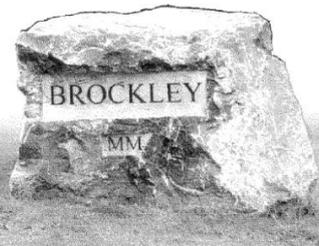


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Brock's News



The annual newsletter of Brockley Parish Council

Annual parish meeting 2015

The 122nd APM brought 18 people to Chelvey Church on 30 March: a good turnout, but down on previous years.

Chairman's report Julian Ridge summarised the key issues over the year.

North Somerset Core Strategy: The Planning Inspector has now submitted his report, implying a housing supply target of 21,000 between 2006 and 2026, with a policy review due in 2018. North Somerset should now be able to develop its strategic plan for new housing provision, hopefully putting a brake on the recent rash of development applications. **Footpaths:** These are in good order and the new path from the A370 to the Bowling Green is being well used. **Gullies and drainage:** The problem in Brockley Hall has been resolved, and an attempt is being made to instigate regular maintenance of key roadside gullies around the parish. **Wall along the footway on the A370:** This 200 year-old feature has a number of gaps, and we are in discussion with the owner and with North Somerset Council, who are responsible for it below footway level. The cost is likely to exceed £15,000 and we hope Bristol Airport's Local Community Fund may be sympathetic to the heritage argument its restoration. **Road safety:** Horse & Rider signs and 'Slow' markings have been completed on the blind approaches to Chelvey Church. Our thanks go to the Airport Fund, which donated £378 for the work. **Backwell West Town sign on the A370:** This village name plate had been erected on tall poles some years ago at Chelvey Batch, about 250 metres inside the Chelvey boundary. (The boundary actually crosses the A370 at Fountain Cottages/Pit Lane.) After lengthy negotiation with Backwell and North Somerset Councils, we have now had their sign removed. We intend also to manage the grass verges in this area in a more eco-friendly way, rather than having them mown as at present like a bowling green. **Bringing water to Brockley Church:** It is proving very difficult to get all parties, of which there are several, to agree to a plan. **Litter:** Recently we have had a commitment from North Somerset Council to clear the Combe twice a year, and this has just been done. Sadly, within days the litter began to reappear. We thank those parishioners who give their time to pick up litter throughout the parish (see item below). **Elections:** Five of our six parish councillors will stand again on 7 May, so there will be a vacancy. Parishioners have all received a flier with details of how to stand. **2015-16 budget:** After three level years, we have raised the precept by £200 to ensure our call on reserves is minimal.

Other reports District Councillor Geoff Coombs reported briefly on the Boundary Review (triggered by a 20 per cent reduction

in the number of district councillors), council tax (frozen for another year), the new Link Road (work began in February), and the Core Strategy.

Parishioners' questions began with concerns that the new Link Road might become a new city boundary for developers. There led to discussion about pressures on the Green Belt, particularly after the 2018 review. At present the Green Belt is being protected both by central government and the district council, but there is scope for development on it special circumstances can be demonstrated and/or where there is a strong affordable housing element.

Farewells In May our parish will leave Backwell Ward and go, with Cleeve, into an enlarged Wrington Ward: we said our goodbyes to Geoff Coombs and Karen Barclay, who have served us well. Also leaving us is David Pike, who has been a parish councillor since 1991 and contributed much to the work of the council. We have particularly appreciated his expertise on Bristol Airport and his efforts to ensure we didn't turn blue at winter meetings.

The meeting concluded with a talk on domestic security from our new beat officer, PCSO Kate Turner. You can read the full minutes of the APM on our main notice board or email us for a copy. **GR**

2015 litter pick

A dozen hardy parishioners braved the wet and windy weather to attend the annual litter pick on 28 March. About 15 bags were collected, containing a wide variety of waste. As in recent years, the most common articles were empty cans of cider and lager, generating concern about drink driving. Well done to those who joined us and to those who couldn't join us on the day but who contribute throughout the year by clearing up parts of our parish. **MF**

Events over the year

Music & wine Around 40 people heard the beautiful organ of St Nicholas' Church used across its complete tonal range in May when Charles Matthews returned to give a recital on the theme of the chaconne. A programme of Buxtehude, Purcell, Tomkins, Bull, Estrada, Messiaen and Bach did not disappoint. **AR**

Tales of the Smyth-Pigotts A large audience listened to Jasper Allen, a descendant of the Smyth-Pigott family, talk in June on new information gleaned from archives he had inherited. We now know more about how the family fortunes were won and lost, how gambling played a part, the relationship with local gypsies, the existence of illegitimate children, and how place mats were invented by a Smyth-Pigott who lived in Brockley Cottage! Bryan Smith showed how the Smyth-Pigotts changed the landscape by

adding features commonly found at stately homes – for example, pleasure grounds, tree avenues, subways, deer park and lots of statues. Supper with wine followed, with proceeds going towards funds for improved facilities at Brockley Church. **BS**

8th Brockley Lecture Susanna Blackshaw drew out the religious and social symbolism in 'The Oxburgh Hangings: the needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots', giving her audience a rare chance to see original material. A supper with wine followed, with proceeds earmarked for installation of water and toilet facilities at Brockley Church. **AR**

Coming soon

Parish council elections Thursday 7 May is not only General Election Day but also time to elect parish and district councillors. If you are not yet registered to vote, go quickly to <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>.

Beating the bounds On Saturday 9 May St Bridget's is reviving this traditional walk round the civil parish. It is four miles, starting at Chelvey Church at 10 am, and followed by a snack lunch. Phone Jean Whitaker on 01275

462609 to take part in the walk and/or lunch. Will anyone find our boundary stones? In *Brockley with Chelvey* (1983) Jim Pullan wrote of two near Tap's Combe (see picture). We would love to have news and publish photos.

St Bridget's open afternoons Enjoy tea & cake and a tour between 2-5 pm on Saturday 30 May, 11 July, 29 August or 10 October.

Harvest Home will be celebrated with jazz on the lawn at St Bridget's in September. **GR**

The way through the woods

An agreement has been reached with the landowner to clarify and signpost lines of bridleways and footpaths in Brockley woods, thanks to collaboration between ourselves, North Somerset Council, the Ramblers Association and horse riders.

The old Smyth-Pigott path from the A370 crossroads to the Bowling Green is now officially a bridleway, and this route extends to a point where Brockley Combe Road leads to Fountain Forestry. Recently a new footpath has been created and signed: it leaves the A370 through the old deer park entrance gates between Brockley Stores and the Cleeve boundary and winds up through the woods to join the bridleway close to the Bowling Green. This is another way to explore the woods, in addition to the paths that were originally part of the Smyth-Pigott carriage drives.

In the woods you can see evidence of the Smyth-Pigott activities in the 18C and 19C. We don't know when the Bowling Green was constructed - our earliest documentation



shows it in 1788, but it was much used for entertaining visitors throughout the Smyth-Pigott ownership.

By small deviations from some paths you can see the old lead and calamine mines, but not all of these are capped, so take care not to fall in. What you see most are the trees, some of which are planted as avenues. There is one of chestnuts and oaks parallel to the A370 and one of limes on the way to the Bowling Green. A separate clump of limes can be seen to the left of this avenue at a high point, almost certainly a viewing mound to see the rocks on the other side of the Combe. John Hugh Smyth-Pigott was an enthusiastic tree planter all over Brockley, and at one time he is reported as planting more trees than any other landowner in the country! 18C drawings show the hillside devoid of trees, except for some round the Bowling Green, so not surprising that there was a windmill at the highest point, the remains of which can still be seen. The Bowling Green is now surrounded by tall yew trees, whose age has been estimated at 250-270 years; they were probably originally planted as a hedge to shelter visitors.

Many notable figures visited Brockley Combe: Coleridge's visit in 1795 is well known, as is the poem he composed whilst climbing there. Visitors were also entertained and treated to refreshments at 'Dinah Swan's' cottage at the entrance to the Combe. This cottage with visitors and carriages is shown on drawings by Grimm in 1788, but sadly no trace of it remains today.

Collinson in the 18C described Brockley Combe as a fine romantic glen with rugged walks and trees growing from crevices. I hope that when you walk in the woods and see the rocks, you will agree with his description. For more information, see Smith & Parfrey (2014) *Brockley & the Smyth-Pigotts*. **BS**

Backwell Education Trust

If you want to raise funds for an educational project, are under the age of 20 and live in the parish, you can put your case by writing to David Pike, Secretary to the Trustees, at Sedalia, Brockley Hall. **DP**

The Brockley herons

Heronries may be occupied for hundreds of years, and no-one really knows how old the Brockley heronry was. John Marchant, co-ordinator of the heronries census for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), says their records indicate it was founded around 1800. Rutter¹ recorded in 1829 that Brockley Park contained 'an ancient heronry, an object now become rare but formerly much coveted by English gentlemen for the sport afforded by these birds in the favourite amusement of hawking.' When Nicholson² undertook the first national census of heronries a century later, he also used the term 'ancient' for our heronry, meaning 'there was some evidence of existence prior to 1800' and adding, 'A colony which has existed within a short distance of its present home for at least 130 years will be taken as "ancient".'

The use of grey herons as quarry for falcons was the key reason for the fierce protection of heronries by their landowners². This would have been so until the 17C, when the lordly 'sport' began to decline. A piece by the 17C painter Hondius, called *Heron Bait*, hung in the Pigott's breakfast parlour¹, and from Hondius' works we know that by his time

heron-hunting involved riders with shotguns, and dogs put to attack the adult bird.

Grey herons have been equally valued historically as table meat, especially the very young birds known as 'heronsewes' or 'branchers', which would have been much more palatable. These were hooked from the nest with a long pole and fattened in an aviary or 'stew'. Herons were on the menu at all great feasts, and 400 were served to celebrate the Archbishop of York's appointment in 1465. In 1517 the official rate for herons in Somerset was 8 guineas – a small fortune³ – and in 1678 Willughby⁴ could still say 'the owners [of heronries] make yearly a good profit of the young.' After the 17C the taste for heron declined, although 'As lately as the 1830s Lord Carnarvon's friends at Pixton, now Allers Wood, Somerset, ate them skinned, stuffed and roasted like hare².' Though still expensive, they continued to appear in the markets into the early 19C⁵. Fortunately, the Brockley heronry survived these customs, for in 1851 Newman⁶ observed, 'I know of another [colony] at Brockley Hall. This heron-haunt is situated close to a rookery, and although the young herons are frequently shot, the birds do not forsake their old birth-place. It is a curious anomaly, the herons carrying fish from the marshes, which they catch with their long bills and bear...to the high trees.'



photo credit: Cleeve Nursery

Although I cannot substantiate F Smith's⁷ statement that our Brockley heronry was mentioned in Domesday, it is credible that a heronry would have formed part of a well-found medieval manor. The manor based on Brockley Court was self-sustaining in 1526 when Richard Harvey 'seized' a third of it, having 88 acres of wood, 23 arable, 15 of meadow, a windmill and dove-house⁸. As well as wildfowling on the wetlands at Chelvey and Middelg, medieval landowners could well have encouraged or established colonies of birds for their eggs and feathers as well as for meat and sport. The manor based around Chelvey Court had a 'Deer' Park, Warren & Swanery, all now appropriated to other uses⁸. The swannery was in or near the river Kenn⁹, and large flocks of swans are still seen on Kenn Moor fields. Early maps of Brockley show a rookery¹⁰, and herons and rooks often nest close together. In fact, the term 'rookery' is generic to any colony of nesting birds, and 'heron rookery' has been used interchangeably with 'heronry'.

Our heronry has been recorded variously as Brockley, Brockley Hall, Brockley Woods and Brockley Park: herons often favour the tall trees of parkland on old estates. Towards the end of the 18C, the Smyth-Pigotts had developed the estate as a private park, probably emulating the Tyntes, who had developed Chelvey Park a century earlier⁹. In

1826 the Smyth-Pigotts re-routed their carriage drive, which Rutter explains: 'from the windmill proceeds down to the deer park, above the finely wooded heights containing the heronry, skirting which the road [now the A370] leads across the entrance into the Coomb.' Wigglesworth¹¹ in 1917 found the Brockley heronry 'situated in a park on a gently sloping hillside and the nests were all placed in tall deciduous trees, ash, oak, etc., the tops of some of which were more or less dead.' It was 'mixed up with a rookery of considerable size.' Nicholson confirmed that some heron and rook nests shared 'the same trees...where the interval is in one case only half a yard.' He examined the heron pellets, finding a diet of trout 'in large quantities', as well as water voles, beetles, molluscs, vegetation, and a field mouse. In Rutter's time only Brockley and Pixton Park heronries were known still to exist in Somerset, but by 1917 there were another two¹¹.

The BTO have records indicating annual occupation at Brockley from at least 1901 onwards¹², with the count rising from 10-12 nests in the early 20C^{11,13} to a peak of 48¹⁴. The number of breeding pairs would have been higher, as herons have a long breeding season, with nests re-used later in the season by other (often younger) pairs. Marchant says 'There was felling in the area around 1960 and the herons moved from ash and oak trees up to 1959 to mainly hornbeam and oak for a few years from 1961. The grid reference we have was recorded as ST468667 in 1963.' His account fits with the redevelopment of land around Brockley Hall from 1956 to 1963⁷, and confirms other sources that the heronry was within 100 yards of the main road² and visible from it⁹. So the site may well have been in the area of ground behind today's Nursery, tucked behind and between Brockley Stores and the 1930s house called Heron Wood. Robin Prytherch has been counting the heronry at Cleeve for the BTO for over 40 years. He recorded¹⁵ that the Brockley heronry still held five nests in 1964 but was 'extinct' in 1965. The birds had begun to move the short distance (under half a mile) to Cleeve in 1962, when breeding was first recorded there^{14,15}. There were no counts at Cleeve until 1964 (16 nests) and by 1965 the transfer was complete. Around 40 nests were in use there last year.

Nicholson argued that 'Antiquity is reckoned by the colony, not by the site...provided its pedigree appears reasonably continuous, even though the actual site may have shifted a little.' No doubt today he would list our heronry as 'Cleeve Hill Woods, formerly Brockley Park. Ancient: shifted 1962-64.' **GR**

Sources 1 J.Rutter (1829) *Delineations of...Somerset*, 30-1; 2 E.Nicholson (1928) *Report on the 'British Birds' Census of Heronries*, 334-356; 3 M.Cocker, R.Mabey (2005) *Birds Britannica*, 53; 4 F.Willughby (1678) *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby*, 278; 5 Gladstone in Shrubbs (2013) *Feasting, Fowling & Feathers*, 23; 6 H.Newman (1851) *On Changing the Eggs of Birds*, *Zoologist*, 10, 3327; 7 F.Smith (2003) *Just Passing Through*, 17; 8 J.Collinson (1791) *History and Antiquities of Somerset*, II; 9 J.Pullan (1983) *Brockley with Chelvey*; 10 B.Smith, C.Parfrey (2014) *Brockley & the Smyth-Pigotts*, 17; 11 J.Wigglesworth (1918) *The Heronries of Somerset, Proceedings of the Somerset...Natural History Soc.*, 17; 12 J.Marchant (2015) correspondence; 13 F.Blaithwayt (1908) *Notes on Heronries*, *Zoologist*, 452-3; 14 E.Palmer, D.Ballance (1968) *The Birds of Somerset*, 50; 15 R.Prytherch (1996) *The Heronry at Cleeve*, *Bristol Ornithology*, 23, 3.

Erratum, Brock's News 2014

Census records indicate there were 26, not 36, households in the parish in 1914. **GR**