





## A JUBILEE GIFT for CHILDREN

The Jubilee is nearly upon us. We hope to give each child a free gift to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. So we need to know all the children between ages 0-18 living in the Char Valley Parish area in order to make sure we have enough gifts.



**Please email Tamsin Ely, our parish clerk, [with just your child(ren)'s names] by the beginning of May, if you would like your child to have this memento. [charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk](mailto:charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk)**



## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE JAMES HARGREAVES HALL MORCOMBELAKE



The hall is named after the minister, James Hargreaves born around 1800.

He completed his training into the ministry and was then invited in 1830 to come to Morcombelake to establish schools and chapels in the area, within an 8 mile radius, which he undertook on horseback.

The first chapel in Morcombelake was built in 1832 on this site. In 1863 a schoolroom (which is now the Village Hall) was added at the front of the chapel. The entrance was shared with the chapel.

During the Second World War ( 1939 – 1945 ), the hall was used for social dances and also net making (the pegs on the wall were used for this). Mothers from the area earned money making them.

During the early sixties Rev H. S. Vickery was appointed, he organised the renovation and repairs of the building and the installation of the arched window.

In 1997 the last service in the Chapel was held, services being continued in St. Gabriels Church, on the main road in the village. The Chapel was then in a bad state of repair.

1999 saw the United Reformed Church offer the village the opportunity to buy the hall and chapel, for a sum of £15,000. A steering group was set up.

In December 2000, it was decided to demolish the chapel as it was beyond repair. In April 2001, a lottery bid was submitted and rejected, so villagers raised the money themselves, with grants from local and Dorset councils.

Charitable status was then granted and by April 2004 enough money had been raised, so, in 2005, the Chapel was demolished and refurbishment of the hall commenced.

In honour of James Hargreaves the hall was named after him. He is buried with family members in the churchyard, the garden is based on the grounds of the Chapel.

CHAR VALLEY PARISH COUNCIL, recently donated a bench which is situated in the garden of the James Hargreaves Village Hall, Morcombelake



## Talking Sewage

Although most homes in our parishes rely on a septic tank rather than mains drainage, septic tanks are rarely talked about. We try to forget about them and dread the day that the wrong smell or a visible leak tells us that something's wrong.

But it's high time we had a serious talk about sewage – for several reasons:

The law has changed recently.

**From January 1 2020, it became illegal for any septic tank in England to discharge effluent directly into a watercourse such as a river, stream or pond; any that do must either be replaced or upgraded.**

It's extremely difficult to sell your house unless its septic tank is compliant.

**When you come to sell your house, your buyer will insist that the septic tank meets all the legal requirements. If it doesn't, you will have to install a new one in a hurry or pay for the buyer to do so.**

We're all much more aware of the problem of pollution in our rivers.

**Faulty, leaking and overflowing septic tanks are one of the main causes of pollution in our rivers. They mean that *E. coli* and other potentially very dangerous bacteria get into the river – the same river that children play and swim in all through the summer.**

**Important information for households with septic tanks (including cesspits and small sewage treatment plants)**

No matter what your dad told you... **ALL TYPES OF TANK NEED TO BE EMPTIED REGULARLY!**



**Have your tank or system emptied by a registered waste carrier at least every 2 years and preferably every year** (only some very new sewage treatment plants can be emptied less often)

**Check for signs of pollution** like sewage smells, pools of water, sludge, foam, lush weeds or grey fungus around your tank and in nearby streams/ditches. If you spot any, call a specialist for help.

**Make sure your gutters and downpipes don't feed into your septic tank.**

Rainwater from your roof should go straight into a land drain, surface water drain, ditch, gully or storm water drain. That way, when there's a downpour, your septic tank isn't overwhelmed and flooded.

**Don't put fats, cooking oils paint, bleach or harsh chemicals down the drain or your toilet** – they kill the bacteria that break down the waste in your septic tank.

**Use phosphate-free cleaners and detergents** that say they are suitable for septic tanks (Ecover, Magnum from Aldi, Bio-D, Method and Ecozone are worth considering.)

**Don't flush sanitary towels or other sanitary items**, nappies, 'flushable' wipes or similar objects down the toilet as they can block the system. Wrap them up and put them in your rubbish bin.

If you have a rental property or b&b – make sure that visitors know these last three rules. A useful shorthand guide is: **ONLY flush the 3Ps: Pee, Poo and toilet Paper.**

We've prepared a leaflet on the subject – it's included with this issue of *Char Chat*. If you need extra copies, please contact the Parish Clerk, Tamsin Ely (her details are in this newsletter). You can also read more on our website: [www.charvalley.org/sewage](http://www.charvalley.org/sewage)

## LARCH DIE-BACK

Motivated by some Christmas reading and seeing the notice in the recent Char Chat News, I find myself stepping into the inspiring shoes of Carolyn Peck – who has been your local tree officer for an impressive 12 years, keeping an eye on the Trees and Hedgerows of the Char Valley Council area, particularly the conservation area in Whitchurch.

A Forestry England spokesperson for the area told me how upsetting it was that they were having to take down trees, particularly the sweet chestnuts, which were just reaching maturity and becoming valuable hosts for wildlife.

As I'm sure you all know some of the iconic trees on the skyline on Conegar Hill are larches so here's some more information in the hope that we can all spot the warning signs of the disease.



My first job, I find, is to write an article about Larch Die-Back. Forestry England announce they are clear felling their larches at Monkton Wyld, Trinity Hill & the Charmouth forests, including Wootton Hill, as they've found evidence of larch die-back in their woods sadly.

Larch die-back is caused by *Phytophthora ramorum*. *Phytophthora* species are microscopic fungal-like organisms closely related to algae. Their name literally means 'the plant-destroyer' and they have been responsible for some of the worst plant disease epidemics in history, including potato blight which led to the disastrous Irish potato famine in the 1800s.

Unfortunately, Forestry England have found the *Phytophthora ramorum* not just on larch, but also on sweet chestnuts. If anyone has been up there recently you will notice that the area has been clear felled, including rhodendron, for a specified area around the infected trees. It looks brutal but Forestry England have no choice as they do their best to control the disease. (And are legally obliged to undertake this work).

### How can you tell if your trees or plants are affected?

Symptoms include:

- Blackened base of the leaf near the petiole (stalk) and along the midrib of the leaf.
- Withered and blackened leaves or needles leading to dieback of the outer branches.
- Areas of black "bleeding" on the trunk.
- In larch, the disease progresses very quickly so whole trees will be dead within a short period of time.
- As well as larch, it can also affect: English oak, sessile oak, sweet chestnut, beech, sycamore, horse chestnut, cherry, ash, birch.





## Larch Die-Back ctd....

Trees in the wetter parts of the UK are particularly susceptible because the pathogen requires water to spread and infect its host. Major outbreaks on larch have occurred in south-west Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Cornwall.

Unfortunately the disease is here to stay - it was first discovered in the UK in 2002 on an imported *Viburnum* plant. It can spread naturally in wind-blown rain (up to 4 miles) but it is the plant trade that spread this disease across the globe.

Before its discovery there were approximately 154,000 hectares of larch planted in Great Britain, 5% of the total woodland area. Most of this has been lost and larch can no longer be used as a timber species.

*Phytophthora ramorum* is also found commonly on shrubs such as *Rhododendron* (hence its inclusion in the clear felling), *Viburnum* and *Camellia* (in fact a large proportion of findings of the fungus have been in plant nurseries), where it may cause browning of leaves, lesions or cankers, wilting and dieback. Again we all need to be vigilant looking out for evidence of the disease on those plants too.

There is lots more information on the RHS website— search for *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora*

*kernoviae*.

If you suspect any of your plants or trees might be suffering please do follow it up with the Defra, Forestry England or Woodland Trust (contact details below) as this is a **notifiable disease**. (*That means if you think you have it you must report it*). Dave Peck (East Devon Beat Manager, Forestry England) recommends that anyone with trees such as larch or sweet chestnut should be regularly checking them for signs of the disease.

He also makes a plea for taking precautions to prevent the transfer of the disease from one site to another. For example, if you have been for a walk in any of the places they are clear-felling, then before you go elsewhere, and potentially spread the disease, brush/ wash off your boots with a disinfectant if possible.

The Defra portal is

[www.bit.ly/CVPC28](http://www.bit.ly/CVPC28)

and there's also a Woodland Trust partnership with

[www.observatree.org.uk](http://www.observatree.org.uk)

Forestry England is

[www.bit.ly/CVPC27](http://www.bit.ly/CVPC27)

For suggestions of trees that you *can* plant please contact me, Emma O'Bryen, at [emma@obryen.co.uk](mailto:emma@obryen.co.uk)

## Two new Councillors for CVPC

CVPC is delighted to welcome two new councillors to join us. This brings us up to 11 councillors spread over our joint parishes, one short of our electoral allocation of 12 — so there is still a place for you!!

### Juliet Busby.

I have just moved into the area after 45 years on and off in the Bride Valley, with my family including my mother, husband and four children, and the pets which will keep growing. We feel very lucky to have moved into one of our dream farms and I am sure that you will all see us looking after this beautiful part of Dorset if you meander along the Monarchs Way— our dogs will certainly come and say hello.

### Nick Ziebland.

I am delighted to have been co-opted onto our Parish Council recently. I have lived in Whitchurch Canonorum for 13 years now, so still a newcomer! We moved here after I retired from a career in retailing and have not regretted it for one moment. I have been involved in a variety of businesses and charities since moving here and am currently on the board of Local Food Links which probably provides school lunches for some of your children. The Parish Council has taken on a number of important projects in the last few years, particularly around the environment and climate change and this is one of the reasons I was keen to join. I look forward to working with a great team of people.

## The River Char Community Project: Clean, Revive, Restore

As promised in the last edition of *Char Chat*, we launched the River Char Community Project on 11th December with a meeting and walk at Becklands Organic Farm. Ian Rees of Dorset AONB and Nick Gray of Dorset Wildlife Trust described how the continuing work would involve:

- **Monitoring:** training local people in river monitoring techniques.
- **Habitat improvement & restoration:** to allow aquatic plants and fish species to thrive.
- **Invasive species control:** including clearing Himalayan balsam and monitoring mink.
- **Research & survey:** establish what the natural state, flora and fauna of the river would be.
- **Septic tank management:** Ensuring that septic tanks are managed correctly and do not pollute the river.
- **Agricultural land management:** Working with the farming community help reduce sediment runoff and nutrient pollution. (At the event, Tim Bowden of FWAG demonstrated the different quality of hedgerow soil and soil that has been compacted by ploughing and agricultural vehicles.)
- **Natural Flood Management:** work to delay and reduce flood peaks and reduce sediment runoff.
- **Community engagement:** Most of this work cannot be done without help from local volunteers.

More details on all these approaches can be found on our website at [www.charvalley.org/riverchar](http://www.charvalley.org/riverchar)

On 17th January we held an evening 'Char Conversation' led by Ian Rees and Nick Gray and attended by 37 people. See the Questions and Answers summarised at [www.charvalley.org/rivercharqanda](http://www.charvalley.org/rivercharqanda)

On 12th February, we held a 'daylighting' working party (to clear a section of the river and its banks).

On Saturday 12th March, we held a second river restoration and bat-box making session with Dorset AONB and Dorset Wildlife Trust at Befferlands Farm. Around 30 people got good clearance work done along a stretch of the river, with new wildlife habitats created from the coppiced branches.



*A stretch of the River Char after 'daylighting' (trees coppiced on the south bank) – a haunt of the iconic dipper. – Photo: Nick Gray*

### Forthcoming events

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April – training for local residents in riverfly monitoring techniques. (The event is full but please contact the clerk if you want to join a future training)

15th June (early evening) – A guided river walk/talk with Nick Gray. *Please put the date in your diary now for this ramble and/or for the more arduous...*

21<sup>st</sup> July (early evening) – First of two working parties to start on rooting out Himalayan Balsam.

### How you can help

If you've got a septic tank/cesspit/sewage treatment plant, you can help keep the river free of sewage by maintaining your tank and getting it emptied regularly. (See the leaflet and separate article in this issue.)

If you are fit and willing to help with our working parties, or just want to follow what we're doing, please contact Tamsin Ely, Parish Clerk, and ask her to add you to the River Char email list.

There's more to the river than pollution and invasive species. Do send us sightings or photos of anything of interest + poetry, artwork – anything we can add to the website. Encourage children or grandchildren too...

You'll always find latest news and updates at: [www.charvalley.org/riverchar](http://www.charvalley.org/riverchar)



## River Char Community Project ctd...

### Local News

There have recently been widely publicised sewage releases into the River Char by Wessex Water. We have had a conversation with our MP, Chris Loder, about this and are looking forward to working with the newly formed Lower Char Community Project who are in contact with Wessex Water about this ongoing problem.

The nearby River Asker Community Project met on 23rd March and reported great progress with a similar scheme over the last 2 years, also led by Dorset AONB and Dorset Wildlife Trust. So we have high hopes for our own project.

Finally... the government has four public consultations currently open on River Basin management plans, its response to the Landscapes Review, the Nature Recovery Green Paper and Environmental Targets. You'll find links to all of them at [www.charvalley.org/environment](http://www.charvalley.org/environment) – please respond to any that interest you.

*Coppiced branches were dragged away to create horse-shoe refuges for insects, beetles and small rodents. (Photo: Hilary Joyce)*



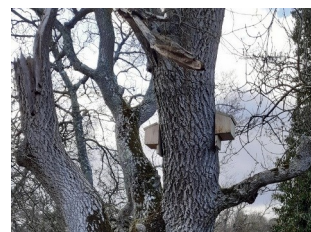
### Off to work we went...

Two action workshops have been held this year to improve the banks of the River Char where it passes through Cardsmill and Bafferlands Farms. Volunteers hinged and coppiced riverside trees, made insect and beetle habitats and made bat boxes. It was also good fun! Unfortunately, the river was flowing too fast to allow the planting of willow cuttings.

There will be Himalayan balsam pulling workshops during the summer and more river restoration workshops next winter.



*Making bat boxes required all hands on deck... (Photo: Hilary Joyce)*



*Freshly fashioned bat boxes on a riverside Ash – Photo: Nick Gray*

Author: Andrew Carey

## Protected Rights of Way—important updates

As we move into warmer brighter weather, we will see an increase in the number of people walking our footpaths and other protected rights of way. There are two major points of concern that all of you can help with.

First: the behaviour of those using these routes—please help everyone by knowing and following the Countryside Code. If you see others who seem unaware of the Code, please mention it to them (in a polite way!) and if you are hosting visitors or guests then please ensure they are aware of the Code.

The latest version (updated 7th Feb 2022) of the Countryside Code can be found at:

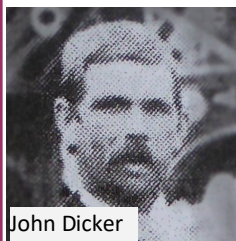
[www.bit.ly/CVPC22](http://www.bit.ly/CVPC22) with a printable notice here: [www.bit.ly/CVPC26](http://www.bit.ly/CVPC26)

Second: It helps everyone if our rights of way are clearly signposted and kept in a useable condition. By keeping routes clear and obvious, we avoid problems caused by people straying from the paths and damaging crops, or potentially injuring themselves. If you use these routes and find problems, please report them to Dorset Councils rights of way officers by registering the issue online at:

[www.bit.ly/CVPC24](http://www.bit.ly/CVPC24)

## GRAVE DIGGERS AND INTERESTING BURIALS AT WHITCHURCH

It is believed that the Symonds family, who are the village grave-diggers, moved from Symondsbury, near Bridport to Whitchurch sometime in the mid to late 1800s. The first one to arrive was Simeon (born 1835)



John Dicker

who was a farmer. Over the following decades, his son John Dicker (b 1871) farmed at Griddleshay on Bluntshay



Percy

Lane. His son Percy (b 1904) farmed at Butt in Ryall. Simeon (b 1931) (Percy's son) worked with his father at Butt until 1968 when the farm was sold.



Simeon

Simeon had already started an agricultural contracting business at this time, working on the many small farms in the Marshwood Vale and beyond.

“Simmy” as he was affectionately known took his youngest son Michael into the business in 1974. By 1995 Michael's son Mark had



Mark

joined the family firm. Mark is the fifth generation of the Symonds family to be a grave digger.



Michael

There are some famous people buried at Whitchurch. Sir Robin Day, “The Great Inquisitor”, has a cremation stone near the main church door. He used to live at



Morcombelake and bought cider from my father. He is remembered as a political journalist, and television and radio broadcaster. He worked both for

ITN and BBC. He was a regular fixture on all BBC general election night programmes from the 1960s until 1987.

Georgi Markov, the Bulgarian dissident who worked for

the BBC, is buried in the churchyard. On 11 September 1978, as he walked over Waterloo Bridge, London near where he worked he was jabbed with a poison-tipped umbrella by an associate of the Bulgarian Secret Service, and developed septicaemia and died 4 days later.



One side of the headstone is in English and the reverse is in Bulgarian with a beautiful rose on the actual grave. Georgi Markov's in-laws used to live in the Vale. The burial took place at 8 am, in secret, so that there was no media presence.

It is believed that Sir George Somers, the “The Discoverer of Bermuda”, is buried somewhere under the flagstones inside the church. No-one knows where. He was born on 24 April 1554 at Lyme Regis and became a naval hero and privateer. He was knighted in 1603 and became Member of Parliament for Lyme Regis in 1604. At some stage he bought Berne Manor on the edge of the Whitchurch parish.

In 1609 he was appointed admiral of the Virginia Company which was organised to provide relief to the Jamestown colony settled in North American two years before. He set sail from Plymouth on the “Sea Venture”, the flagship of a seven-ship fleet. En route the fleet ran into a hurricane, the ships became separated and the Sea Venture was shipwrecked off Bermuda.

The crew remained on the island for 10 months, living off food gathered from the land and sea. In the meantime they built two new boats the Deliverance and the Patience and sailed off to Jamestown only to find a much depleted population racked by famine. The Bermudian produce saved the colony. Sir George sailed back to Bermuda to get more supplies but became ill and died on the island of “surfeit of pig” on 9 November 1610. Food poisoning perhaps! Local legend says that he loved Bermuda so much that he requested that his heart be buried there. So this was done. His body was sent back to England pickled in a barrel of rum, to be buried in Whitchurch Canonicorum church.





Perhaps the most important person buried at



Whitchurch in a shrine inside the church is St Wite. It is believed that she was a Saxon holy hermitess who lived near a sacred spring on Chardown Hill (off the A35 in Morcombelake). Legend says that she was killed in the late 800s by marauding Danes who regularly attacked

and pillaged villages near the coast. She was so highly thought of that King Alfred is understood to have had built a small wooden church in her honour.

Over the years this was replaced with a small stone church and lastly by the "Cathedral of the Vale" that we know today. Whitchurch can boast of being one of only two churches in England to have the bones of its patron saint buried within its walls. [The other one is Westminster Abbey.]



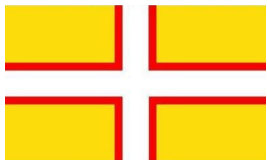
## St Wite's Well

An annual makeover of this well loved local heritage feature was recently carried out by 4 Morcombelake villagers – despite it being a soggy January Saturday morning. Battling overgrown buddleia and a carpet of crocosmia that does well in these parts, the Well can now be seen! The Well is one of many hidden heritage gems in our local landscape.



left to right, villagers Romy, Carol and Ronnie

The well is a spring issuing from the eastern side of Chardown Hill southwest of Ship Knapp Farmhouse, and was named the 'Saint's Well' on the 1887 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. This spring has been known as a Holy Well since at least the 17th century. Also known as St Candida's Well, the water is considered to have curative properties for eye complaints. On nearby Stonebarrow Hill, the wild periwinkle flowers are called 'St Candida's eyes'.



June 1st is Dorset Day and the feast day of St Wite, and the Dorset County flag is also known as St Wite's Cross. Her remains are said to be enshrined in the church in Whitchurch—see separate article on local graves.

The well is one of the National Trust's archaeological and historical sites on the Golden Cap estate. Discover more of their sites, visit: <https://heritagerecords.nationaltrust.org.uk> and put Golden Cap estate in the search tab.

Ruth Worsley, local heritage and landscape enthusiast.

[ruthieworsley@gmail.com](mailto:ruthieworsley@gmail.com)



## CHARMOUTH HAS HEDGEHOGS !

This year Charmouth seems to have had a promising number of hedgehog sightings and evidence of their presence in the form of distinctive dark tapered droppings, which sometimes look like a dark slug, has been seen in several gardens.

The UK's only spiny mammal is in serious decline and there are many factors at play several of which we can help with.

Hedgehogs are found both in the countryside and urban and suburban areas. As the name suggests, traditionally they would be found near hedges which are an ideal nesting site, providing a good supply of food, protection from predators and corridors to move along. Pastures used for grazing are also important foraging areas for hedgehogs.

The right kinds of gardens can provide hedgehogs with a plentiful supply of food, both natural and supplementary, as well as many potential nest sites for breeding, resting and hibernation. For these reasons urban areas have become a stronghold for hedgehogs in recent years.

They have home ranges of around 10-20 hectares, which means that any one hedgehog might travel around at least half of Charmouth. They will roam on average 2 km per night searching for food and potentially up to 3 km in the case of males searching for a female.



Hedgehogs are widely recognised as a potential ally in the garden. They are carnivorous and generalists, eating invertebrates such as beetles, slugs, caterpillars and earwigs depending on which invertebrates are abundant throughout the spring to autumn. They are also opportunists and will eat carrion, frogs, baby rodents and birds, bird's eggs and fallen fruit, much of which contains invertebrates as well.

These two factors are critical to why hedgehog numbers have declined – they need a network of gardens to roam around and they need those gardens to have plenty of invertebrates.

Fragmentation is a major issue with fences replacing hedging, walls, new developments, and busier roads all breaking up green spaces that hedgehogs depend upon.

### **Hedgehog Highways**

We can make their life a little easier by making holes in or under our garden fences and walls for them to pass through. These DIY hedgehog highways only need to be approximately 13cm x 13cm. This is too small for most dogs to escape from gardens. You can even buy gravel boards with a hedgehog hole ready cut ! Planting more hedges and keeping existing hedges wide is the ideal option. The wider and denser a hedge, the more biodiversity it supports providing benefits to all wildlife.

### **Leave a mess !**

Piles of cut twigs and logs and leaf piles provide ideal foraging and resting sites. As a true hibernator, hedgehogs need a sheltered place for hibernation and they also need the leaf litter to line the hibernation site with. As a gardener, I have more than once found hedgehogs curled up in beautifully woven leaves from plants such as carex and iris that they have carefully wrapped around themselves having gathered leaves in first.

### **Make a pond**

Ponds, with safe access into and out of for mammals, support a huge range of biodiversity which can help provide food and a source of water for hedgehogs as well as supporting other wildlife.

### **Avoid or reduce using pesticides and herbicides**

The use of slug pellets and herbicidal weedkillers all impacts upon invertebrate populations that our small mammals and birds rely upon. Even chemicals licensed and promoted as earth friendly and safe are increasingly being shown to have negative impacts upon our soil micro-organisms and complex ecosystems of invertebrates. See the Pesticide Action Network UK for more information.

### **Supplementary food**

Specially made hedgehog foods exist and can be bought from most local pet and garden stores as can hedgehog houses (the wooden ones are safest for them) for hibernation and nesting.

Hedgehog Street is a UK wide campaign to inform the public and support hedgehog research including a map that you can log your sightings onto.

[www.hedgehogstreet.org/](http://www.hedgehogstreet.org/)

Article courtesy of Julie Leah at [Charmouthgreengroup@gmail.com](mailto:Charmouthgreengroup@gmail.com).