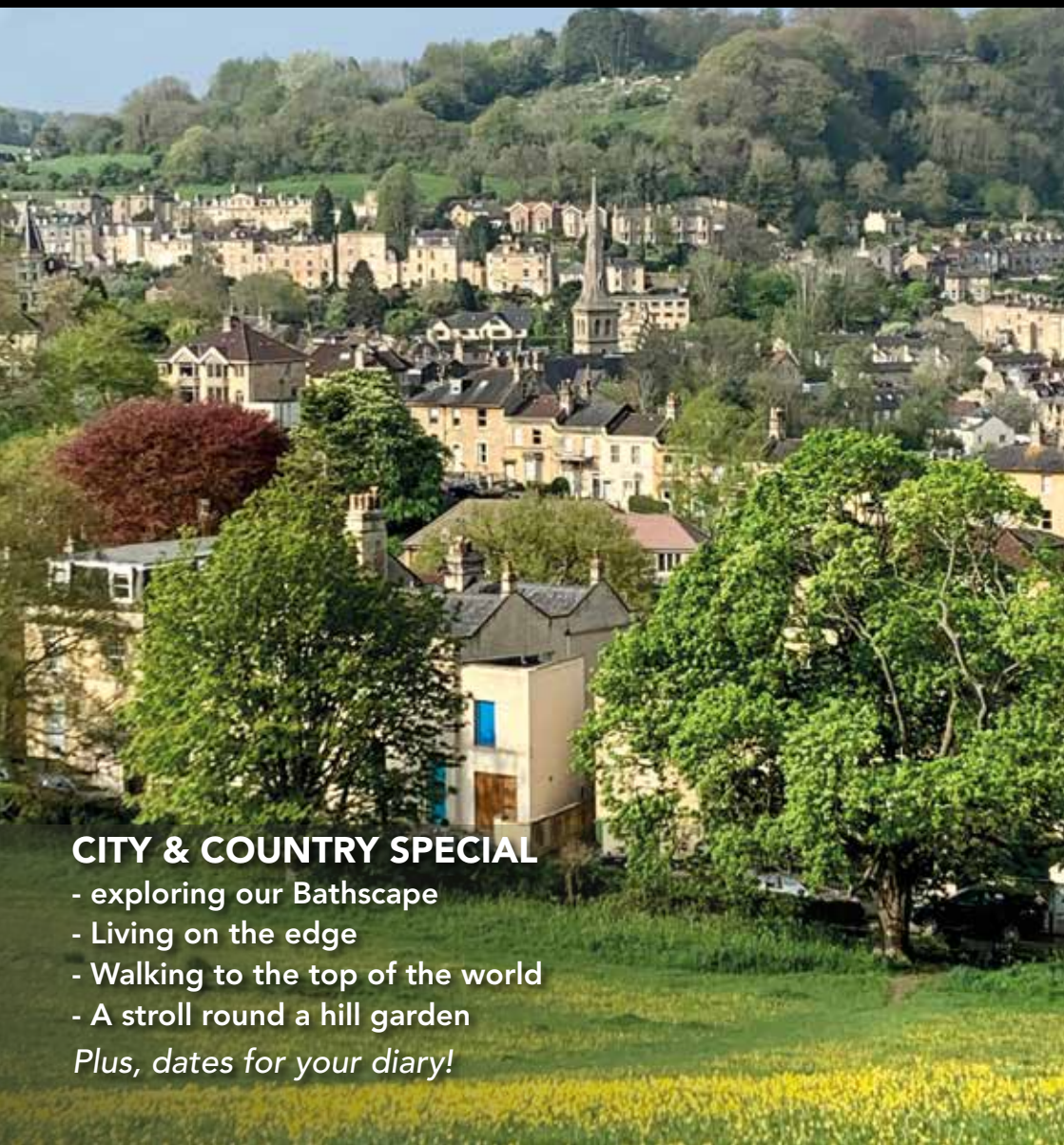


Widcombe magazine

SUMMER 2023

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- Living on the edge
- Walking to the top of the world
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Widcombe magazine

SUMMER 2022

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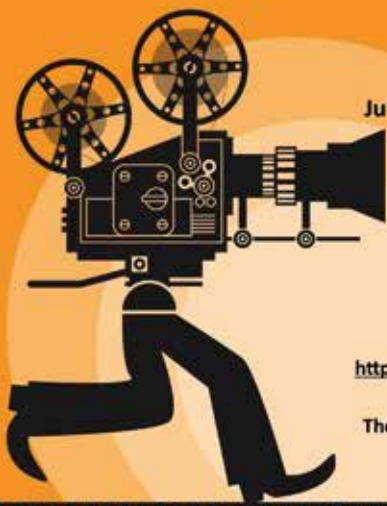


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Chair's column

As I begin my tenure as chairman, I want to thank my predecessor Jeremy Boss for his unstinting energy during his eight years as chairman. Jeremy was brought up in Widcombe so his links to the area are strong, which has been in evidence throughout his tenure. He has both directed the work of our committee and been constantly involved in the detail. You may have seen him working on the flower containers along the Parade, picking litter on the river-pick scheme or on the door at WA events. He has brought the Association into the twenty-first century with our presence on Twitter and Instagram and the upgrading of our interactive website. He has been ably supported by his partner, Beverly Wallis, who has also taken an active role within the Association, and together they have made a formidable duo. His greatest legacy is the enhanced feeling of community across Widcombe for which we are very grateful.

Our theme in this issue is Living on the Edge. In many towns and cities, the urban edge is regarded as the backyard, with marginal land used for dumping the detritus of city living. Not so here. Our great fortune is that much of the countryside adjoining Widcombe is owned by the National Trust, which has prevented development that could otherwise have filled the valley between Widcombe and Bathwick, and the higher land towards Combe Down. The NT's stewardship is supported by national designations that further protect the open land around us, the Green Belt and the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In addition, Bath has World Heritage Site status, conferred by UNESCO and given to places of outstanding cultural value. The designation of the World Heritage



Mike Wrigley

Site includes the city and its unique setting within the countryside. As the website (bathworldheritage.org.uk/bath) tells us, 'The City of Bath lies within a hollow of the hills. There are green views in every direction from the city centre. The countryside stretches right to Bath's doorstep.' The fields and woodlands we use for recreation and exercise form the background to our everyday activities. They are part of that heritage and Widcombe is part of the 'doorstep'.

Two recent initiatives sponsored by the Widcombe Association demonstrate how we can enhance the quality of the countryside around us and promote the attractions of the area. The Friends of Lyncombe Hill Fields are managing four hectares of former farmland, creating a reservoir for wildlife and maintaining public access. They are sponsored by the WA, the Greenway Lane Social Committee, Greenway Lane Area Residents' Forum and the Bear Flat Residents' Association, and supported by the Friends of Alexandra Park and Bathscape. The Widcombe Association has also prepared notes and maps for a number of walks into the countryside that start and finish in Widcombe, and these are available on our website.

Both on our own and in partnership with others, we will be looking for further ways to bind town and country.

■ *Mike Wrigley, chairman*

The car in the city

The Fifteen Minute City (FMC) is an urban planning concept by which most daily necessities and services can be easily reached within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from any point in the city. Like Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Clean Air Zones, the FMC has been attracting the interest of the media and the ire of activists who see it as a dystopian plot to limit our freedoms. In sedate Oxford, for example, there have been near riots in protest against initiatives to limit the impact of motor vehicles within the urban area.

So, what does the concept of the FMC actually involve? In the planning and development of an urban area, the objective would be to have as many facilities as possible within a 15-minute walk or cycle ride of every house. Residents would thus have the convenience of shopping, going to school, working, or relaxing close to home without the need to use a car. Is this really so revolutionary?

In the early part of the last century, Garden Cities and New Towns were built from a similar premise. Nurseries and primary schools, shops, public spaces and play areas, community buildings and bus stops were designed to be within walking distance for as many people as possible. It makes sense for these facilities within easy reach of people's homes, but it should be a guideline and not a dogma. The same aims can be pursued within existing towns and cities.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are simply a new interpretation of the Environmental Areas expounded by Professor Sir Colin Buchanan in his seminal report *Traffic in Towns* in the early 1960s. His ideas, in turn, were inspired by Sir Alker Tripp, an Assistant Commissioner in charge of traffic for the Metropolitan Police in the 1930s.

Both men wanted to limit traffic in urban areas to maintain acceptable environmental standards. Through-traffic would be eliminated from residential neighbourhoods. For Buchanan, it was important that the capacity of roads in urban areas be limited by noise and air quality thresholds rather than by engineering design criteria. It is 90 years since Tripp, and almost 60 years since Buchanan, but we have still to reach a consensus on these issues, even in the face of the climate emergency and a much better understanding of the dangers to health from traffic.

The initiatives currently being introduced by the council in Bath, including the Clean Air Zone and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, are consistent with these concepts. However, their application requires pragmatism and common sense. It also requires a strategic view of how the various initiatives join together across the whole of the city. And, to be really successful, these ideas must be allied with genuinely effective public transport. Unfortunately, at the moment, we are moving backwards on that particular issue.

■ Mike Wrigley

Widcombe Choir



Widcombe Choir will be moving to Thursday afternoons (1:30 to 3:30pm) from the 14th September.

Here are some of the reasons why local people love singing with Widcombe Choir:-

- Fun, friendly, good for body and soul
- A community, a good singing group
- Sing and forget your worries

Our Summer Term this year ends on 22nd May.

If you want to join our email list, see our section of the Widcombe Association website, or go to our own website <https://widcombe-choir.mailchimpsites.com>, where you can check Term Dates. Or just turn up.... you will be welcomed.

We meet upstairs at ...
Widcombe Social Club
Widcombe Hill, Bath BA2 6AA

Widcombe Choir is affiliated to the Widcombe Association
Visit: www.widcombeassociation.org.uk/project/the-widcombe-choir/

Mapping the Green Belt

Green Belt is one of the best known planning policies and one of the least understood. The first Green Belt was established in 1938 to control the outward spread of London, safeguarding areas of green space between the fast-growing capital and surrounding towns and villages. In many ways, the policy was successful, but one of the consequences was that many of those towns and villages then expanded – adding to the numbers commuting to work in the capital.

In 1955, the UK's local planning authorities were encouraged to establish green belts around their main towns to control the direction of growth, and to prevent urban sprawl and coalescence with neighbouring settlements. The plan was that Green Belt boundaries be defined in local plans and last for 20-25 years before being reviewed and adjusted to allow expansion (or possibly contraction) in light of changing needs.

The general public, however, became fiercely protective of 'their' Green Belt, seeing it as permanent and inviolable. These days, any plans to roll back boundaries (which may be necessary to allow for much-needed housing and infrastructure) are invariably opposed. Perhaps the mistake was in the 1955 wording – if a shorter timeframe had been stipulated, say 10-15 years before review, there might have been greater expectation of change.

The Green Belt in the West of England (as defined in the 1980 Structure Plan)

was designed to control the pattern of development associated with Bristol and Bath, the main objective being to avoid coalescence or urban sprawl.

A major review of the boundaries followed in the early 1990s, but although land was identified as suitable for expansion to the north and west of Bristol, the special circumstances of Bath's geography and heritage, emphasised by the designation of the entire city (including its setting) as a World Heritage Site, meant that little or no expansion could be permitted. In the



most recent development plans, Keynsham has been identified to expand and there is hope that this will be suitably supported by transport infrastructure.

To add to the council's difficulties, much of Bath (and all of Widcombe) lies within the Bath Conservation Area and is largely encompassed by the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There are limitations on what structures are acceptable – even works to trees require approval. The countryside is very much on our doorstep, but we should spare a thought for the council's planners who have a far greater burden than most other local authority planning teams. ■ *Jan Shepley*

Welcome to the Dolemeads

The Dolemeads is the city village between the river, the cricket ground and the A36, with Brunel's railway viaduct running through its heart. It's a very special place with a vibrant set of residents who foster a strong sense of neighbourhood.

The area was once nicknamed mud island because it flooded all the time. At the end of the nineteenth century, following the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, the entire area was raised above flood level and 'workmen's dwellings' were built. These are the homes you can see today in Archway and Excelsior Streets and many are still social housing.

The streets are packed out twice a day when parents drop off and pick up at the schools, but the rest of the time it's a quiet little suburb. The school's walking bus is always a treat to see passing through. Sadly, the walking bus's main access to the Dolemeads from the river path is a narrow, unlit alleyway behind the railway arches, which we hope the council will soon improve.

Dolemeads struggles with the anti-social behaviour of people who pass through the area and residents work with limited success to engage the council, Network Rail and The Arch Company (which lets the arches to small businesses) to care for the neglected areas, which are clogged by graffiti and fly-tipping. To try to counteract these eyesores, residents have created the

Community Garden - an oasis of joy in a small triangle of previously neglected playground space, next to Brunel's viaduct.

We asked a few of the locals why they live here and these are their thoughts:

I love the Dolemeads because...

....it's very close to the town centre and station - it's easy to live here without a car - we enjoy feeling part of the Widcombe community, high street and local shops - it's less than five minutes from the canal and Bathwick fields (which feels like the countryside) - great scenery - nice neighbours - easy access to the live music and world class theatres of the city - we can watch cricket at the cricket club on a summer's afternoon - there are local businesses within the arches (seeing people do their fitness class is fun!) - I love it because it's so peaceful and friendly - it's such a supportive neighbourhood, we all look out for each other - it's a proper little city village, with interesting people, industrial heritage, and is a real testimony to the working people of Bath, not only over the last 100 years but going way back - it's a little slice of tranquility!'

■ Creina, Dan, Louis, Milly, Minky Rachel, Tina, and more



John and Ellie with their dogs (photo by Dinah Lewis)



Widcombe Heroes

Beverley Wallis nominates Ginny Trust (Widcombe Pharmacy) and Robbie Emm (Fine and Dandy), who are stalwart waterers in Widcombe Parade, Ginny of the troughs and Robbie of the floriferous phone booth opposite his barber's shop.

If you would like to nominate a Widcombe Hero, please email secretary@widcombeassociation.org.uk

What a load of rubbish

The second Great Avon Litter Pick took place in March, covering the publicly accessible riverbank from Bradford-on-Avon to Hanham Lock and Conham River Park in Bristol. Over 150 people took part, collecting 171 bags of refuse.

As last year, the Widcombe Association mustered one of the groups and 14 volunteers cleared rubbish along the riverbank from Pulteney Bridge to the Churchill Bridge. They also covered the canal bank from the Beckford Road Bridge to the confluence of the canal with the River Avon in Widcombe, and Widcombe Parade, including the areas on both sides behind the shops, retrieving a



Volunteers assembling in the Claverton Street car park

dozen bulging bags of litter. The event has the support from the council which provided the equipment and removed the bags of rubbish within its area.

Following the success of this year's litter pick, organiser Chris Nicholson plans to repeat the initiative next year and to extend its scope. ■ *Mike Wrigley*

Verging on countryside

The work of the Widcombe Association Verge Enthusiasts (WAVE) has continued through winter and spring. The WAVE team, led by WA committee member Helen Peter, has transformed the verge along Widcombe Parade from an overgrown jumble to a well-tended bank of shrubs, perennials and bulbs. Volunteers of all ages lend a hand, including children and staff from Widcombe Infants' Forest School, Paul Pearce from Bath and North East Somerset's Parks and Gardens team (who even volunteers on his days off) and local residents. There are plans for more work through the summer and new volunteers are always welcome. *Contact helen.m.peter@gmail.com.*



Obituary: Adrian (Cliff) Hooper Bastin

26 February 1929 – 11 September 2022

Bowled out at 93!

Cliff Bastin was a long-standing member of the Widcombe Association and regularly attended annual meetings. He was born in February 1929 in the house in Southville Terrace, Lyncombe Vale, that was to be his home until his death there in September 2022 at the age of 93.

Cliff was educated at St Nicholas School, Darlington St and at Beechen Cliff. He worked for the Air Ministry and spent time in Aden and Masirah, as well as travelling on his motorbike to RAF bases in Gloucester. He also travelled by train from Green Park Station where the train would be held for him, as he was often late.

Although known as Adrian to his family, he adopted the name Cliff in tribute to a footballer of the same name who played for

Exeter, Arsenal, and England in the 1930s and 40s. Sport was a way of life for Cliff, particularly cricket. He played for Bath Exiles, initially at Norwood, where his sister and mother often prepared the teas, and then at Lansdown.

As well as cricket, Cliff was interested in all types of sport. He followed Bath City at Twerton Park and would often seek out other Saturday matches at Larkhall and Frome. He played cribbage and snooker at Widcombe Social Club. Cliff never married and the story goes that he was once given an ultimatum by a young lady – cricket or me! He chose cricket.

■ Ann Ashworth and Ann Short (Cliff's sister)



Safeguarding our streets

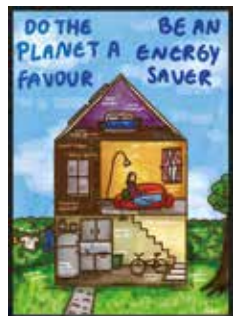
Widcombe was hit with a mini crime wave before Easter with at least four thefts from businesses in Widcombe, an arson attack on the children's playground next to Widcombe Primary School and a stabbing outside the Co-op in Claverton Street. All this has added to long-standing problems of low-level drug dealing and anti-social behaviour, including growing levels of graffiti.

The police have launched the Street Safe initiative to deal with public places where people have felt or feel unsafe because of environmental issues, such as poor street lighting, abandoned buildings or vandalism (<https://www.police.uk/pu/notices/streetsafe/street-safe/>). Alternatively, people with concerns can contact the police community support team in Bath South (<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/your-area/bath-city-south/>) or inform Widcombe's ward councillors. ■ *Jeremy Boss*

It's an Eco-winner!

The sixth-form winner and overall Judges' Choice of the Widcombe Association's Eco-poster competition is Hayesfield student Amelia Parkes Cordock. The Widcombe Association launched the competition to encourage energy saving at home, in school and in the community.

The competition was publicised through local secondary schools and WA membership with cash prizes donated by Ecotricity and Bath and West Community Energy. Prizes were also awarded to Etienne Munajat at Beechen Cliff in the 11-14 years category and Tim Williamson in the adult category.



You are invited to

Coffee Plus

every **Tuesday** from **10.30 am** at
Widcombe Baptist Church.

We aim to create a social space for the more mature folk in the Widcombe community, but people of all ages are welcome to join.

Each week we provide coffee, cake and a short thought from the Bible. Here's what some of our regulars say ...



Meet **John and Rita!** One of our lovely couples at Widcombe Baptist Church.

Rita described Coffee Plus as an opportunity to meet in a friendly way with older people without noisy crowds of talking.

Meet **Ken and Miriam**, another couple of Widcombe's elderly sweethearts.

Ken loves his mornings at Coffee Plus because he can talk to people in a relaxed atmosphere and there are great cakes!



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For booking, pricing, availability or for a stroll around the gardens please get in touch.



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Out & About

A conversation with the NT

The National Trust cares for 700 acres of land across Bath including ancient woodlands, wildflower-rich hay meadows and permanent pastures, which are part of the traditional farmed landscape. We talked to Joe McSorley, National Trust Area Ranger for Bath, to find out how the land is managed and how local people can help protect and support this much-loved landscape.

How much of the National Trust land in Bath is farmed?

Most of the land on the Skyline is farmed at various points during the year and has been for centuries. Half is managed with a tenant farm business and the other half, including the pasture at Prior Park Landscape Garden, is let out for grazing to farmers with whom we work to maximise the variety and abundance of flowering plants.

What benefits does farming provide to the Skyline?

Grazing is a really important tool in maintaining species-rich wildflower meadows, which provide a link in the food chain for bees, hoverflies and butterflies – themselves a food source for birds and small mammals. We graze with low numbers of livestock and only for part of the year to reduce dominant grasses and to let light and moisture through to dormant wildflowers.



Joe McSorley, National Trust Area Ranger

Bath Skyline is popular with dog walkers, but do you face any challenges from this?

On the whole everyone walking their dogs is mindful it's farmed land, but the lambing season (February to May) is always a worry. Even the best-behaved dogs can stress sheep and running in the sheep fields can lead to lambs being miscarried. In addition, a small number of walkers don't clear up after their dog or leave full poo bags by trees and gates for others to dispose of, and we'd encourage everyone to do their bit by taking waste and litter home.

Is there a calendar for when livestock are on the Skyline?

Sheep are around all year but generally not in dog-accessible fields. Cattle are around from late April through to October in the permanent pastures such as Bushey Norwood and Rainbow Wood Fields. In the hay meadows, they'll come in after the hay cut in August and will graze until October. Sheep graze Richens Orchard from September to December, and we close the gates at this time, ensuring fruit from the trees are in buckets near the gates for people to help themselves. ■ *Colette Hill*



Exploring our Bathscape

While Bathscape might not be the most elegant of words it does perfectly encapsulate the role of the Heritage-Lottery funded partnership scheme set up to help us explore, understand and restore Bath and its environs.

Bathscape manager Dan Merrett explains: ‘the work we do can be summarised under three broad headings – improving our environment, encouraging people out to enjoy our unique landscape, and providing resources, training and events to help people get the most out of it.

The ‘Bathscape’ itself encompasses the green setting of the City of Bath World Heritage Site, and stretches from Charmy Down in the north to Combe Hay in the south, from Corston in the west to Kingsdown in the east. Just three paid employees – Dan Merrett, senior projects officer Lucy Bartlett and volunteer coordinator Julia Kennaby – run a jaw-dropping array of projects, executed by an 800-strong army of volunteers. At time of writing, the website (bathscape.co.uk) was calling for more, including walk leader volunteers to lead wellbeing walks or help with the walking festival; community action volunteers to help plant trees, plant wildflower meadows, or maintain footpaths; views and vistas volunteers to research and share the best viewpoints such as Bathwick Fields or Beechen Cliff; and conservation volunteers to build bug habitats and bird boxes or collect wildflower seeds (those collected from the meadows south of Smallcombe Wood have been distributed



over new sites from the ha-ha below Royal Crescent to Inox Park north of Bath City Farm).

The Bathscape website is a treasury of useful information. There is a monthly podcast, Footprints (<https://footprints.captive.fm/>), which is also available on Apple podcasts, Amazon music and Spotify. There are articles <https://www.bathscape.co.uk/learn/> on a whole range of topics from the story of Ralph Allen’s house and garden at Prior Park to the 15 species of bats that can be found ‘in one of the best bat hotspots in the country’. There are self-guided walking trails from Sensory Smallcombe to Bath’s Best View at Alexandra Park (<https://www.bathscape.co.uk/activity/more-self-guided-walking-trails/>) and more walks created by the Widcombe Association <https://www.bathscape.co.uk/activity/widcombe-association-6-self-guided-walks/>

The initiative is made possible by the support of Bathscape’s many partners from the council and Wessex Water to Bath Spa University and the University of Bath. Funding is secure until at least 2025, which is just as well as there is still so much to do.

■ Colette Hill

Out & About

Living on the Edge at Butt Ash

We are very fortunate to need wellies round here – getting down and dirty outdoors is a wonderful thing – and here in Widcombe we have easy access to all kinds of lovely mud - in the garden or along the canal, up in the fields in Smallcombe and Widcombe or through the woods. Throw in a dog (responsibly) and, in my humble opinion, you have the best possible day out.

My family and I are lucky - we live close to the centre of Widcombe and not only do we share our space with a dog, but alpacas, pygmy goats, some sheep and hens as well. Many of you will be familiar with Zippy – our youngest alpaca who until recently was a regular contributor to these pages (in response to concerned Widcombe residents he is still here and happily chewing the grass – but he's working on his first novel which is taking longer and more crayons than anticipated).

Lots of people pop their heads over the wall to watch what's going on in the field and we always try and wave back. It's a great way for us to meet people and for people to watch the animals at close quarters.

Of course, sometimes we get calls from concerned locals – a heads-up to a dead sheep in the field. We always check, but said ovine is thankfully usually napping after a hard morning's grazing, and rarely (and by rarely, I mean never) says thanks for the wake-up call.

In general, though, the relationship between town and country is harmonious. I think our animals out in the field are part of the wider Widcombe family and, like any family, each member is different and each has its own personality. Spending time with them teaches us a lot about ourselves and



is actually surprisingly calming – it's quite difficult to worry about human things while the alpacas are arguing (again) about which feed bucket is theirs, or Barry the goat is trying to eat all the carrots.

FAQs (yes, they are frequently asked)

I love seeing your lambs in the spring. How long have you had them?

That's not us – try Nick's flock further up Ralph Allen Drive. Or maybe an optician??

Are they llamas? Or alpacas?

These are alpacas – an easy way to remember is that 'llama' rhymes with 'banana'. Llamas have banana-shaped ears, whereas alpacas have cute, floofy, straight ears and are generally much more attractive and better tempered than their more rustic counterparts (Zippy might have hacked this answer).

I love pygmy goats. They're adorable, right?

Two of them are – one pushes his luck!

Would you be up for bringing one of the alpacas to the Ring O Bells for my friend's birthday one night?

No. They are not circus animals, they like to stay together at all times and we don't have that kind of public liability insurance. This is without consulting the management at the Ring O'Bells who I'm pretty sure would repeat what I've just said.

How about children's parties?

See previous answer.

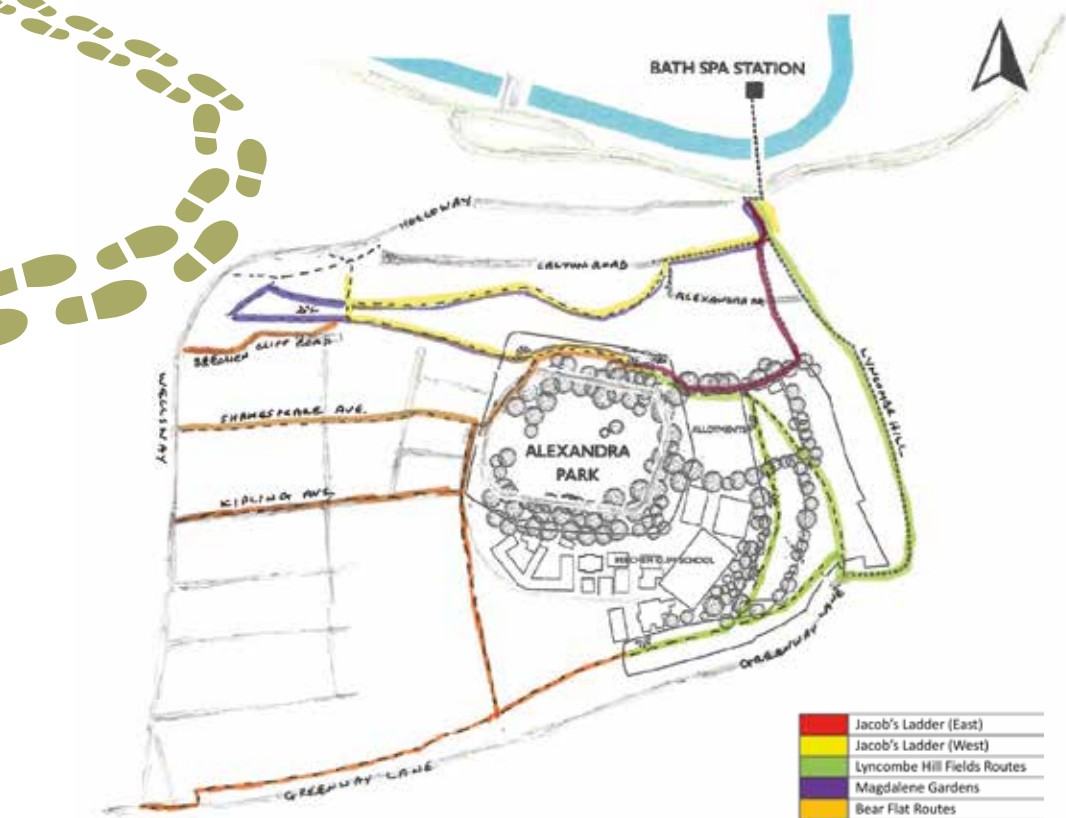
■ *Biddy Walcot*



An easier walk to the top of the world

In Widcombe, you are just 10-15 minutes walk to Bath's best viewing point at Alexandra Park. But too many walkers follow Google maps, struggling up the steep steps of Jacob's Ladder. Far better to wander the newly-improved paths along Beechen Cliff Woods or choose the step-free route

via Lyncombe Farm Fields and past the elegant villas of Lyncombe Hill. With that in mind, the WA is working with Bathscape, the Council, Lyncombe Hill Fields, and Alexandra Park to consider options for signs to guide walkers towards the kinder options for making the climb. ■ *Helen Peter*



Out & About

Adventures on the edge

As this issue is about living on the edge of the city it seemed obvious to profile one of Widcombe's new entrepreneurs, Darroch Davidson, whose businesses are all about championing the great outdoors. I met Darroch at his HQ, one of the railway arches in the Dolemeads. Talking to him, you at once see his passion and enthusiasm for outdoor adventures, his pride in Bath and the surrounding area and his commitment to the local community.

Darroch's adventures began early. After school in Bradford-on-Avon, he joined the army, staying for nine years, including operational tours in Afghanistan. Work in the security industry followed, with stints in Nigeria, Afghanistan and Iraq. As Darroch put it, 'I wanted to go to places you only see on the front cover of National Geographic.' Home at this point was on the other side of the world, in remote mountains on New Zealand's South Island where he could hike, canoe and ski.

When he moved back to Bath, he wanted to continue having adventures and to do something he loved for his work. He set up his first guided activity business using his military skills, with six bikes stored in his flat. He now has three businesses, wildswimbikerun.com for guided activities in Bath, bathoutdoors.co.uk which specialises



in outdoor equipment and the latest, bathebikeshire.co.uk, which he started when he observed that there wasn't a good offer in Bath. He partners with US company Radpower Bikes as he believes they are the best value product. Sustainability is a real priority with the need to avoid car journeys. He does not come across as a zealot but wants to help by providing practical solutions.

All his activities are based at the Arches in Dolemeads, where he has good space and an external area. There is something for everyone, guided walks, cycling tours, bike-packing, paddle boarding and ebike hire. The common theme is sharing with tourists and locals alike the wonders of Widcombe, Bath and the surrounding area. He loves the history, the geography and wonderful ecology and with four different seasons, he never tires of it.

Adventures are not always dangerous and demanding as Darroch told me about his guided dawn chorus walks. He enthused about the variety of birdlife on their walk from the city, along the canal and up into Smallcombe Wood. On his tours, he always encourages his clients to visit local Widcombe outlets – the cafes, pubs, restaurant and shops.

He believes in contributing to the local area, and has made sure the area in front of the Arches is free from clutter and has encouraged the council to undertake a deep litter clean. He is trying to work with the landlord and Network Rail to address the graffiti-strewn arches, but that is a harder nut to crack. ■ *Jeremy Boss*





WIDCOMBE WOBBLERS CYCLE RIDES 2023

APRIL

13th Thursday 6.00pm

Evening Cycle to the Jolly Sailor at Saltford.

12 miles

22nd Saturday 10.00am

Cycle to The Rising Sun Pub, Pensford.

24 miles

MAY

13th Saturday 10.00am CHALLENGE RIDE!

Day cycle to Lacock.

32 miles

JUNE

16th Friday 6.00pm

Evening cycle to the Electric Bear Brewery.

5 miles

22nd Thursday 6.00pm

Evening cycle to the Long Barrow, Stoney Littleton for a picnic.

13.5 miles

JULY

16th Sunday 10.00am

Cycle to the Lavender Farm and Tuckers Grave

18 miles

3rd Thursday 6.00pm

Evening cycle to the Inn at Freshford

14 miles

AUG

19th Saturday 10.00am

Day ride to Quoins Vineyard, Bradford on Avon

23 miles

24th Thursday 6.00pm

Evening cycle round the canal circuit to the Hope and Anchor

12 miles

If you would like to join us for a leisurely sociable cycle please book at

<https://widcombe-association.whitefuse.net/pages/3-events>



The Thursday evening rides are shorter than our weekend rides. Most of our rides have one or two sections uphill; the challenge rides are longer and have more demanding climbs. All our rides are relaxed and taken at the pace of the slowest.

Meeting point: under the tree at the western end of Widcombe Parade. In the case of bad weather, please go to www.widcombeassociation.org.uk for last minute changes.

Out & About

Wild in Widcombe

For me it's a great pleasure to have both town and country on the doorstep in Widcombe. We have the best of both worlds and many people tell me they wouldn't want to live anywhere else. For those who enjoy nature there are lots of wildlife spectacles within easy reach. Birds offer some of the best. Within a few minutes' walk from my house I can be down on the riverside path to see how the peregrine falcons are progressing with their nesting activities on St John's Church. In the first week of April this year the female falcon was lying in the nesting box brooding her eggs, but I could see she was keeping an eye on everything going on below. When her mate reappeared there was a great flurry of activity as some unfortunate bird was passed between them in mid-air. The falcons have become totally adapted to living in the city.

Walking the other way up Ralph Alan Drive there is another wonderful spectacle in spring. Herons nest in their small colony

of about eight nests in the treetops not far beyond the garden centre. It's a noisy affair with much bill clapping going on. I find it strange to see the birds perched in trees where they seem so ungainly. They catch fish along the river and canal and there is a continuous procession of birds commuting to and from their nests. Across the road from the heronry we are lucky to have a pair of ravens nesting in the tall wellingtonia tree in Abbey Cemetery. Their sonorous honks can be heard as they fly overhead. Until recently ravens were restricted to wild uplands and coasts, but they too are learning to adapt to city life.

Since I came to live in Widcombe 12 years ago I have kept a record of the different kinds of birds seen in our garden. The total now stands at 44, plus another 14 seen flying over. That's pretty good for a garden only 10 minutes' walk from the railway station. We have had everything from tiny goldcrests and even firecrests, to buzzards and, of course, the ubiquitous gulls. Our most extraordinary visitor was a corncrake that dropped in last year on route from Africa to the Hebrides! That was exceptional, but it's what I like about Widcombe, you never know quite what will happen next. ■ David Goode



Heron fishing on the Canal - about to lunge

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Widcombe Life



Join the Mummers!

The Mummers welcomed in the New Year in usual style with three performances across Widcombe directed by Widcombe Queen Margarida Dolan. They will be back next year and welcome new players.
(<https://www.widcombemummers.org.uk>)

Parlour games

Bath Mayor Bob Appleyard welcomed WA volunteers to his parlour to mark the WA's outstanding award in the In Your Neighbourhood Awards, run by the Royal Horticultural Society in association with Britain in Bloom.



Photos of the Mummers by Michael Hyde.



Go Green Widcombe spreads the word

Alex Sherman, CEO of the Bath Preservation Trust makes the case for retrofitting our homes to reduce our energy use at the latest Go Green event.



Musical feast

Bath Opera and the Widcombe Association present The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart's great comic opera of intrigue, misunderstanding and forgiveness on Friday 21 July, at the Julian Slade theatre, Prior Park school. Bring a picnic to enjoy before the performance, taking in the view over Bath and beyond. Fizz will be available to buy and there is plenty of parking on site.



Christmas is coming!

The Widcombe Association Christmas Market 2022 was the most ambitious yet with over 50 stalls across three venues and 2,000 visitors. The array of crafts on sale, many with a festive theme, made for an enjoyable day with friends and family. A wide array of tastes were satisfied through arts and crafts in jewellery, ceramics, textiles as well as artwork. We hope to continue this theme in 2023. Look out in August for the opening of applications from crafters.

Please note that the 2023 dates for the WA Christmas market are a week earlier than last year - Saturday and Sunday November 11th & 12th. ■ Clare Furlonger





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Art

On the art trail

The Widcombe Art Trail (17-18 June) is bigger than ever this year with artists' homes, sponsors' homes, the Natural Theatre Company and Widcombe Baptist Church all welcoming visitors through their doors. There will be paintings, sculpture, crafts and jewellery, prints and cards, all for sale during the weekend. More information about the exhibitors and the route can be found at www.widcombearttrail.com.

■ *Pippa Wrigley*



Connection by Vikki Yeates



Still Life by Liz Holden White



Landscape by Maggie Martin



Golden Dog by Carol Symon



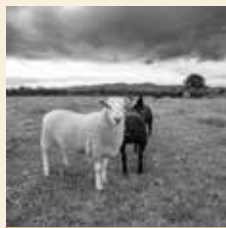
*Continuum
by Caspar Taylor*



Ear rings by Polly Gough



On the beach
by Ruth Davies



Sheep Near Santon
by Richard Ford



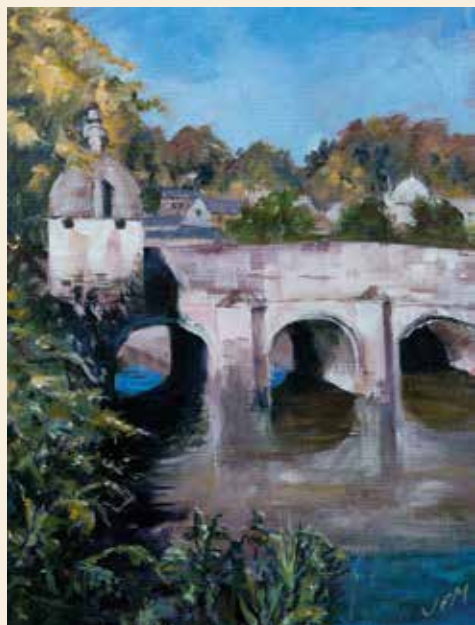
Heron
by Jess Palmer



Leaves and cobalt
by Sue Pryor



Flowers & Blue Semicircles
by Sarah Lewis



The Bridge at Bradford by Judy Meats



Metal Framed

In the garden

View from the hillside

We are lucky to live in a unique city where the majority of its inhabitants live tantalisingly close to open countryside. My visit this time was to a house and garden that truly makes the most of its elevated position above Widcombe – under a mile from the buzzing city centre.

In the 19th century, the Grade II listed house was home to George ‘Black’ Robinson (1791-1866) the first Chief Protector of Aborigines, who resettled then abandoned the Big River and Oyster Bay Aborigines of Tasmania. Robinson was notorious and flamboyant, and his influence on the design of the house can be seen in its distinctive Tasmanian-style balcony. The present owners were mesmerised by the view from that balcony and set about redesigning the garden to take full advantage of the elevated setting and the borrowed view of the city and the surrounding hills.

With the help of stonemasons and a digger, the slope at the rear of the house was terraced, creating platforms for the new kitchen garden. Espalier apples spread over the south-facing wall and hedging is used to create separate rooms; beetroot, beans and onions are some of the many vegetables grown here. A spring-fed rill brings calm to this part of the garden and a splendid row of pleached limes draws the eye towards the house.



Growing on the steep grassy slopes to the front of the house are trees dating back to the 19th century, including holm oaks, beech and a sequoia. In spring, the tone of the planting is gentle and muted, then, as summer progresses, dahlias, crocosmia Lucifer, knautia macedonica and penstemons switch the palette to blazing reds and oranges.

A highlight is the newly designed garden which takes its inspiration from Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf. A leading figure of the New Perennial gardening movement, Oudolf favours bold drifts of herbaceous perennials and grasses, selected as much for their structure and movement as for their colour. Here the selection includes echinacea, eryngium, helenium, rudbeckia, sedum and Turkish sage and prairie-style grasses. Garden ornaments and sculptures are a significant point of interest, especially in winter.

The lawns are interspersed with terraces, gently winding paths and sweeping steps.

Picturesque ponds and waterfalls have been established in an area of wet land, and a shady glade has been planted with acers. Finally, a magnificent archway built from fallen branches leads to a meandering trail through the woodland. All in all, there is an abundance of areas to unwind at the end of a busy day in this magnificent garden on the edge of our beautiful city. ■ *Beverley Wallis*

In the garden

Summer to-do list

Summer is a great time to get out the BBQ and sit back and soak up the sun. However, we gardeners know that there is plenty to do to keep the garden looking its best.

Many summer flowering perennials such as hardy geraniums, alchemilla, stachys and delphiniums can be cut back really hard after flowering and they will quickly produce fresh growth and usually a second flush of flowers. A sprinkling of general fertiliser will give them a great boost.

Leave small areas in veg beds for bedding plants, roots of border plants or a scattering of mixed annual seeds. These will add colour as well as attracting pollinators and natural bug predators.

Look out for pests: Solomon's seal sawfly caterpillars seem to appear overnight, so pick them off as soon as they do, and do the same with the bright red lily beetles that will also be emerging from their winter sleep. A regular stroll around the garden with a torch and a bucket in the late evening can go a long way to keeping snail numbers down.

If you are troubled by caterpillars on your brassicas or carrot root fly, consider investing in insect-proof netting such as Environmesh: you'll get bug free crops and the netting lasts for years.

If the summer looks like being another scorcher, raise the blades of your mower or even stop mowing. Don't be tempted to water lawns in a heatwave, it's an expensive waste of precious water and scorched grass recovers as soon as it rains.

Early summer is the perfect time to sow seeds of hardy biennials. Wallflowers, foxgloves, sweet William, forget-me-not, Iceland poppies and Canterbury bells sown now and planted out in the autumn will give a great, inexpensive display next year.

Happy gardening.

■ John Leach, Prior Park Garden Centre



Dates for the gardener's diary



Wednesday 17 May, 2pm: private tour of a large rural garden in Radstock with mature trees, wild areas and a cut flower and kitchen garden. There are open lawns and borders with secluded seating areas as well as interesting outbuildings, a hen house, small ponds and a mini stumpery. <https://widcombe-association.whitefuse.net/pages/3-events>

Saturday 20 May, 10am to 12 noon: Claverton and District Horticultural Society Plant Sale, at Claverton Down Community Hall. Free entry. Bargain plants grown by members including, annuals and perennials, bargain seedlings, house plants and a children's seeding station. <https://www.clavertonhortsoc.org/>

19 Jul 2023, 2.00pm: private tour of a two-acre garden in Batheaston, with its colourful mix of annuals, biennials and perennials. <https://widcombe-association.whitefuse.net/pages/3-events>

Saturday 2 September, 2.00-5.00pm: Claverton and District Horticultural Society Flower and Produce Show at Claverton Down Community Hall. Over 100 entry classes of fruit, vegetables, flowers, baking, photography and crafting. Open to all. <https://www.clavertonhortsoc.org/>



Widcombe

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St Thomas à Becket, Church Street

Traditional services every Sunday

Times vary, please see website for more information

Church open for visitors 2.30-4.30pm Sundays, June - August

St Matt's, Widcombe Hill

Contemporary service every Sunday

Times vary, please see website for more information

www.widcombe.church

In the garden

Walk on the wild side

Everyone is welcome to join the Wayfarers' walks this summer, making the most of the beautiful countryside on our doorstep. The group meets on the second Wednesday of the month, at 10am, at the west end



of Widcombe Parade. Walks last one or two hours and are medium paced. Registration is not necessary, just turn up! Come dressed for the weather, with suitable footwear and be prepared for a few climbs. <https://widcombe-association.whitefuse.net/events/7-widcombe-wayfarers-walking-wednesdays>



Fabulous pictures of Widcombe and Bath by local artist Sue Porter.
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The next edition of Widcombe Magazine will be coming your way in November 2023.

If you have any comments about this issue, we welcome your feedback.

Please email: magazine@widcombeassociation.org.uk

Working Widcombe

Farming on the edge

Nick and Jane Frere were in their twenties when they came to Bath from what was then Rhodesia – fleeing their beloved homeland because ‘farmers had become easy meat for insurgents.’ While Jane brought up their two sons, Nick found work on contracts abroad, installing irrigation equipment in the Saudi Arabian desert where his client was building a dairy and ‘starting Saudi Arabia’s agricultural revolution’, then in Venezuela and Algeria. He returned full time to Bath in 1990. At last, he started to farm for himself, setting up at Southside Farm in Perrymead.

These days, Nick keeps around 50 sheep and 300 chickens – selling the eggs on his Friday rounds in Perrymead, Entry Hill, Lyncombe, Widcombe, and further afield to restaurants and hotels around Bath. On Saturdays, he and Jane run adjacent stalls at the market in Green Park, where Nick sells eggs and Jane sells her homemade cakes and biscuits.

James Gay’s farming life began more easily.

He came to Rainbow Wood Farm with his parents in the early 1980s, when the 300-acre farm was owned by the Mallett family of nearby Klondyke House. The farm now belongs to the National Trust and James keeps 500 breeding sheep and 40 cows. Like Nick and Jane, James and his wife Rachel have diversified to ensure a range of income streams. At different times of year, they sell Christmas trees, create a pumpkin patch, run a Halloween Spooky Barn, and sell coffee



James Gay

from their Molehill barrista coffee trailer. They also make a good income from their award-winning bed and breakfast, which has its own entrance in one prong of their L-shaped farmhouse.



Nick Frere

James is glad to be working so close to Bath. He and Rachel have a busy social life and take advantage of all there is to do and see nearby. But, of course, the proximity of Bath does have its downsides. Both farming families have stories to tell about the thoughtlessness of those passing through their farmland.

‘The majority are fine,’ says Nick Frere. ‘It’s just the few inconsiderate people who do silly things.’

James concurs: ‘90 per cent of people who walk the skyline are regulars; they know me by sight; they know where the livestock are and where the footpaths go.’

It’s the tiny minority, then, who make things difficult for the farmers and stressful for their livestock. ‘I know in minutes if the sheep have been worried by a dog or by strangers wandering through the fields,’ says James. ‘They are skittish and fearful and become uncooperative when my dog tries to herd them. They might even back away from him.’



James has challenged metal detectorists and walkers who don't stick to the footpaths. 'They think they are entitled to go where they want and they wander straight through the sheep fields, leaving gates open as they go so that animals I have segregated for good reason are left to wander together and get mixed up. Sheep are wary of those they don't know. These people make the animals nervous. A worried sheep might abort. It's actually very serious.'

Every so often, Nick will find an abandoned instant barbecue in one of his fields. 'It's been left because it was still smouldering probably, too hot to handle. But who is supposed to clear it up?'

James also wishes dog walkers would consistently pick up their dogs' faeces. 'Dog waste can contain worms and parasites. It gets scooped up with the hay and ends up in the bales that are fed to livestock over winter.'

The worst are the dog attacks. Over the years, Nick has lost four sheep in Richen's Orchard in Bathwick Meadows. 'One sheep will carry two lambs. Each lamb is worth £200. Not to mention the misery of it.'

These days the National Trust closes the orchard to the public when the sheep are in there so, things have got better though small dogs can still get in to worry the poor animals. 'Even a chihuahua will chase sheep,' Nick observes.

James deals with at least one dog incident a month. 'Often, the owners won't even know anything has happened. Their dog runs off, worries a few sheep, then comes back panting and wagging its tail and the owners have no idea where it's been. You're not in a park up here,' he says. 'This is the animals' home.' ■ *Colette Hill*

Farmers' wishlist

- Keep dogs in sight at all times
- Keep all dogs on a lead near livestock
- Bag dog faeces dispose of elsewhere
- Close gates that you find closed
- Leave open gates open
- Stick to the marked paths
- Don't stray into private fields
- Don't have barbecues
- Take your litter home



Local History

Marking the boundary

It is rather odd to have lived in Widcombe for 17 years without knowing exactly where the area begins and ends. However, that's exactly the position I was in when I started writing this article and also, spoiler alert, when I finished it.

Perhaps a little bit of history would be helpful. Let's start with that blackhearted villain William the Conqueror and his Domesday Book of 1086 (which, like all of the most of exciting things in history, is really about tax). Here, Widcombe makes an appearance as part of the Bath Hundred of Somerset. It was then the manor of Lyncombe with Widcombe and was a leasehold property of the Abbey of St Peter (now Bath Abbey), the freehold being held by the Crown. You can view the Domesday Book online where you can discover how many households were in the manor (22) and the precise number of pigs (8) and sheep (180). Those Normans were nothing if not thorough.

There's a good reason why Lyncombe got premier billing in 1086. At that time the manorial centre was in what is now Lyncombe Vale around Lyncombe Farm (which is now Lyncombe Hall). Widcombe itself lay further to the east, around where St Thomas à Becket Church now stands. Rather confusingly the name Lyncombe later became primarily associated with an area further to the west which now includes Bear Flat and Entry Hill whereas few would now argue against Lyncombe Vale being in Widcombe.

Charlton's map of 1799 shows the manor at its fullest extent stretching as far north east as Dolemeads Gardens and, to the north west, to what is now Hayesfield School. To the south it reached the Cross Keys pub on the Midford Road and to the south west it encompassed the current site of St Gregory's School. If you can lay your hands on a copy

of the map (or borrow mine) you can quite easily work out who, in 1799, owned the land on which your house was built.

The problem nowadays is distinguishing between different sorts of boundaries. The current ecclesiastical border (being that of the Anglican parish of Widcombe) is largely marked out with helpful, if rapidly deteriorating, boundary stones.

Somewhat annoyingly the civil boundary, being the current electoral ward of Widcombe and Lyncombe, is different and, unlike the parish, contains Bear Flat, Entry Hill and Bath Cricket Club (and until very recently extended as far as Pinesgate on the Lower Bristol Road). So, if you live in Bear Flat, you vote in Widcombe and Lyncombe, but you live in the Anglican parish of St Luke's; and, if you go down the hill to watch the cricket, you are simultaneously both inside and outside Widcombe.

Maybe all this talk of boundaries is rather missing the point, particularly as you don't need to live in Widcombe to join the excellent Widcombe Association! Perhaps Widcombe is less a place and more a state of mind. ■ *Dan Lyons*

Walking the boundary stones



On 12 August, the history group will lead a walk round part of the old boundary of Widcombe, locating the remaining boundary stones of 1894 and learning some local history on the way. The walk starts by the river at Ferry Lane; it is 3.5 miles, including some hills – with the reward of flapjacks and tea at the finish. Booking (via the Widcombe Association website) is essential. ■ *Sian Lewis*

St Thomas Celebration Weekend

St Thomas à Becket's Church is to hold a celebration weekend on 24-25 June to mark the feast of St Thomas. The church has suffered yet another theft of lead from the vestry roof, so all proceeds will go to the St Thomas Restoration Fund.

There will be tea in the churchyard on both days, from 3pm to 5pm. On Saturday evening, there will be a talk about the history of the church and parish - 7pm for 7.30pm start, tickets £8 (WA members) and £10 (non-members), to include a glass of wine (tickets from the WA website). On Sunday there will be a service of evening prayer with popular hymns. Full details of the celebration weekend can be found at <https://widcombe.church/>.

■ *Sian Lewis*



Jessica Palmer Art

jessica.palmer@hotmail.com

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Widcombe Foodies



Speckled Rarebit

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Ingredients

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- 1 tsp English mustard
- 4 tbsp brown sauce
- 50ml Speckled Hen pale ale
- Pinch of cracked black pepper
- 5 slices of granary bread

Method

Place all the ingredients, except the bread, into a bowl and mix well. Cover and leave to settle in the fridge if time allows (up to 24 hours).

Spread the mixture evenly on the slices of bread, making sure you smooth it right to their edges.

Place on to a baking tray in a preheated oven at 200°C/gas mark 6 for around 10-15 mins depending how crispy you like it; if you like it extra crispy, cook under a hot grill.

Serve with anything you fancy: we like to serve ours with a dressed mixed salad and tomato and onion chutney.

■ Alex Webber, Head Chef - Secret Garden, Prior Park Garden Centre

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Committee Profiles

Dan Lyons



Dan Lyons retired two years ago without giving too much thought to how he might spend his new-found days of freedom. He expected to take up his hobbies (cycling, fishing etc) with new fervour, but with so much time available there was no sense of urgency to spur him on. His solution: get busy volunteering – hence his role with, among others, the Widcombe Association.

Originally from the Lake District, Dan read history at York then trained as a lawyer in London before becoming a Chartered Tax Adviser at Deloitte, first in the capital, then in Bristol. He and his wife, Jo, moved to Widcombe 17 years ago and brought up their children here.

Dan has retained a deep interest in history, particularly military history, and has spent some time exploring the battlefields of the Somme, Normandy and Arnhem. He observes that this part of the world is rich in its own battlefield history. The battle lines of the 1643 English Civil War battle of Lansdown can still be seen at the top of Lansdown Hill. The penultimate battle fought on English soil was also played out at Norton St Phillip during the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. The last battle was fought at Sedgemoor where the Duke of Monmouth's attempt to overthrow King James II ended in defeat.

Dan's interest in history led him to the Widcombe Association and a key role as the keeper of Widcombe and Lyncombe's historical archive, previously held by Miss Elizabeth Holland in her home at Prior Park Buildings. Dan undertakes new research and, with retired cardiologist John Chambers, plans the WA's sell-out history walks.

More of Dan's time is taken up by his role as chair of trustees for Citizens Advice in Bath. Demand for advice about benefits, energy costs, debt and housing is huge and growing. 'There is real poverty in Bath despite its evident wealth,' Dan says. 'Two of our wards are in the bottom 10 per cent nationally for deprivation. Over 60 per cent of our clients have a disability or a long-term health condition. Most come to us with complex problems.' Two thirds of the CAB's advisors are volunteers and more are always needed.'

Volunteering keeps Dan busy but maybe not busy enough. When I ask if he plans to stay retired, he admits to missing the buzz of the working day: 'I may work again, something part-time perhaps, in London. But I am enjoying the volunteering and there is always more to do.' ■ *Colette Hill*



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The sweet smell of nostalgia

In the 70s in Bath, anyone with even the slightest touch of alternative culture, be it philosophy, recreational substances, a penchant for tie-dye fabrics or the love of Hawkwind's Silver Machine which seemed to be playing permanently on the juke box, found their nirvana in the Hat and Feather pub at the top of Walcot Street.

The Hat's extractor system was somewhat rudimentary, so after a full Thursday evening's session (Thursday being Giro day back then), one would arrive home exuding a particular aroma of cigarette smoke, chip fat and patchouli. One Bath councillor referred to the regulars as filthy hippies, but being one of them, (Natural Theatre was based practically next door) I think I got through more shampoo and shower gel than at any other time in my life.

To plagiarise the song, one really did have to wash that pub right out of one's hair.

The old Widcombe Social Club also had its own unique aroma. Although the place was starting to fall down, the staff, namely Bob, Dawn and Kinger kept the place immaculately clean. For example, the snazzy composition tiling mosaic that represented a dance floor shone like glass.

We proposed that it be preserved and re-laid in the new club but this turned out to be impossible. Decades of ladies dancing round their handbags in stiletto heels had sealed it firmly to the concrete underfloor.

An old-fashioned building called for old-fashioned methods, and this, combined with a certain strata of the community's penchant for sleeping rough in the relative comfort of the semi-covered car park, meant a surfeit of that pungent but highly

effective product namely Jeyes Fluid. Bob got through gallons of the stuff!

The new club is blessed with state-of-the-art aircon, but the old Sosh struggled to cope with the combined aromas of the ubiquitous fag smoke, the super-strength Jeyes and of course, the deep fryer, overseen through the roller shutter by the redoubtable Mrs Chips. Like the Hat and Feather of old, one could always tell when someone had spent the evening at the Sosh.

Anyway, the technician at the Naturals made a smart revolving tombola machine for the club's bingo and raffle sessions. When the old club was demolished, that essential piece of equipment was put into storage in the theatre company's basement, where it remained unused and forgotten.

Several years later, the building work finished and the new club going great guns, we fished the tombola machine out to use in that week's grand draw. I thought I'd better check inside for leftover tickets from all those years back and I opened the little trapdoor on the side.

To my surprise, I was met by a heady and highly nostalgic waft of what I could only describe as Parfum du Sosh 2007. Suddenly, I was back there, dancing round my handbag, a fag in one hand and a plate piled high with chunky chips in the other!

Honestly, one could have bottled it!

■ *Ralph Oswick*



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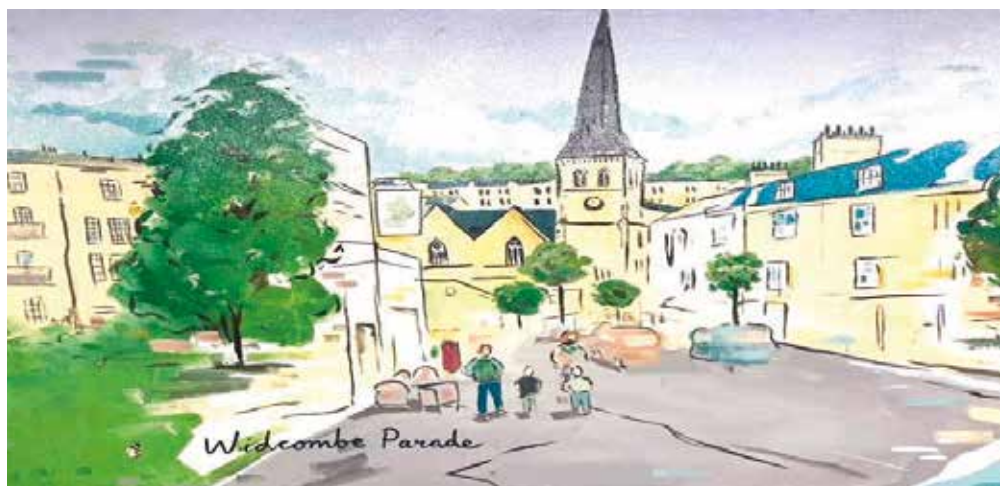
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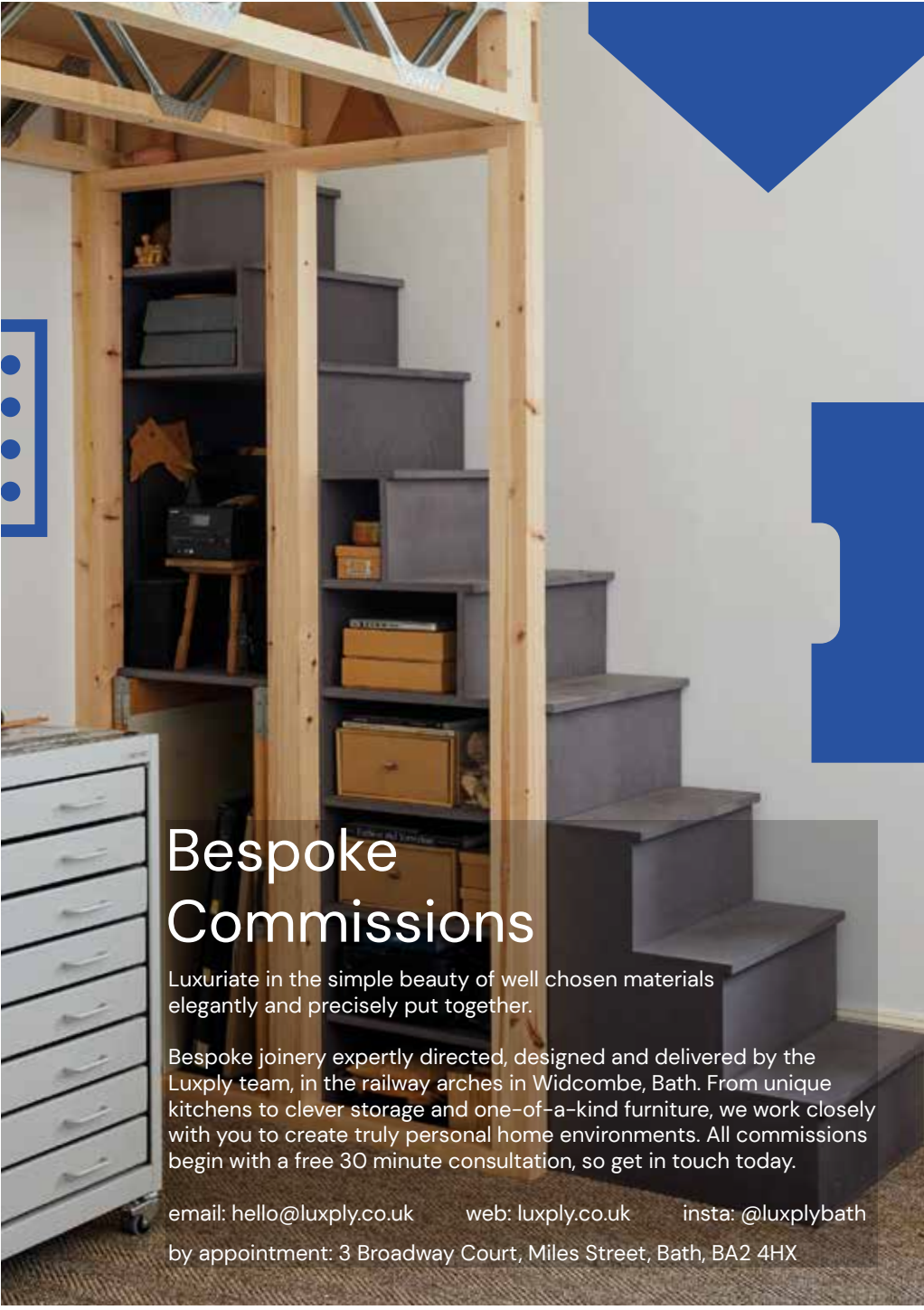


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