

All items for the
Summer edition by
Friday 24th May
2019

Stoke News

Spring 2019

Contact Jean House
jeanhouse@btconnect.com
For more news look at
www.stokestgregory.org

The View from the Stores

Bob Dylan famously sang in 1964 that “the times they are a changin’ ...”. And so they are for both Stoke St Gregory and our nation. Change is inevitable and it is often necessary and whilst we may not like it or agree with it, we have to accept, adapt and move forward in a positive frame of mind. When Karen and I came to Stoke St Gregory in April 2011 we adapted to a new way of life. Since then, we have worked to make The Village Stores more than just a ‘village amenity’ or a ‘convenience store’. Our aim was to make it a destination, a place where people felt able to chat, feel comfortable and welcome. This has required hard work, long hours with a modest financial return. However, unlike Del Boy we never believed that “next year Rodders, we’ll be millionaires!”.

Those of you who attended the meeting in the Village Hall in 2018 were introduced to the concept of a ‘community enterprise’ by a representative from the Plunkett Foundation. At that meeting our intention to sell The Village Stores was understandably raised. You may recall that I said we were committed to finding a buyer who would carry on the trade of this valued business. With this objective firmly in mind we have hosted many prospective buyers since first putting The Village Stores on the market in October 2014 – but we have not succeeded in sealing a deal. This has been both demoralising and frustrating and having to cope with repetitive disappointments, whilst managing our own personal issues, has finally taken its toll.

Bearing in mind everything we have tried to achieve through The Village Stores and the commitments we have made to this community, it is with great regret that we inform you of our intention to close The Village Stores on 31 December 2019, or earlier, if an alternative arrangement can be agreed (see opposite). This decision has not been made lightly – The Village Stores has been our life and sole income for eight years. We fully appreciate the impact this will have on those of you who have supported us during that time (and prior to our arrival). Needless to say, it will have a significant impact on us as well. >>>

‘Willows, Wetlands, Weaving and more..’

by Chris and Anne Coate compiled by Jean Allen.

Inspired by this year’s bicentenary of their business, Chris and Anne Coate have produced a book, **‘Willows, Wetlands, Weaving and more...’** telling the story of their family’s involvement in the willow industry on the Somerset Levels. Archived material combined with photographs, personal anecdotes and living memories record Coate’s family history and that of the willow industry in Somerset. Original business ledgers, documents and artefacts provide the source material for a fascinating family memoir. The family and business development through 2 centuries inevitably provides an insight into social, geographical and economic history of the times too.

‘Willows, Wetlands, Weaving and more..’ tells of the highs and lows of Coate’s business; the effects of fashion trends and market competition necessitating flexibility and innovation. You may be surprised to learn how they first produced high quality artists charcoal and that they are now a leading global supplier!

Sustainability is at the heart of the business and willow is an ultimately renewable raw material. If the growing and processing of willow is of interest there is something on that too! In fact every aspect of the business is included.

‘Willows, Wetlands, Weaving and more...’ will surprise the reader with insights into how willow has been used in everyday life, past and present, and in recent years for some exciting special commissions for high profile clients! With its roots planted in the past, Coate’s continues to develop into the future as willow growers, willow suppliers, basket makers, furniture makers, charcoal producers, and tourist attraction!

....with regret, ‘Closing this Year’

>>> As you will no doubt be aware, the Heart Of The Village (HOTV) team had been proactive by examining alternative arrangements should it have to come to closing The Village Stores. As a result, we are now working very closely with HOTV to facilitate a smooth transition if their proposed arrangements be successful. Be assured, Karen and I believe this community should have a village shop and we ask you to pull out all the stops and to wholeheartedly support the project. It will be hard work but as both Karen and I can vouch, the project will succeed if the community is committed to it. Further information about the HOTV proposal and their plans can be found in this newsletter. I am sure the team will devote much time and effort keeping the community informed of progress.

In the interim period it is business as usual at The Village Stores – you will not see any changes to stock or services we offer. For this reason we sincerely hope you feel able to support the shop and we will continue to welcome you. It is no exaggeration to state that the village shop will successfully function only if customers from this community regularly purchase goods. As we have said before, we do not expect everyone to buy their weekly groceries at The Village Stores but investing a proportion of your grocery budget will benefit you and the community in the long-term.

As far as Karen and I are concerned, we will be applying for planning permission for conversion of the retail area into residential use and it is then our intention to re-advertise The Village Stores, incorporating our house, on the open market so that we can make plans for our personal transition and the future.

Thank-you to all those who regularly use The Village Stores and have ‘invested’ in this 100-year old business over generations. We will keep you updated on our progress.

The Heart of the Village. (HOTV)

You may have read elsewhere the sad news that after a long and heroic stand, Ian and Karen have decided that they can no longer keep the Village Stores running after the end of this year. This brings sharply into focus the plan to set up a community shop (and pub).

The survey which the PC conducted last spring was overwhelmingly positive about the idea of a community shop, but at that point the main aim was to sell the shop as a going concern, and we were unable to take it further without stepping on the toes of the owners. It was a similar position with the pubs: the survey was very positive about a community pub, but on the assumption that it would be the last pub in the village. We did not want to compromise efforts to save the Rose & Crown by buying the Royal Oak.

The situation has moved on since then. The Rose & Crown has now obtained a change of use and is being marketed as such. The shop is about to apply for a change of use. If we are to make a success of a community venture, now is the time to get going in earnest. To this end, the Heart of the Village team has formally applied to set up a Community Benefit Society and we are developing a business plan which we aim to share with everyone in the village as soon as possible. We are grateful for the support of both Nicola Berridge and Ian and Karen Upshall as we take this on.

The team is agreed that buying the Royal Oak and using the building to house a community shop on one side and a revitalised pub and café on the other is by far the most practical plan. The other possible options —buying the shop or buying the Rose & Crown— just don’t stack up practically or financially. The siting of the Oak, and the size and flexibility of the building (not to mention the skittle alleys) make it very attractive as a community asset, and it may well be that over time it comes to have uses (e.g. a space for young people) well beyond the shop and pub that we are proposing to start with. PTO> Page 2

(Continued from Page 1) **HOTV** Of course we will have to raise a massive amount of money. The thing about community shops and pubs is that they are hard work to get started, but once they are going they prove very resilient (far more so than private businesses), and they are of enormous benefit to their communities on many different levels. Not only do they provide services that otherwise would not exist, they also integrate the community: the pool of volunteers, members/shareholders and customers all working together in a common cause. There are several examples of successful community businesses nearby: Kingsbury Episcopi, Spaxton, Stockland &c. Many more can be found on the Plunkett Foundation website. In short, we have an awful lot to do, and it will not happen unless we have wide support in the village, but as others have shown, it is do-able, and the long-term benefit to the village would be huge—whereas the alternative of doing nothing could be a death knell. The **HOTV** team continues to meet on the first Monday of every month, at 7:30 in the Village Hall. The meeting is open to all. We welcome questions and suggestions.

North Curry and District Amateur Gardeners

March 7th “A cottage garden history” with Sally Gregson

April 4th “Plants for awkward areas” with Roger Hirons

May 2nd “Bees” with Brigit Strawbridge

Saturday 25th May Plant Sale at the Pavilion 10.00am – 12.00pm

We meet on the first Thursday of the month in the Pavilion of the Greenway Playing Fields, North Curry at 7.45 for 8.00pm. New members and guests are always welcome so come along, enjoy the talk and stay for a cuppa and a chat afterwards.

We don't meet in the summer months but we do have some lovely outings. If you'd like to join us for any of them, details can be obtained from any committee member or look out for our posters.

Stoke Stampede Thanks

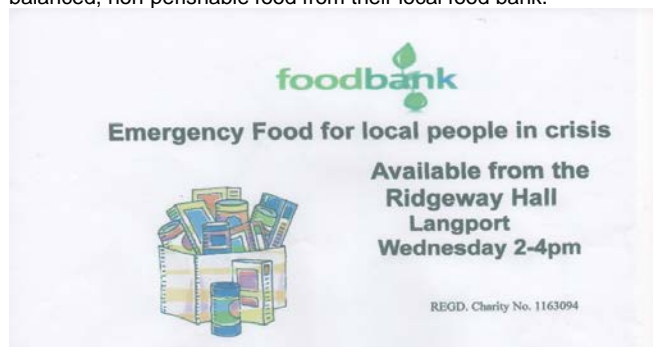
As race director of the Stoke Stampede, I would like to thank all people involved in a very successful event on the 6th January. We have had amazing feedback on Facebook and in person on a well organised and thoroughly enjoyable event. This is all down to the wonderful organising committee, the fantastic volunteer Marshall's and the ladies and gentlemen who run our water stations and help out in the hall at registration and also the people at the end of the run who welcomed the runners over the finish line with a smile and a medal, this means a lot to all our competitors.

Lastly I would like to thank the whole village on wonderful support and encouragement right around the whole course especially the lady waving support from her Velux window. The support from the community is what makes this run so special and long may it continue.

Once again may I thank you all, it makes all the organising so worthwhile. **Paul Morse Race director**

The Trussell Trust Food Banks

Food donations Non-perishable in-date food is donated by the public at a range of places, such as schools, churches and business, as well as supermarket collection points. It is then sorted into emergency food parcels, to be given to people in need. **Food vouchers.** Care professionals such as health visitors, schools and social workers identify people in crisis and issue them with a food bank voucher. This means people can receive a food bank parcel of three days' nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food from their local food bank.



Village Fete

As mentioned in the last edition the Village Fete will be on Saturday, July 13th. In addition to all the usual stalls, refreshments and entertainment thought is being given to a family five-a-side football tournament and an extended exhibition of vintage vehicles and machinery. If you have any interest in contributing to these as a participant, please contact Graham Gleed (490407) or Robin Ferrett (07734752828) for vehicles and machinery.

Did You Know . . . ? Did you know that special sidings were built at Athelney Station to cater for the freight wagons that took Stoke's willow chairs to the London market? The sidings were put in when part of the old Taunton to Yeovil branch line was used for the new Great Western route to Penzance in 1906.

Wicker furniture became very popular during this Edwardian period and was used to furnish whole living rooms, hotel suites, and ocean going liners. Several of the local basket makers specialised in chairs, and Frank Woodland's stick frame chair - made by Albie Champion - can be seen in the museum at Willows & Wetlands.

The fashion was short lived, but during World War 1 the Athelney sidings were put to a use of more national importance. It was from here that vast amounts of willow were delivered to the London basket making factories, for shell cases, pigeon baskets, medical panniers and other military items (many of which can also be found in Coates Museum).

Chris & Anne Coate's new book - '*Willows, Wetlands, Weaving and More . . .*' refers to a 1916 order from Scotts of London for 4,000 bundles of buff and white withies - and this was at a time when every willow wand would have been stripped by hand!

The book, compiled by Jean Allen, is available at the Willows & Wetlands shop, price £9.99. It is a fascinating 200 Year story of how the Boobyer and Coate families came together to combine the local withy growing and basket making industries.

(See Press Release on Page 1 – Editor)

Stoke St Gregory Walking Group



The summer walks will start again in April on the first Tuesday of the month.

The dates for spring / summer walking will be:

Tuesday 2nd April starting at 5.00pm

Tuesday 7th May starting at 6.00pm

Tuesday 4th June starting at 6.00pm

Tuesday 2nd July starting at 6.00pm

All starting outside the shop.

Anyone is welcome to join us; well behaved dogs are also welcome. We usually walk for 3-4 miles followed by a meal at a pub. If you'd like to know more please ring Liz Hembrow 490828.

Village Spring Clean

After the success of the village spring clean last year, it is intended to hold a similar event on March 23rd, 10AM at the Village Hall. Tools will be provided and as well as picking up litter it is planned to highlight the blight of dog poo by spraying deposits with fluorescent paint as a way of highlighting to dog owners the frequency of this unsightly and unhygienic nuisance. I hope that as many people as possible turn out as a reflection of the pride we have in our community.

Parish Council News [December, January, February]

The two big concerns in the village at present are the application to build 34 houses in the allotments field and the intensification of plans to set up a community shop and pub. The latter is discussed in the Heart of the Village article in this edition. The PC agreed in January to make £3000 available to the HOTV group to assist them through the next stage.

There was a lively PC meeting in December to discuss the **housing application**. Full details of this can be found in the December PC report on the News page of the village website. As of writing, no date has yet been set for the Planning Committee meeting at which the application will be decided. Some of the immediate neighbours to this scheme are opposed, which is understandable, but 8 out of 9 parish councillors and many others in the village are strongly in favour, seeing it as an essential element in regenerating our village with its ageing population, an infrastructure under strain and too few small or affordable homes.

It is understood that the planning officer is likely to advise refusal for two reasons, both of which we believe to be unreasonable: the site is outside the "settlement boundary", and there is insufficient evidence of demand for affordable housing.

The settlement boundary (sometimes called the village envelope) is a line showing where housing development will be permitted by default, but there is a serious problem in defining it. If the PC asks the District to include land within a redrawn boundary, it is in effect writing a large cheque to the land-owner. We have been clear for some time that new housing is needed, but rather than inflate the value of one field at the expense of another, we invited all land-owners near the centre of the village to submit schemes. To date, the current application is the only response, and the fact that it received such overwhelming support at the PC should be seen as an implied request to extend the settlement boundary to include it.

The other reason Planning gives for opposing the scheme is the lack of evidence (according to them) of any demand for affordable and/or small open market housing. We have heard many accounts of people wanting to buy homes in the village and not being able to. If this scheme is to happen, it is essential that it meets the housing needs both of the current community and of those who have had to leave because there have been no suitable homes available to allow them to stay.

If you or anyone you know is in need of housing not currently available, whether affordable social rented homes, low cost starter homes for young people, homes for families to grow into, or bungalows for those wishing to downsize, please add names to the list in the shop, or get in touch with me (nick@curloadfarm.co.uk), or our district councillor Phil Stone (phil.stone7@icloud.com) so that we can pass on anonymous evidence of demand to Planning.

Although the housing scheme should be judged independently on its merits, it is worth pointing out that the much-needed improvements to the playing field will not take place unless they can be funded by the housing. Since both schemes were originally submitted, the developer has proposed some improvements to vehicle access to the playing field and pedestrian access along Willey Rd.

Some residents may be aware of the recently started "**Somerset Wood**" on 23 acres of land in Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton. This is a response to the anniversary of the end of the First World War, the idea being "a lasting memorial to those from Somerset who fought and fell". All Somerset Parish Councils are being invited to contribute costs or help in kind, in proportion to the number of their residents lost. (More information is to be found on the SCC website: search for "The Somerset Wood".) The PC is considering our response, and we would be glad to hear your thoughts.

Not much time goes by between complaints about **dog fouling**, and the subject came up again in February. As has often been mentioned before, it is not only unpleasant but dangerous to children and farm animals. It was agreed that while most dog-owners are sensitive to the issue and always pick up, a minority stubbornly refuse to do so and are difficult to influence. One idea that has been tried in other areas is to spray dog poo with fluorescent paint to (literally) highlight the extent of the problem, and we are going to try this during the litter-pick mentioned nearby. In the meantime can we please ask again that when you are walking your dog you take care not to leave the countryside more polluted than you found it.

TABLE TENNIS FOR FUN & FITNESS

The table tennis group gets together on Wednesday evenings, from 7-9pm at the Village Hall for a couple of hours of sociable exercise. All standards welcome. All equipment provided. Pay on the door, £3 per evening for adults (£1 for youngsters 12yrs+), including refreshments. Younger players particularly welcome. Why not give us a try? You might surprise yourself, like most of us did. After a few sessions you'll feel like you've always been one of the group. If you're nervous, why not bring a friend too? First week free! Just come along, or for more info call Paul on 490565 or Terri on 490671.

Parish & District Council elections come round every four years, and 2019 is an election year. It is a point of pride that of 51 parishes in Taunton Deane, Stoke St Gregory was one of only 9 to have an elected PC in 2015 —in the remaining parishes there was no competition for seats. We believe that having an elected PC is a very good thing since it helps to keep parishioners in touch with those who are representing them, and we would like to encourage others to come forward and stand for election in 2019. At least some of the current PC will be standing down.

The elections will be held on May 2 this year. The notice of election will be published on 18 March. Nomination forms will then be made available, and must be submitted by a date in April yet to be announced. Please consider refreshing the PC by standing for election. Being a parish councillor can be a very positive experience, not just for the satisfaction of helping to keep the village on course through difficult times, but because it gives you an insight into all levels of village life, and a relationship to others that you might not otherwise experience. I have found it quite hard work but also very rewarding.

At the **Annual Parish Meeting on 16th April**, we plan to invite all the candidates for the local ward of the District Council to talk to us, and it would be very good to meet new PC candidates as well so that we can get to meet each other. In addition all the current issues in the village will be discussed, with the opportunity to ask questions. It should be a lively evening and everyone is welcome.

We are very sorry to learn that our, **Parish Clerk** Becky, has decided to resign to make more space in her life for new ventures. It has been great working with Becky for seven years, and we wish her very well. This does create an opening for a new parish clerk, who we will be hoping to appoint in early May. If you would be interested in a very flexible part-time job that involves you closely in village affairs, Becky can supply all the details (ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk). Living locally would be an advantage, likewise some administrative experience, though training will be provided.

Stoke St Gregory Women's Institute

Our WI year has begun in Stoke full of optimism, with new members and visitors joining us for meetings. The January speaker, Trudi Henderson, gave an important talk about scams. As a Community Banker employed by Nat West Bank, she had worked with many victims of doorstep, online, postal and phone scams. We were advised of the best ways to avoid becoming victims. Although we were mainly reassured by her talk, we realised that there is no room for complacency. Scammers are a well-organised, determined and nasty bunch! The over 65's are particularly targeted.

This month we enjoyed a fun evening with our speaker, Brian Phelps, whose talk was called "By hook or by Crook". He explained the origins of many of our most common sayings and phrases. He used the old tv format of "Call my Bluff." Three explanations of a phrase's origins were read out then we voted for the most likely. Quite often it proved to be the least likely!

Our March speaker will be Dr Burroughes on the subject of "A Victorian Gardener." In April Shirley Routledge will 'spray a little perfume' and talk about "The Emotion of Fragrance". May will bring "The Great British Shake Off" with Christina Blackwill. Well -done, Jenny, for organising such a lively, varied programme! In April we visit the Royal Mint near Cardiff and St Fagan's National Museum of History.

Meeting details: Tuesday 12th March 7pm.

Tuesday 9th April 7pm.

Tuesday 14th May 7pm.

All at the Williams Hall

Village Agents work to provide those in Somerset's rural communities with easier access to information and services. They help to bridge the gap between isolated, excluded, vulnerable and lonely individuals and statutory and/or voluntary organisations which offer specific solutions to identified needs. We can offer advice on support, local groups and activities available in your community.

Linda Burton | Village Agent | Mobile: 07931018019 | Email: linda@somersetrec.org.uk

A quick reminder to check the expiration date on blue badges and bus passes as they run out and then can't be used. Bus passes are not being replaced unless you request it (to reduce wastage costs). Call 0300 123 2224 to get yours replaced.

Stoke St Gregory Tennis Club

Annual Open Day: Saturday March 30th 2-4pm

Whether you're an adult or junior, a beginner or experienced player, our Open Day is a chance to:

- Find out more about the Club & plans for the year ahead, including coaching
- Play some tennis
- Join or Renew Membership for 2019/20
- Enjoy some light refreshments

Annual subscriptions are *still* the same as last year, so are great value:

Family membership: £55, Single: £40, Junior: £20

If 30th is very wet, or you are unable to make it on that day, we shall also be having an Open Afternoon at our Club session on Sunday April 7th 2pm - 4pm as an alternative date.

Coaching We are unable to offer Junior Coaching at the moment, as we have lost the services of our previous tennis coach; however we are endeavouring to find a replacement & shall advertise details when we are successful.

For more information, contact Stuart Mark 490541 stuart.w.mark@btinternet.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Stokestgregorytennis>

THE PARISH CHURCH of ST. GREGORY

We are currently renewing the Electoral Roll, and draw your attention to the notice of this in the March Parish Magazine.

March 1st. - **World Day of Prayer**

This Service takes place on Friday 1 March at 7.30 in the Parish Church. We hold this event in conjunction with the Baptist Church. Everyone is welcome.

This year's focus is on Slovenia, "Come, all is ready."

Refreshments will follow in the Church Room.

March 5. - **Shrove Tuesday**

Shrove Tuesday supper will be held on 5 March at 7.30pm. in the Church Room.

Supper. Raffle. Tickets: £10.

The Speaker: Dr. Robert Dunning. "Old newspapers of Taunton"

LENT COURSES

Beginning on Monday 11 March the Revd. John Tyler will lead 5 courses entitled "Jesus before Christianity" In SSG Church Room - 6-7pm Or if preferred, at North Curry 4-5pm.

EASTER SERVICES

Good Friday - 19 April - 11am at Parish Church. United Service with the Baptist Church
Easter Morning - Sunrise Service at 6 am. At Baptist Church grounds.

Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th May - NGA Open Gardens at Hillcrest and Lane End House.

Details will be in April's Magazine

26 May - Rogation Sunday Walk. Details will be in April's magazine.

The Royal Oak (01823 490602)

SNAPPA

HIGH ENERGY 3 PIECE PLAYING CLASSICS
FROM THE 50'S TO MODERN DAY ANTHEMS

THE ROYAL OAK

STOKE ST GREGORY FRIDAY 3RD MAY

www.snappa.co.uk

[facebook/snappaband](https://www.facebook.com/snappaband)

WILLIAMS HALL SOCIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE

SATURDAY 9TH FEBRUARY - FUN QUIZ NIGHT
Many thanks to the 70 people who came and enjoyed this fun evening.

Apologies for the technical problems with the sound equipment and hope it did not spoil the evening too much.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

SATURDAY 12TH APRIL

MALCOLM the MAGICIAN 2.30pm
£2.50 per person. Refreshments available

SATURDAY 11TH MAY

SOMERSET DAY BREAKFAST
9am to 11am

Come and help us celebrate Somerset Day with our traditional breakfast

Adults £6

*****CHILDREN UNDER 12 EAT FREE*****

NB All children must be accompanied by an adult
Come eat, socialise and let us cook breakfast for you

SATURDAY 13TH JULY

Book stall at the Village Fete

SATURDAY 12TH OCTOBER

ELVIS 56 WILL BE IN THE BUILDING

Music and dancing. Bar and raffle. £10 person
Further details to follow

Look out for further info on these events on the
Village Hall Website www.williamshall.org.uk and on
advertising around the village. We look forward to
seeing you at these events

Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church

We are delighted to be welcoming Rev'd Sonya Setchell as our new Minister and her husband Ian, in March.

Dates for your diary March - May

Messy Church - Fri 8th March 3:30pm

Sonya's First Service - Sun 10th March
10:30am

Sonya's Induction Service - Sat 6th April
2:30pm

Sun 21st April

Easter Sunrise Service - 6:00am

Easter Day Service - 10:30am

Messy Church - Fri 11th May 3:30pm

Charity Lunch for Christian Aid -
Mon 20th May 12:30

Café Church

Come and join us for a more relaxed and interactive church service with coffee, fruit and cake on the 2nd Sunday of every month.

Quiet Church

Church open for prayer and quiet time on the 2nd Monday of every month 9am to 5pm

TWiGs Babies and Toddler Group

Every Thursday in term time 9:15 to 11:30am.

We look forward to seeing you soon

Parish Clerk Wanted

The post of Clerk to Stoke St Gregory PC is becoming vacant from May 2019.

The job involves the administration of the council, including book-keeping and correspondence. Training available.
If you would be interested in a part-time job, involving an average of 25 flexible hours per month, contact Becky at

ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk for details.