



Cerne
Historical
Society

MAGAZINE

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine.



The Weathervane George Mortimer



Fire! Fire! Fire! George Mortimer



How Old is the Giant? Katherine Barker



It Happened This Month Den Denness



Lost and Found Andrew Popkin



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Sept

2020



Welcome to the fifth issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine.

Regrettably, Covid 19 has forced us to cancel the remaining meetings and talks arranged for this year. Fortunately most of the speakers are able to give the talks next year instead so we already have a full programme planned for 2021. We can only hope that the pandemic will be over by then and we can use the Village Hall again. If we cannot, we will investigate the possibility of holding "virtual" meetings online via Zoom. Please let us know whether or not you would welcome that.

In the meantime we shall continue to publish our magazine, although we have decided to publish it quarterly rather than monthly from now on and, by popular request, to continue doing so even after we have resumed our usual activities. The issue after this will be the Winter one published in early December and the next ones after that will be the Spring one in March and the Summer one in June.

As well as the considerable variety of articles in this Autumn issue that we hope you enjoy, we also have two new columns called "It Happened This Month" and "Lost and Found"



We hope they will become regular features of the magazine. "In This Month", Den Denness will recount many interesting and amusing events which occurred in the area at the same time of the year in the distant or not so distant past. If you know of such events which you think we should feature please let us know.

In "Lost and Found" Andrew Popkin will present photos and descriptions of various objects discovered in or near the village in the recent past which were obviously lost or buried many years, and often centuries ago. This column will be dependent on you, the reader, to provide us with details and photos of objects of interest you have found. We will be happy to take photos of them for you if you would like us to do that.

Gordon Bishop – Chair of the Cerne Historical Society

This magazine may be viewed and read online or downloaded from cerneabbashistory.org





George Mortimer

Restoration of the Weathervane on St Mary's Church

The weathervane on the top of the vice turret on the North West corner of the tower of St Mary's Church has been renovated and restored to its normal commanding position thanks to the Friends of St Mary's and the generosity of Caroline Tisdall. The weathervane had become sadly dilapidated, with the 'E' arm missing and the 'S' arm turned back on itself. The gilt on the weathercock had lost its sheen



Photos © Jane Tearle

and much of the ironwork was corroded. Now it gleams in the sunshine as an instant guide to the vagaries of the wind. On occasion, however, the winds have been particularly unkind. The 'great whirlwind' that struck Cerne Abbas on 31 October 1731 necessitated extensive repairs to exposed areas of the church, including the weathervane.

This 2020 restoration provided the opportunity to study the weathervane more closely. The weathercock has the initials RB studded into it and the date 1711 cut into its tail. The initials are those of Richard Bartlett, who was churchwarden in 1711. He had been elected churchwarden the previous year. An entry in the Churchwardens Accounts for 1711 reads '*item: paid Roger Hodder for 6½ [lbs?] of brass used about ye weathercock Colouring*'...[plus other work] ...'*£1.15s.8½*'. The tradition of the weathercock on churches goes back to the earliest Christian times, seen as an emblem of St Peter and Christ predicting that Peter would deny him three times before the cock crowed.



The tower of St Mary's dates from about 1530 and there may have been an earlier weathercock, but it was Richard Bartlett who put his name to the one we see today. Who was Richard Bartlett? Bartlett was baptised in St Mary's Church on 15 March 1655. He married Ann Ryal at Up Cerne on 29 May 1703. Richard died in 1715 aged 50 and Ann in 1742 aged 70. They are commemorated on a brass plaque on the north wall inside the church, under which they are

*In the Name of God Amen, Richard Bartlett
County of Dorset Yeoman being weak in body, but of so
Memory, Praise be therefore given to Almighty God, do make
Will & Testament in manner & form following (that is to say
I comend my Soul into y^e hands of Almighty God hoping y^e M^y
my Saviour Jesus Christ, to haue full & free pardon & Forgiveness*

Richard Bartlett
4th Feb^r 1715. J^{no} 2nd 1715.
Invent^y J^{no} 2nd 1715.
Comm^o mor^o
The: Riley sum

buried; a sure sign of their status in the church and village. There were no children from the marriage. In his Will dated 4 February 1715 he is described as a 'Yeoman'. Amongst other bequests, he gave and bequeathed to his wife, Ann, *'all those farms and tenements called or known by the names of Notten Farm, Notten Mill and Droup Farm situated lying or being in ye Parish of Maiden Newton....'* It is known that the Abbey had properties in Maiden Newton at the time of the Dissolution and it is quite possible that Richard had acquired these lands and properties in the years that followed. There is a hamlet called Notton just south of Maiden Newton on a bend in the River Frome. The coincidences are perhaps too much to ignore and this hamlet may be where Richard had his farm and mill.

Underneath
In hopes of a Resurrection to Eternall life
both the Body
of
RICHARD BARTLETT
of
CERNE ABBAS
Who departed this Life y^e 16th Jan^y 1715
In the 50 year of his age
To Whose MEMORY this is Incribed
ALSO ANN the wife of the said
RICHARD BARTLETT
Who departed this life y^e 5th of March
1742 aged 70 years

It is also reputed that Richard was the licensee of the Nag's Head, now 9 Abbey Street, but this has not been proved. Prominent victuallers were certainly active in village life well into the 19th century and served as churchwardens for St Mary's. They have similarly left their names for posterity in the church, one example to be found on the wooden screen dated 1749 at the west end of the nave.

About Roger Hodder who was paid for work on the weathercock in 1711 we know nothing, except that he was buried here in 1743.

In Roger Hodder's footsteps some 309 years later, the restoration of the weathercock in 2020 was carried out by Sally Strachey Historic Conservation (SSHC), whose Director is James Preston. The foreman on-site was David Anderson, assisted by stone mason Dan Bottomley. Tess Clogstoun did the gilding to the weathercock. Their names will also be recorded for posterity in the Churchwardens Accounts.

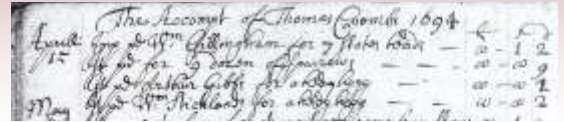


Caroline Tisdall
Photos © Jane Tearle





'23 Nov 1694: Item. Gave to a woman being undone by fire - 6d'
(Extract from 'The Account of Thomas Coombs 1694')



Thomas Coombs was the Churchwarden for St Mary's in 1694 and responsible for recording amounts paid from the poor rates. The poor rate was a tax on property levied in each parish, which was used to provide poor relief. The above quote was but one of three entries for 1694 alone, giving relief to individuals burnt out of their homes. The going rate appears to have been 6d per person affected!



The 17th century was a traumatic one for fires. On the afternoon of 6th August 1613 a blaze broke out in a shop in High East Street in Dorchester that caused considerable damage to the town. In the same year, the Globe Theatre in London burnt down, the thatch roof ignited during a performance of Shakespeare's play 'King Henry VIII'. But this was eclipsed by the Great Fire of London in September 1666 which gutted the medieval City of London. Following this fire, Acts of Parliament were passed which put restrictions on house design, for example the upper floors of houses were no longer permitted to jut out over the floor below. Fortunately for the medieval houses in Abbey Street, the ban on jetty construction came too late. However, more importantly, the 1667 Act stated: *'No man whatsoever shall presume to erect any house or building, whether great or small, but of brick or stone.'* The traditional Dorset cottage was built with 'cobb' walls, a largely West Country building medium used for centuries. It was made by pounding together locally available clay, cow dung, horsehair and water. In Cerne the locally available clay was the lower Chalk and this had an advantage of self-hardening after construction. The cobb walls were built up in 'lifts' or layers, from a thick base, 24" was common, and narrowing to 18" or so at the top. This would be completed with a thatch roof. Whilst the use of cobb and thatch was traditional, functional and relatively cheap, it was also vulnerable to fire. The use of brick thereafter became more common. It was safer, but also served to demonstrate the relative wealth of the house owner. How fashion changes!



The Great Fire of London also introduced the concept of fire insurance and by 1720, for example, the Sun Fire Office had underwritten some 17,000 policies totalling £10million. Ironically perhaps, the Sun Fire Insurance company suffered a serious fire itself, damaging or destroying the records of some of those who had taken out fire insurance policies. The insurers created 'fire mark' plates in order to identify for the fire brigade with which company a house was insured. This fire mark was not for the rather ghoulish reason stated in the Cerne Abbas First School 1987 Village Guide: *'The knocker is for insurance, if your house was on fire and you did not have a sun knocker you were left to burn, but if you had a knocker they knew who would pay the fireman'!*



Cerne Abbas and Fires in the 19th Century

The 1798 Admeasurement Survey, which can be seen on the Historical Society website, has two short but intriguing entries. Against No 150, now 32 Long Street, there is a margin note: *'House burnt down 1810. House insured in Sun with Blandford Agent'*. Against the adjoining house No 151, now 34 Long Street, a further margin note: *'Insured for £100. House burnt down 1810'*.



The Taunton Courier for October 1810 recorded *'a fire broke out at Cerne Abbas which destroyed a blacksmith's shop and two other houses adjoining'*.

Taunton Courier 11 Oct 1810 p7

On Friday the 5th instant a fire broke out at Cerne Abbas, in the county of Dorset, which destroyed a blacksmith's shop, and two other houses adjoining.

The fire as it affected No 32, which actually comprised two earlier cottages, led to payments by Sun Insurance to John Bennett, Gent, and Joseph Bennett, ironmonger, for £200 and £13.15s respectively. John obviously must have owned the house, although Joseph is recorded in the Survey as the 'Lifehold'. No 34 belonged to 'Widow Ford', but no record of any insurance payment to her has been found. Nos 32 and 34 were restored to some extent, but the space which is now the garden to No 32 at the bottom of the Snicket is testimony to the fire.

Quite where the blacksmith's shop was situated is not known but, if it was the source of the fire, sparks from it probably ignited the thatch roofs of Nos 32 and 34 Long Street. The fact that Joseph was described as an ironmonger suggests that he may have had a blacksmith's shop to the rear of No 32 and was the source of the fire.



There was also a payment for £50.6s.3d by Sun Insurance from the fire to William Clark who lived at what is now No 30 Long Street and the site of the present public toilets. William was described in the Survey as a watchmaker and draper, but as a 'twine spinner' in his insurance policy. By 1810 he had diversified into spinning and weaving operations from workshops in Back Lane on land to the rear of No 30 Long Street. The workshops were in the now somewhat dilapidated garages in Back Lane and employed at one time up to 15 people. The cottages opposite in Back Lane were probably built about 1820 to house them. All the workshops were thatched and may also have been affected by the fire; hence the payment.



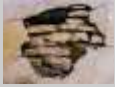
The major fire of the 19th century occurred in Long Street. A report in the Dorset County Chronicle for 20 November 1828 reports that the fire started somewhere immediately behind Pitt House and what is now the village stores, probably in out-buildings facing onto Mill Lane.

The report continues: *'A few minutes after the first alarm was given, the two engines belonging to the parish of Cerne were on the spot, and worked with greatest alacrity; and, a messenger having been despatched to Sydling, the engine of that parish soon arrived, with a number of individuals ready to tender their assistance. But, notwithstanding the great eagerness to assist evinced by everyone, the continued exertions used, and the plentiful supply of water obtained, the flames for a long while resisted every attempt, the buildings being principally roofed with thatch. A very extensive range of minor buildings and outhouses, belonging to different individuals, then caught fire; and at this period, the conflagration was awful in the extreme, as, from the highly combustible nature of most of the buildings, the flames towered to an almost incredible height, and exhibited a mass of burning buildings covering and enclosing upwards of an acre of land.'*

Dorset County Chronicle 20 Nov 1828 p4

Destructive Fire at Cerne.—The little town of Cerne never before exhibited such a scene of consternation and alarm as was witnessed on Tuesday last. About four o'clock on that morning the inhabitants were aroused from their slumbers by an alarm of fire. It was soon ascertained that some outbuildings on the back parts of the premises belonging to Mr. Palmer, surgeon, as well as on the adjoining premises of Mr. Sickland, were on fire. The flames almost immediately obtained a force which defied the efforts made to quell them, and

The whole of the buildings we have mentioned were totally destroyed; nothing being left but the bare walls containing a mass of ruins and ashes. The New Inn and the other houses which were opposite the fire, were in the greatest danger; but for upwards of four hours momentary apprehensions were entertained that some of the immense flakes flying about would alight on the thatched buildings in the inn yard, but by the roofs being kept constantly wetted, the danger was averted. The fire coming, at last, in contact with a house covered by a tiled roof, its fury abated, and, by the unwearied exertions of the inhabitants of the town and those who came to their assistance, it was gradually subdued. The report completes by telling us that ‘the principal part of the property is insured in the West of England and Sun Fire Offices. The value of the property destroyed, it is imagined, cannot amount to much less than £3000’, (about £330K today adjusted for inflation).



As if Cerne Abbas had not suffered enough in 1828, the Dorset County Chronicle and Somerset Gazette for 11th December reported a hurricane which struck the village on 6th December. It passed though the village from the south west at about 11.30am, tearing up trees and hedges, destroying ricks, and damaging many buildings and roofs. It reached the Red Lion, now the Giant Inn, *‘carrying away the thatch on the roofs of the outhouse, and in one part removing the whole of the roof; a cart which was standing in the yard was overturned and rolled to a considerable distance’*. William Clark’s *‘dowlas factory was then visited by this terrible whirlwind, which possessed sufficient power to force down the roof and one of the side walls; but the fall of the roof being impeded by an apple tree, the work people, of whom about a dozen were at the time engaged in the building, were providentially saved’*. Happily, nobody was killed.



The houses in Long Street were rebuilt in the years following, an Indenture dated 1835 stating that James Crane, ‘Yeoman’, had spent about £800 to rebuild Pitt House. The Indenture also says that what is now the village store was ‘erecting’ and that the house the other side was ‘erected’. It is of note that thatch is no longer a feature of the houses on the north side of Long Street.



The 19th century ended with the (thatched) Red Lion, now The Giant, being destroyed by fire. This was in 1897 and it was rebuilt the following year to the building we know today.



The Local Fire Brigade

It is timely to consider what arrangements there were for fighting fires, always a feared event in a village with open fires within homes and plenty of combustible material without. As we have seen from reports of the fire in Long Street 1828, there were rudimentary fire engines available, maintained by the parish, but their capabilities would have been limited. These could be supplemented by requesting assistance from other parishes, but being horse-drawn one can readily calculate that their attendance in the event of a fire would be somewhat belated. Although the major cities had developed their coordinated fire brigades in the 19th century, it was well into the 20th century before local authorities were required to provide *the services for their borough or district of ‘a fire brigade with such fire engines, appliances and equipment as may be necessary to meet efficiently all normal requirements’*.



Cerne Auxiliary Fire Service : Dick Curtis, Joe Marsh, Reg Whitmore, George Miller, Dusty Durrant, George Old

At about the same time, and just in time for the outbreak of the Second World War, the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), consisting largely of unpaid volunteers, was formed in parallel to the Air Raid Precautions organisation. Cerne Abbas formed its own AFS, although there is no record, happily, of their being called out in anger. The CHS archives have a photograph of the worthy volunteers who maintained a local fire watch throughout the 1940s.

Cerne Abbas and Fires in the 20thC



The 20th century opened with the destruction by fire of the Prince of Wales pub in Duck Street in 1911, one positive outcome being that the site is now the playground for the Cerne Abbas First School. Another fire in 1932 destroyed shops immediately behind the 'bus shelter which isn't'. The shops were not rebuilt, their sites instead being incorporated into the garden of 1 Abbey Street. These fires were fought from parish resources and the impact of the fires almost certainly far worse than might have been had the resources later in the century been available.



Unusual view of buildings on corner of Abbey St before the fire that consumed them, from inside the Royal Oak



In the ownership of the Coleman family, The Tanyard caught fire in the late 1950s and the headmaster of Cerne School, Mr Hugh Reynolds, marched all the pupils down to watch from the safety of Goose Green, as the Brigade tackled the blaze.



In Duck Street in the mid-1960s, Providence House caught fire, destroying its roof. The house was subsequently converted into two houses, with No 8 retaining the original main entrance and a new side entrance being built for No 10. The latter was bought by Brigadier and Mrs Crawford. Mrs Crawford produced a lovely tapestry of the fronts of the houses in each of the village streets, a copy of which can be seen in the village hall. The original is in the Dorset County Museum.



Nos 7 & 9 Duck Street



Duck Street was visited again by fire on 3rd May 1984. The roofs of No 7 and No 9 had just been re-thatched when the thatch on No 7 caught fire, which then quickly spread to No 9. At one point seven fire appliances from various stations around Dorset attended the fire. Much of the furniture from the two properties was rescued by villagers before the fire fully took hold. Part of No 9 had opened that morning as a health food shop and amongst the debris in the street was a small table with an unopened sherry bottle and glasses which were going to celebrate the new venture.

The owner of No 9 had a tussle with the planners who wanted it to be re-thatched but, having threatened to walk away and leave the house a ruin, the planners relented and allowed tiles for the roof. The re-building of No 7 took at least a further year.



The Maltings, No 32 Long Street, was visited by fire again in 1985 and the upper half had to be rebuilt.



No 32 Long Street



Mill Lane 2007

Cerne Abbas and Fires in the 21st Century



Without tempting fate, the village has been almost completely free of fires so far this century, the last being in Mill Lane in 2007. However, although not the intention of this article, those with thatch roofs will have noted their relative vulnerability to disasters, natural and otherwise. In the midst of the pandemic currently afflicting the nation, one can only repeat the mantra, Stay Alert, etc!





Katherine Barker



How Old is the Giant?

Twenty four years after being 'put on trial' in 1996 when no final decision was reached, the use of the latest scientific techniques relating to dating soil samples may finally solve the problem as to its age; a year which also marks the 1920-2020 anniversary of its management by the National Trust.



The August edition of *Current Archaeology* attracted my attention with reference to the two Cerne Giant papers, the first by Mike Allen and Martin Papworth and relating to the recent small-scale excavations to retrieve dating soil samples from this well-known hill figure and the second by Brian Edwards exploring its historical context. And have warmly thanked them for the complimentary remarks presented in their respective papers; that 'in 1996 Bournemouth University took the innovative step of putting the chalk hill figure on trial in the village hall in Cerne Abbas' where 'a major academic debate was held between eminent archaeologists.'

It was my setting up a Continuing Education programme for what was then a new University which presented the opportunity to put the Giant 'on trial.' My idea was first prompted by my reading Dr Joe Bettey's paper published in the journal *Antiquity* in 1981, that there is no early evidence for this hill figure, followed by Vivian Vale's discovery of the first written reference to this in the 1694 Churchwardens Accounts which reads 'For repairing of ye Giant 3s.' Without regular cleaning a hill figure will quickly 'grow over.' At this time the Giant will have been defined by deep gullies cut down onto the chalk; it was in 1995 Lord Edward Digby described to me as how, as a boy, he used to run up and down these with his friends. In order to assist with Giant 'maintenance' the NT packed the gullies with Shillingstone chalk.



In short, if something looks old does it have to be old? Having booked the (old) village hall I invited three respected academics to present cases for the ancient/prehistoric, the medieval/post medieval, and a 'other things, other people' - that the Giant is important irrespective of its age - led respectively by Prof Timothy

Darvill, Prof Ronald Hutton and Dr Barbara Bender and supported by twenty-one archaeologist and historian 'witnesses' - including Martin Papworth. 'Assessors' were Dr David Morgan of the Society of Antiquaries and Ivan Smith of the National Trust. And the 'proceedings' chaired by Colin Patrick, a Bournemouth barrister, who kindly gave his services 'free of charge.'



Attracting a capacity audience, this was to be a very successful, thought-provoking day. And the papers arising from this were published by Oxbow/Oxford as *The Cerne Giant: An antiquity on trial* (now out-of-print). I have here a full photographic record of the day + the Giantess project (see below) and mounted a display in the village hall in complement of the talk I gave to the Historical Society in November 2016. And also have here the video/CD of the 'Trial' filmed by BBC West.



I spoke in support of the post-medieval and my paper is published in the *Trial*. The day was much enhanced by the recent discoveries made by David Miles at Uffington – that a hill figure could indeed be ancient – and his paper on the Uffington White Horse is also included in the *Trial*.

So how old is the Giant? On arrival, people were invited to ‘cast their vote’ as to its age and then again at the end of the day. At the beginning of the day, the Giant was overwhelmingly prehistoric and at the end it was still prehistoric but by a much reduced majority. In short, the Jury remained ‘out.’

Before the ‘Trial’ the NT Information Panel at the Giant Viewpoint described this hill figure as ‘prehistoric’ but after 1996 the wording was rather more circumspect. And almost a quarter of a century later the Giant has once again attracted NT attention, this time in the use of the latest scientific techniques relating to dating soil samples. Results have been delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic but understand these are likely to be available in the autumn, announced by the NT in a press release or news conference. The Viewpoint Information Panel may about to be ‘edited’ once again.



Photo Francesca Radcliffe

The ‘Trial’ prompted my organising an exercise in Experimental Archaeology in 1997, a ‘taping out’ with a group of students of a Giantess in lengths of plastic sheeting. And which was also filmed. See the note in the *Trial* and my paper ‘Brief Encounter: the Cerne Abbas Giantess Project, Summer 1997’ *Dorset Proceedings*, 119, 1997, 179-183.



The Cerne Giant and the accompanying Giantess was taped out between 7-11 July 1997. Set out using a grid - the hillside here is so steep those at the top of the figure cannot see those at its feet - drew attention to the measurements of the Giant as carefully recorded in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1764; he is 180 feet tall. Measuring this today in metres removes an historical element presented by this hill figure. The Giantess project demonstrated that there is nothing inherently difficult or time-consuming in plotting out a hill figure but which yielded a number of insights not easily gained in any other way.





September



1843. In September 1843, the *Sherborne Mercury* reported on an event which it declared was 'of greater importance to the future well-being of this town [Cerne Abbas] and its neighbourhood than has occurred here for many years'. The cause of such excitement was the opening, on Thursday 14th, of the newly built schoolroom located on the edge of the village on Duck Street. The building had been constructed

thanks to the 'munificence' of Lord Rivers and the local Anglican vicar, the Rev. J. H. Waugh. The day was devoted to various forms of celebration. It opened with the prospective schoolchildren being addressed 'at some length' by Waugh on the duties that they owed their parents. A procession followed, in which a series of banners, each of which featured an uplifting slogan reflecting the concerns of the Church of England, were carried. These included 'God Save the Queen', 'Union' and 'Obedience to Power'.

The procession wound its way to the Vicarage where it was joined by the children from the workhouse, whose 'cleanly appearance and orderly behaviour' earned them much praise. Both groups of youngsters were then treated to tea and plumcake, before hearing a further speech from the vicar and being 'dismissed' to their homes.

However, for the adults present, the celebrations continued. In the evening the village brass band entertained all who were present with a performance on the lawn, and wine, with further slabs of plumcake, were served to all. Simultaneously, Waugh generously paid for a dinner at the New Inn for about thirty of the workers – employees of the builders Byles and Northover - who had helped construct the schoolroom. The *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* reported that the men 'enjoyed their treat heartily', joyously adding that 'all was conducted in good order'.

1968. The civility and obedience of the Victorian village schoolchildren offers a stark contrast to an event which was reported in Cerne during the Swinging Sixties. In September 1968, the village hit the headlines after the Giant was despoiled by vandals working under cover of night. The *Daily Mirror*, beneath a banner headline which exclaimed that 'Suddenly...the Giant on the Hill Changes Sex', reported how Cerne residents awoke on Thursday 5th September to find the Giant had been emasculated. In the words of the newspaper's reporter, the vandals:

Blotted out the obvious male characteristic with green emulsion paint and added female features with white paint. They left one clue: the words 'Barnard was Here' painted across the figure.



Who 'Barnard' was, and why he or she felt moved to execute what must have been a fairly laborious task remains a mystery. But, fifty-two years later, might there be a guilt-ridden septuagenarian who, after reading this, may feel moved to make a belated confession?



1731. Natural disasters, although thankfully extremely rare, are not entirely unknown in Cerne Abbas. At a quarter to one on the morning of 30 October 1731, the village suffered one of the most destructive events in its long history. At midnight, the air had been completely still. But, within an hour, a tornado was to rip through the heart of the village, causing significant damage. Hutchins recalled the event in the second volume of

his 1776 *History and Antiquities of Dorset*:

“It began at the South West side of the town, went in a direct line to the North East, crossing the middle of the town, and for the breadth of about 200 yards, uncovered tiled and thatched houses, rooted trees out of the ground, broke others, some a foot square, carrying off the tops a considerable way. The sign of the New Inn, 5 feet by 4, 6 feet in the pole, was broken off, and carried cross the street, 40 feet broad, over the opposite house. It threw down the pinnacles and battlements on one side of the church tower, whose fall damaged the leads and timber of the North aisle.”

Hutchins notes that all the houses of the village were shaken by the high winds, but fortunately no lives were lost, and injuries were few. (*With thanks to Chris Copson for drawing our attention to this event*).

1858. One of the many delights commented upon by visitors to Cerne Abbas is the clarity of its night skies. This is attributable mainly to the near total absence of street lighting in the village. However, this has not always been the case. Early in October 1858, the Weymouth-based *Southern Times* informed its readers that Cerne Abbas was:

At last destined to be lit up at night with oil lamps, as we gather from the results of a large and influential meeting which was held at the New Inn, last week, W. F. Coles, Esq., taking the chair. A Committee of Management has been formed, and subscriptions raised, so we may shortly expect to have this long talked of object carried into effect.

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT.—This little town is at last destined to be lit up at night with oil lamps, as we gather from the results of a large and influential meeting which was held at the New Inn, last week, W. F. Coles, Esq., taking the chair. A Committee of Management has been formed, and subscriptions raised, so we may shortly expect to have this long talked of object carried into effect.

These hopes were realised and, not long after, a number of brackets to hold the lamps were installed at suitable locations around the village and a lamplighter appointed to fire and extinguish the streetlights. The lamplighter's equipment was to be stored in a shed, generously donated by one of the village clergy, located behind his chapel. Cerne was, for the first time, relieved of its night-time gloom.

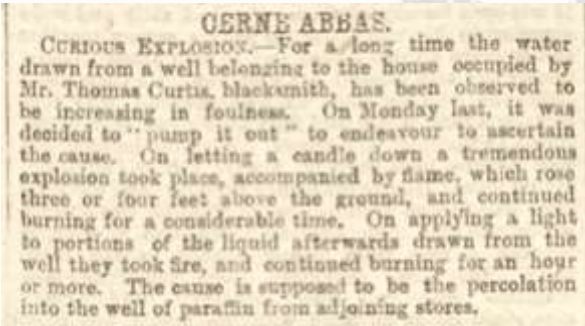
But Cerne's nocturnal illumination was not to last. In 1862 a fire broke out in the storage shed, igniting the lamp oil that was kept there. Fortunately, the chapel was spared from the flames, but the clergyman, conscious of the how perilous the arrangement was, withdrew his offer of the use of his shed. Unsurprisingly, other local shed owners were reluctant to provide alternative accommodation and, with nowhere safe to store the lamp lighting equipment, Cerne's experiment with street lighting was terminated after just four years. Yet, despite its short lifespan, fragments of the lighting scheme are still to be found in the village. One of the wall-mounted brackets that were strategically placed to hold the oil lamps over 150 years ago can be seen, *in situ*, outside 1 Abbey Street.

November



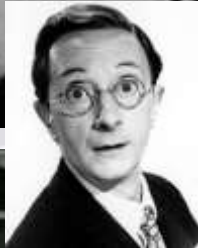
1880. Historically, fire has presented a constant risk in Cerne Abbas, not least because of the combustibility of the village's thatched roofs. But fire from a different source posed a threat to a Cerne building in 1880. On Monday 8th November that year, one of the village blacksmiths – the famous Thomas 'Tiger' Curtis – was disturbed by an offensive stench emanating from the well to the rear of his smithy in Mill Lane. In an

effort to get to the bottom of the origin of the smell, and of the well itself, Curtis resolved to pump the water out, thereby permitting a closer visual inspection. After it had been drained, he lowered a lit candle down into the well to gain a clearer view. Unfortunately, the naked flame ignited toxic fumes which lay at the bottom of the well, with the result that a column of flame shot to a height of four feet above the mouth of the shaft, and which continued to burn for over an hour. Once the fire had exhausted itself it was discovered that, for some time previously, paraffin from a neighbouring



storeroom had leached into the well, turning the water foul and creating a potentially lethal hazard beneath the blacksmith's workshop. Tom Curtis, his family, and his employees had had a lucky escape.

1988. And finally, this November marks the 32nd anniversary of the death, at the age of 73, of the actor Charles Hawtrey. Today, Hawtrey is best remembered for his regular appearances in the *Carry On...* films which were popular in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But one of his lesser known roles was that of George Crumb in the 1952 British comedy film *Brandy for the Parson*. That film was partly shot on location in Cerne Abbas, which explains Hawtrey's rather tenuous connection to our village and his inclusion in this article. For those that haven't seen it, here are two stills from the film, the first featuring Hawtrey approaching, and the second showing him about to enter, one of the former shops sited on Long Street.





Andrew Popkin

We have all lost or thrown away things. Some items we will never see again... This column is all about things which others have lost or thrown out but that you have found. There must be a wealth of everyday trivia lying buried in gardens, waiting to be photographed and placed on this page! Here are some of the personal things we have found at Thimble Cottage, Long St., Cerne



What are these?

From a suitcase?
1930s?

Send me photos of your
finds



Not a horseshoe...
But what?



Sash
window
pulley



We wonder
who last wore
this Edwardian
dress bow?

Shoe scraper?



Early 1950s milk
bottle top -
Stenhouse



Blacksmith
made cabin
hook





The Giant of Cerne Abbas and the 'Choice of Hercules' (Did the Earl of Shaftesbury design the Giant?)

Will the current scientific investigations narrow the age range of the Giant, confirming an early modern date for this fantastic hill figure? This would match the seventeenth century origin suggested by documentary evidence. No hill figure was apparent from a comprehensive survey of Cerne Abbas in 1617, but something published within living memory of the Giant's earliest recorded repair in 1694, leaves us with a tantalizing series of coincidences to explain.

Appearing in print shortly before the death of the author, *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules, According to Prodicus*, was written by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713). It is an instruction to an artist, which Shaftesbury apparently formulated from studying the painting Annibale Carracci created for the ceiling of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome in 1596. The subject was taken from the story known as 'Hercules at the Crossroads', or the 'Choice of Hercules'.



Annibale Carracci, 1596, 'Hercules at the Crossroads'

Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. Wikipedia

The story recalls that at the point of reaching manhood, the youthful Hercules was faced with a major decision that arose when encountering the Goddesses Pleasure and Virtue at a fork in the road, with each attempting to persuade him to adopt their way of life. Advocating the route to an easy life, Pleasure urged Hercules to take the readily accessible path to his left, leading to the much-travelled vale.

In contrast, Virtue extolled the benefits of something not readily obtainable – the fork to his right presented Hercules with a steep, uneven, uphill climb leading to a virtuous life.

After Pleasure's seductive attempts to lure him towards an easy, carefree life were overtaken by Virtue's persuasive insistence, that nothing worthwhile is achieved without hard work underpinned by conscientious piety, Hercules becomes a hero by choosing the uphill climb to his right.

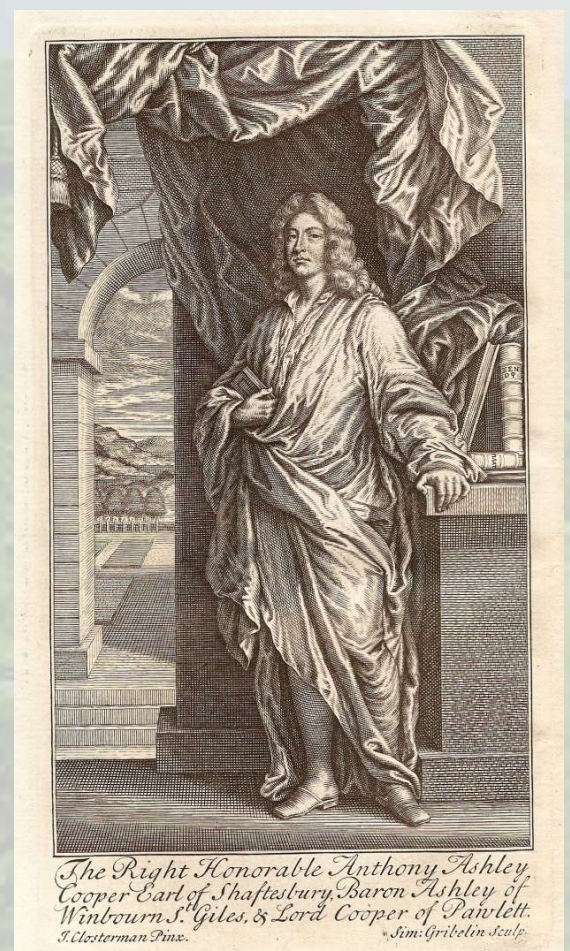
There are three characters in this story and only one chalk figure on the hillside, but our attempts to understand the Giant are assisted by Shaftesbury's guidance which reads like stage directions accompanying a play: the Giant ingeniously represents the throes of the exchanges between the three characters, depicting the pain of the decision Hercules was faced with as well as the outcome.

In Shaftesbury's words:

'...it shou'd appear by the very Turn, or Position of the Body alone, that this young Hero had not wholly quitted the balancing or pondering part. ... there ought to be some hopes yet remaining for this latter Goddess Pleasure, and some regret apparent in Hercules.'

The lasting effect of Pleasure on the chalk figure is obvious from the Giant's aroused state, his raised eyebrows registering his surprise, as he heeds Virtue's call to duty by actively setting off uphill to his right. With his trailing arm and empty left hand acknowledging the easy life of the vale he is leaving behind, the Giant raises his club in his right hand to acknowledge Virtue's victory. The hill figure creatively represents the very moment Hercules becomes a hero, which it was Shaftesbury's precise aim to depict:

...'the grand Event, or consequent Resolution of Hercules, and the Choice he actually made of a Life full of Toil and Hardship'...



Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury.
Simon Gribelin, after John Closterman. Wikimedia

As a moral tradition, the Choice of Hercules rationalizes the meaning and intention of the hill figure, and readily explains the Giant's heightened excitement. Several surviving religious pamphlets also feature explicit images of male arousal as a moral lesson in the seventeenth century, so this could explain why the Church community maintained a similar outline in chalk. However, whilst the Choice of Hercules gained popularity in the eighteenth century, the meaning of the Giant was somehow forgotten.



The chalk figure's athleticism and club indicated the Giant represented Hercules, but there was no lion skin, and no shaggy hair or beard. The meeting with the Goddesses had preceded the encounter with the Nemean lion, so there wasn't yet a lion skin, and the smallish head without shaggy hair and beard was the overlooked clue to Hercules' youthful state.

Did Shaftesbury design the Giant?

The coincidences extend to Shaftesbury's having known Thomas Freke (c.1638-1701), the landowner on whose land the Giant was to be found. The lord of the manor was a close friend and political ally of Shaftesbury's grandfather and guardian, the first earl, who died in 1683, when the 3rd earl was just 12. It is further worth noting that the landowner acquired the nickname 'the great Freke in Dorsetshire'. Clearly a reference to the Giant, and as a nickname likely to have arisen when news of the hill figure first spread; this in turn suggests that this 'great freak' of a chalk Giant was created during Freke's ownership.



It is though, puzzling that the churchwardens were accounting for a repair to the Giant in 1694, only two years after Shaftesbury returned to England aged 21. Even if work on cutting the hill figure had begun straight away, this would have left little time for subsequent deterioration. Perhaps the allocated sum of 3 shillings suggests the Church community's repair was for no more than clearing the chalk lines ahead of an important annual festival. The date of the payment for the repair was 4 & 5 November, the twinned anniversary of William III's birthday and his landing on the annual celebration of deliverance from Gunpowder Treason.

The above represents just a fraction of the new information about the Giant. There are yet more coincidences to get to grapple with, contexts to explore and mysteries to ponder. For now, any dating suggested by the results of the scientific investigations must contend with the coincidence of Carracci's late sixteenth century design, being refined in chalk on this Dorset hillside.

Brian Edwards is a Visiting Research Fellow with The Regional History Centre, UWE Bristol.

Shaftesbury's text can be accessed here:

<https://englishphilosophy.org/texts/shaftesbury/c/jh>





Letters

Letters to the Editor

Patricia Vale writes:

In the article on Pumps and Well Heads in the July issue of the CHS Magazine, concerning the well head from the Pitchmarket with initials 'TMW' and dated 1697, it was stated that the circumstances in which it ended up in the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester were not known. I can elucidate. A Harry Tite was a tenant of the Pitchmarket in 1919 and bought the medieval range of houses in Abbey Street at the auction. He subsequently moved into Dorchester and took the well head with him. At some point it was given to the Dorset County Museum, who wrongly attributed to a Wellington of Dorchester. Its existence came to light in my reading a history of Cerne Abbas. Having been given permission to look for it, I found it in the museum loft and was able to reveal that it had belonged to Thomas and Martha Washington. Until the closure of the museum for refurbishment in 2018, the well head was on public display with a notice about its true origins. Hopefully, it will still be available for all to see when the museum re-opens in 2021.

Long Street, Cerne Abbas

Diana Kimber writes:

I am very much enjoying the excellent CHS Magazines. One of the upsides to this Plague. I am particularly enjoying this month (August) the reminiscences of Bryan Palmer, many of whose memories accord with my own, (although my childhood was spent in the Midlands) Barton Lodge, Cerne Abbas. P.S. Born in Burton upon Trent, I really must challenge Bishop Pococke's assertion re. Cerne Abbas and its beer!!!

Theresa Murphy writes:

I was fascinated to read piece about the TMP well in Long Street. I have a Thomas Peaty of Cerne as an ancestor of mine on my great-grandmother's side. The Peaty family moved from Hazelbury Bryan to Cerne. What is a stunning coincidence to learn is that they lived at 2 Acreman Street—where we lived for 7 years from 2012, and a property that I still own.

Best wishes, The Old Forge, Mill Lane



Letters

Reader's corrections

Letters to the Editor

- We referred to a letter in the last issue and said that Olive Dunn was related to the Fox family. This is incorrect. She was related to the Canterburys who were the landlords at the Union public house.
- In the last issue we incorrectly stated that mains water arrived in Cerne during the sixties. In fact the mains were laid during the mid 1930s.
- We said in the July Newsletter that George Squibb lived in Cerne Abbas in the Pitchmarket for many years. He rented it from 1938 to 1945, but it was while he was living at No 1 Abbey Street that he generously gave the Squibb Garden to St Mary's in 1991.
- **The Editor:** Thanks to all who provided these clarifications.



If you have a question, we will try to provide an answer. In fact, we will be pleased to hear from you on any subject that will increase a mutual understanding of our shared history.

The Letters Page is YOUR page so let the Letter Page editor hear from you.

gcmortimer@btinternet.com

Or put a note through my door at 3 Abbey Court, if you prefer.

We reserve the right to publish if no objection is expressed in your email or letter.

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