



Withycombe and Rodhuish Newsletter

February 2019

Rodhuish Winters

In my time at Higher Rodhuish Farm there were three winters which were exceptionally bad. During the first, in 1948, we were all but cut off from civilisation. I remember as a boy going down to Withycombe in a horse and cart to collect provisions such as bread and other food. At that time there were three shops in Withycombe that supplied household needs: one was owned by Charlie Gould; another by Bill Stevens, David's father; I cannot remember the third. The driver of the horse and cart was Jack Dyer, Marion Badcock's father. The post was delivered on horseback from Withycombe post office; the postmistress's name was Eva.

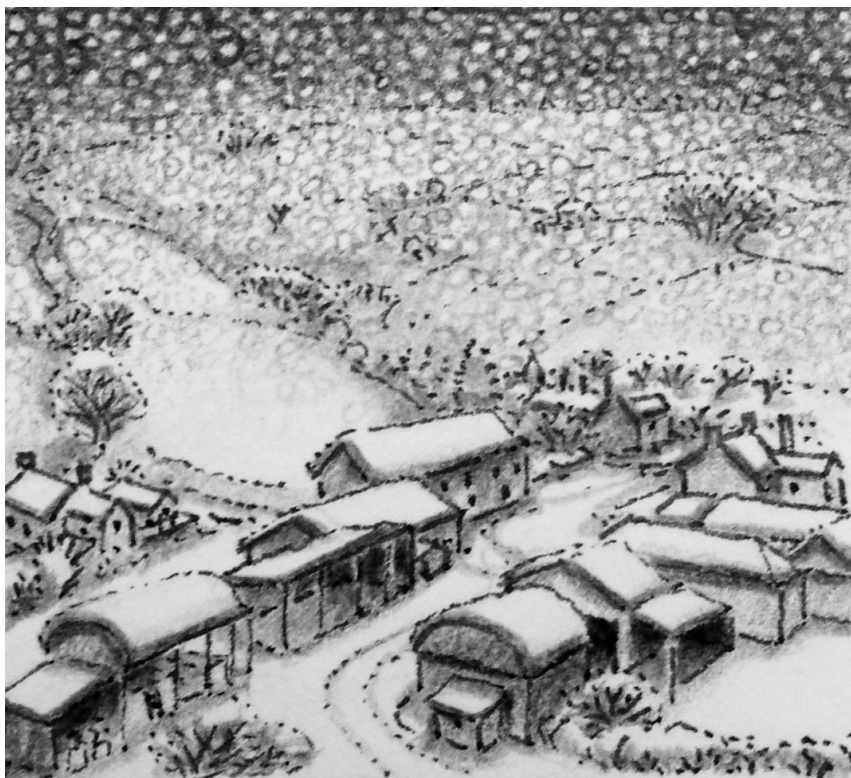
In 1963 there was a long drawn out winter. It started snowing on Boxing Day and the snow still lay on the ground in mid-April. It was a long hard struggle for farming.

1978 was the worst winter of the three, as it was so deep and we never had any warning that it was coming. In the previous two bad winters we had a snow warning and were able to bring cows down from Rodhuish Common to land nearer to the farm. Having forty cows on the common, completely cut off, was worrying. The NFU had got together with the army to organise helicopter drops of fodder to stock that was stranded but when we contacted them to ask for help they said that priority was being given to Exmoor. The next step was to find all the shovels and spades and dig away the snow up the stony track to Rodhuish Common. It took three or four days of hard work. Eventually, Jennifer and father were able to get up to the common on horseback and bring the the cows back nearer to the farm. Bill Shopland (Anthony's father) was then able to take fodder to them; they were very pleased to see him.

Going down to Withycombe from Rodhuish Cross, the first part of the road was completely full of snow. Strong winds had created a lot of drifting; if you wanted to get to Withycombe you had to walk along the hedge.

Long live the remainers!

Alan Thomas



CONGRATULATIONS to Jean Humber, secretary and founder-member of the West Somerset Car Scheme Partnership, who was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community in the New Year's Honours list. Our own Withycombe Wheels, with volunteer drivers, provides transport for people who are in need of it, for example to attend hospital appointments. Jean continues to organise this as well as overseeing the various other schemes that she inspired and helped to set up in West Somerset.



Withycombe Memorial Hall

The hall continues to be used regularly by a variety of groups including Active Living, short mat bowls, snooker, table tennis and Pilates. The recent Quiz nights have been very popular and we had a Christmas Coffee morning and the Carol singers met up in the hall after singing around the village.

We would like to remind villagers that the hall can be hired at very low cost (phone Dave and Judith on 01984 641231), and also a wide variety of crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils are available for hire (phone Anne on 01984 641656).

Forthcoming Events:

23rd February - Bacon/egg butty breakfast (9.30 to 11.30am).

9th March - Quiz Night (starts 7.30).

The AGM will be held in March and a flyer with details will be sent out a month before the meeting.

28th April - Bluebell Walk with cream tea.

Hall bookings/enquiries: David Tilley 01984 641231

Carol Singing in Aid of the Children's Society

May I thank all who came out to sing carols around the village prior to Christmas in aid of the Children's Society and to all villagers who kindly welcomed us and donated to this vital charity. We had enough for 2 teams of singers who were in fine voice and their efforts raised £165 which has been sent to the charity. I would also thank the Village Hall Committee who allowed us to use the hall free of charge at the end of the evening when refreshments and yet more singing were enjoyed.

Roger Hurst

Used spectacles (including sunglasses) and hearing aids

can be deposited in the collection box in the Memorial Hall. They will be refurbished and sent to developing countries.

Regular activities in Memorial Hall

Daytime

Evening

Monday

Table tennis
Contact: Bob/Anne Rivett
01984 641656

Tuesday

Wednesday

Active living
(twice a month)
Contact: Roger Hurst
01984 640060

Snooker
Contact: Graham Burnett
01984 640946

Thursday

Pilates
Contact: Fiona Pascall
07711 296116

Short mat bowls
Contact: Mike Burnett
01643 822301

Friday



PASCALLFITNESS

Pilates in Withycombe

Thursdays 11.30am

First session Free!

07711296116

fiona@pascallfitness.com

**Also get in touch and Sports
Massage and Personal training.**

Memorial Hall Committee

Current committee members are:

Anne Rivett (Chairman), Teresa Flynn (Secretary), Judith Blathwayt, Richard Barnham (Treasurer), Chris Adams, Audrey Bateman, Fiona Chamberlain, Dave Maynard, Bob Rivett, Anthony Shopland, Liz Steadman, Judith Tilley, Carol Wheeler.

Our meetings are open and minutes are posted on the noticeboard at the front of the Memorial Hall.

If you would like to help in any way please contact one of the committee members (telephone numbers on hall noticeboard).

Bird life on Withycombe Common as seen from Dumbledeer

After such a wet spring we had a hot and dry June, and just one really rainy day in July. However from August onwards, we were back to a regular supply. I don't know if this was the cause of the dearth of young swallows; there was no evidence from July onwards of any successful nesting. Maybe this was due to having a Hobby family in the area; they nest late with young Swallows, Swifts and House Martins on their menu.

At the end of June and beginning of July there were some Nightjars churring on Withycombe Common but I didn't hear any of that magical sound later on; a walk to Batts Castle in the lovely long July evenings is usually rewarding. During most months an extended family of Long Tailed tits gives us a flyby, once in July at 9pm!

In August there was not much around; it was grey but with a nice few days at the end when a Common Redstart paid us a call.

September was pretty similar until the fields were ploughed and the gulls came in. On the 9th I had a lovely view of Song Thrushes & Yellowhammers bathing in our pond. Large numbers of Rooks and Jackdaws congregate every evening before roosting.

October was a bit better. On the 1st a Tawny Owl hooted outside our window at 0625 announcing a new month; plus a flock of 50 House Sparrows on the big field! On the 17th migrating Chaffinches arrived in force and then disappeared. Redwings and Fieldfares turned up at the very end of the month.

In November we had some lovely weather, cold and clear at the start. On the 5th I watched a small Male Sparrowhawk circling the bay tree outside our front door with terrified house sparrows and tits twittering inside it; it would prove fatal if any tried to make a break! On the evening of the 6th, driving outside Higher Rodhuish farm, a Long Eared Owl broke cover and then obliged by roosting on a branch above the road illuminated by the car's lights. I was able to see it turn its head with its ears up. Happily no one else came along the road at the same time. This is a very shy bird and not often seen; once before I had spotted one by Forches Garden.

December as ever was wet, dank and dark with a few lovely days to lift the spirits. On the 18th a Tawny Owl started making all kinds of hoots from the ash tree outside our bedroom window, going on for long enough for me to have time to compare it on my iPad; I reckon it was a young female. At the end of the month and now into January we have a group of Goldfinches in residence, a rough count of 70 on an oak tree on one late afternoon, more than I've ever seen before. Otherwise there is a lack of any large flocks of finches or buntings, possibly because of a change in cereal planting locally. So far there are fewer Magpies than the plague we had last year and in the last few days of January there has been much more activity at my bird feeders so I hope the Sparrow Hawk keeps away, ditto the cats!

Richard Devitt

From the Hills

If I were to shut my eyes and conjure up the month of March, what would I see?

The distant pillows of the Quantock Hills, indistinct in the hazy, chalk blue air. The planted fields around our house will be pink and dusty; or perhaps bright and green as corduroy. The sun, shining through leafless branches will cast very crisp, dark shadows across the road.

On the pond I might see a moorhen or a coot. The ducks will arrive fleetingly, to court and squabble and fly off again a few minutes later. Looking very carefully I might find evidence of the little piles of vegetation nipped off and harvested by a water vole. Once or twice I have seen them at this time of year, busy as clockwork bath toys, in and out the soft rush and sedges at the water's edge.

The apple trees in the farm orchard behind the house will be full of the song of Great Tit and Chaffinch; Bullfinch and Blackcap. I will be cheered by hearing the first, wonderful, clumsy bumblebee among the primroses and celandine - and perhaps too by an invisible Skylark far away over the bare fields leading up to Rodhuish Common.

There will be a blue drift of speedwell among the daffodils in the plum orchard and any warm sun will bring out Peacock and Red Admiral butterflies from their winter hiding places. Very early one morning there will be a tentative dawn chorus; or at least a single blackbird singing right outside our bedroom window...

But, if I look in my "Natural History Diary", (scribbled in an old exercise book) to find out what March last year was like, I read: March 1st: Heavy snow; snowed up. March 17th: Very heavy snow. March 30th: More snow!

Whether we get the March of my imagination or a more sobering reality it will nevertheless remain my favourite month.

Ben



Court Place Farm report.



Nothing has happened.
Farming wise that is.

December and January are usually quiet months for us, all fieldwork is done and the gates are closed. We'll retreat into the workshop and start whittling away at my "to do" list: that's machines to service, broken things to fix, improvements to make and that untidy corner to sort out. It does take a while to get the list completely cleared, Louise has been on at me to treat the greenhouse woodwork; that's been on the list for 3 years now, not quite made it to the top yet!

There is some hedging to do, maintenance in Myra's Wood and some ditches to clean, but if it's raining we will be found in the workshop. It's a sort of hibernation.

Steve Crossman

Kerrie Thorne at Christophers Cottage would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who bought or donated plants or produce from the stall outside our house. A total of £60.00 was raised for the Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation charity. Please look out for the stall again this year.

Exmoor National Park recently ran a poetry competition. For fun I quickly wrote a poem, and I actually won a prize!

**I went into the garden
to gaze into the sky
but, despite all my searching
nothing could I spy.
I'll try again tomorrow
in Exmoor National Park
and, to avoid more sorrow,
I'll try it in the dark.**

Dave Tilley

Are you considering selling your house in the next couple of years? Kerrie and Nick Thorne at Christophers Cottage are looking to move into a larger house, preferably in Withycombe. 'We love living in the village and seek a long term family home, feel free to pop a note through our door or call us on 640968 or via email on nick@nickthorndesign.co.uk if this is of interest'.



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PARISH COUNCIL

Mrs Emma Wright (CHAIRMAN), 1 Crown Cottages, Withycombe, Minehead TA24 6QA
Telephone: 01984 641602 Email: burny150@gmail.com

Parish Council website:

www.withycombepc.co.uk

where full details of councillors and meetings etc can also be found.

Parish Clerk:

Sam Rawle, 60 Paganel Road, Minehead, Somerset, TA24 5EY
Telephone: 01643 703514
Email: sam.rawle60@gmail.com

Please send us your email address if you would like to receive newsletters by this means.

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE A LARGEPRINT VERSION OF THIS NEWSLETTER.

Contributions to the next newsletter (including photos, drawings, poems, stories etc) can be sent or delivered to Anne Rivett, Squirrels, Lower Street. (anne.rivett@btinternet.com 01984 641656) - by 30th April please!