



Corsham Spotlight

Magazine of the Corsham Civic Society
<http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk>

Spring 2026
April 2026, Vol 23, Issue 1

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*Contributions to
Spotlight are very
welcome.*

*Please submit articles to
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EDITORIAL - What is Corsham Civic Society?

The Society comprises a group of people who came together originally to show their concern about the development of Corsham, particularly the proposals to demolish certain historically interesting buildings in the town in the name of 'progress'. Our objections were enough to save the frontage of the original Workhouse, which was situated beside the Royal Oak, and behind what is now an antique shop and we were able to raise our voices against the demolition of Osborne House which sits at No 1. Station Road. The Society worked with the Town Council to achieve the restoration of the Mayo Memorial which stands proudly at the end of the High Street at the junction with Priory Street. We continue to promote all the reasons that Corsham should have a railway station. This is a story which goes on and on but despite the sometimes-pessimistic view expressed locally, we must continue to hope there is 'light at the end of the tunnel'. In the 'now' we must continue to watch and make our views known regarding the burgeoning development of the town. Do we have the support facilities – doctors, schools etc, to serve our growing community? We have a very attractive High Street; how can we encourage entrepreneurs to grow their businesses here in Corsham? Come and join us, make your views known. We may not have a legal representation in the town, but after 63 years, we are able to voice an opinion which will be taken into account. See the front inside page for contact details, and the back page for details of our meetings for the year.

Pat Whalley

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From the Vice Chair

Well, I know it is a bit late but may I, on behalf of your committee, wish you a Happy New Year – though where we are all going is very difficult to judge!

Our new meeting venue to St Aldhelm's has been very successful and has resulted in three new members and we have welcomed back several members who had not attended for some time back in the fold. We have held three events so far this year.

At the end of January, we had a most interesting talk about St. Athelstan's Way. This was followed at the end of February by our annual lunch. This time we went outside the civic parish boundary, but it was very successful, with no complaints and much praise for the menu, the venue and, of course, the company! At the end of March, we had an explanation and review of the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2026 by staff from the Town Council. There is more about each of these elsewhere.

The Annual General Meeting will take place on 15th May in the Town Hall. Please do make a note and then attend as this is your society and we want your views. BUT we do need new blood on the committee. The ages of the eight current committee members are four over 80, one fast approaching 80, another not too far off 80 and two others in their 70s. So please sound out fellow members and twist their arms into agreeing for their name to be put forward on the nomination forms included with the issue. NOW!

We are looking forward to talks on People and Places of Chippenham at the end of April, the restoration of the Assize Building in Devizes at the end of June and some of the Characters of Bath at the end of July – so three subjects of local historical interest to whet your appetites.

And then we will gather in the garden of the Almshouses for our annual garden party at the end of August – please note a change of date – it will now be on Saturday 29th August. We do hope you can join us at one of these forthcoming events.

I have included a set of short articles about three planning issues. I hope you do not find them too much like teaching grandmothers to suck eggs, but they clearly illustrate the way in which big business continues to railroad through planning applications with very little notice being taken of the views of local residents. Or the fine detail in the actual planning permission.

Edward Barrett

Membership Survey

Your responses to our survey have been disappointing. So far about a quarter of you have responded – all very promptly - thank you. We would be grateful for a reply from the other three quarters as, to a degree, the future of the Society depends on your answers. If you cannot readily put the survey to hand, please contact me and I will email a copy to you. The minimum we need is a mobile number and how you wish to receive your Spotlight.

Edward Barrett

The Corsham Tapestry

The Corsham Tapestry continues but a trifle slowly. As at the end of March, our stitchers have completed 27 of our planned images so far and very good they are. Another 28 are being worked on at the moment – and many more await attention! The number of stitchers have fluctuated but was boosted by several new ones who swapped their knitting needles on the Peacock WI poppy cascade for sewing needles on our project, which boosted our numbers to the grand total of 21. New stitchers are most welcome.

Edward Barrett

Reviews

Our first meeting of the year in January, brought Carole Britten to our door, to tell us about an exceptional lady who lived her life in a way which many might consider eccentric. Hilary Peters, daughter of a literary agent, was born in London in 1939. She studied theology at St Anne's College, Oxford. After which she decided to ignore the 'trappings' of the world around her, to concentrate on the basics of life. She noted the decimation of the flora and fauna in her native city, and architecture old and new which was changing the landscape. In response she set up a nursery garden in the city, and found a spot at Union Wharf at Greenwich, which is still a focus for visitors to the London Open Gardens Weekend.

Between 1983 and 2014 she travelled the canals and waterways in a narrowboat, during which time she recorded constantly her views and thoughts about each destination. Always the theme was related to ecology and architecture, often concerning religious buildings. Hilary then continued her journey between Cornwall and Scotland in an old ambulance, often accompanied by her favourite animals, and always delighting in the natural world around her. In her later years she took up residence at Worcester Lodge on the Badminton estate, where she enjoyed and shared with visitors, the beautiful landscape around her, until her death in 2022. Whilst Hilary considered herself to be 'hermit', she also enjoyed scones and jam, and sharing her philosophy of life with others. It was following her death that her 'writings' were considered too important to be filed away. These have since become an aide to the progress of the 'Athelstan Pilgrims Way', which follows a route across 6 Benefices of the North Wiltshire Deanery.

Carole, our speaker has brought together an intriguing picture of Hilary and her meanderings, in her book 'Past, Present and Presence' a companion guide to the 'Athelstan Pilgrims Way'. A potential journey of 100 miles, it can be made in short or longer bursts, by bicycle or on foot, but always with the beauty of nature all around.



In February, our Annual Lunch was held at Il Vello d'Oro, Shaw. An Italian Restaurant, with some British fare also available. This friendly venue welcomed some 32 Society members and treated us to an excellent meal which was enjoyed by all.



The March meeting gave members the opportunity to learn about and question, Corsham Town Council officers about the **2026 Neighbourhood Plan**. A very important part of the town's development and plans for the future, and the frequently perceived need for more housing for the County, and the requirement to retain the beautiful spaces which surround our local towns and villages. This encouraged a lively discussion and question time.

Pat Whalley

Obituary

We were extremely saddened to hear of the death of **Nancy Burrowes**. Nancy was the wife of Dr Burrowes, a stalwart of the medical practise at the Porch Surgery in Corsham for many years. Husband and wife were Life members of the Society and always interested in the history and development of the town. The family were a constant support of activities in the area; their son wrote a thesis on the story of the Workhouse in Corsham, as part of his university studies. He very kindly donated it to the Society, and it is housed with our records on Corsham held at the Wiltshire Records Office in Chippenham. Our thoughts are with the family at this difficult time

Pat Whalley

The People of Corsham - Sanjeevan Garcha

As Jeevan leaves us to move to London, the Corsham Civic Society feels it's the right time to put the Spotlight on our reliable, cheerful and hard-working owner of Barnett Brothers on Corsham's High Street. For many of us, a visit to her shop is regular, collecting the paper, seeing balloons blown for a birthday party, having a bet on the Lottery, or buying a card from the extraordinarily divergent collection in the back room. When Jeevan and her husband Jasvir took over in 2001, the greeting cards would not have included such a range of relationships and occasions as it does today! And it's not just the cards – what can't you buy at Barnetts?

Jeevan was brought up on the family farm in a village in the Punjab, India. After the village school, she went to college, in a city 2 hours away, to pass higher exams and study art. This meant boarding school for 5 years. After graduation, a decision about any career for Jeevan was put on hold as she entered an arranged marriage to Jasvir Garcha and, yes, she had met him before the marriage, and yes, it was such a relief to find this extremely handsome young man chosen for her. She lights up at the very mention! Jasvir was born and brought up in the UK. In 1994 Jeevan moved to England to join him in Islington where Jasvir worked in graphic design. After 7 years in which time, a daughter and a son were born, we, old enough, will never forget 'Black Wednesday', in September 1992, during the devastating financial crisis in the UK. Like so many, Jas lost his job, but because his work had taken him to Bath and surrounding area, he suggested they look there for a business opportunity. Very fortunately for us, they found Barnett Brothers in Corsham. When they arrived, they turned the unused space into the card room, enabling them to grow their business into the present multi-choice emporium! Jeevan and family were happy in Corsham from the start, describing the people as welcoming and friendly.

One particular friend was and still is, Michael Rumsey, Chair of Corsham Civic Society for 16 years before recent retirement. His previous retirement from being a Head Teacher in primary education, meant he could tutor people which, of course, includes those for whom English is not their first language. Michael and his friend Mollie were present at Jeevan's Ceremony of British Citizenship. As well as Jeevan's family benefitting from Michael's professional help, they also enjoyed cooking for each other and sharing take-aways. Michael was also generous by driving members of the family if needed. Jujhar Garcha, the middle child, until recently was the Editor of our Spotlight magazine which continues our bond with the family. On a sad note, Jasvir gave in to a long-term illness and moved to live near his parents and many relations in Derby. Jeevan decided to retire and London is where she now lives. She has found a house in Enfield which is suitable for her sons to live with her. When she's had a rest, she will look for work connected to the world of Art. So good luck to you Jeevan! We shall really miss you.

Jane Cox



Yash, Jujhar, Jeevan, Yasmin

Corsham High Street Project (CHSP)

In 2017, the Corsham Civic Society proposed to embark on a scheme to attempt to correctly identify the date(s) of the houses in Corsham High Street. We know that they are primarily of 18th century origin, but could some of them be earlier?

Such a scheme had been undertaken elsewhere, which had resulted in much information, photography and the publication of a book which was very well received from the people in that locality.

A launch meeting was held in April 2018 at which the plan was explained, volunteers came forward, and a plan of actions was raised, which included a funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and liaison with Wiltshire Buildings Record at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, who would advise on training facilities.

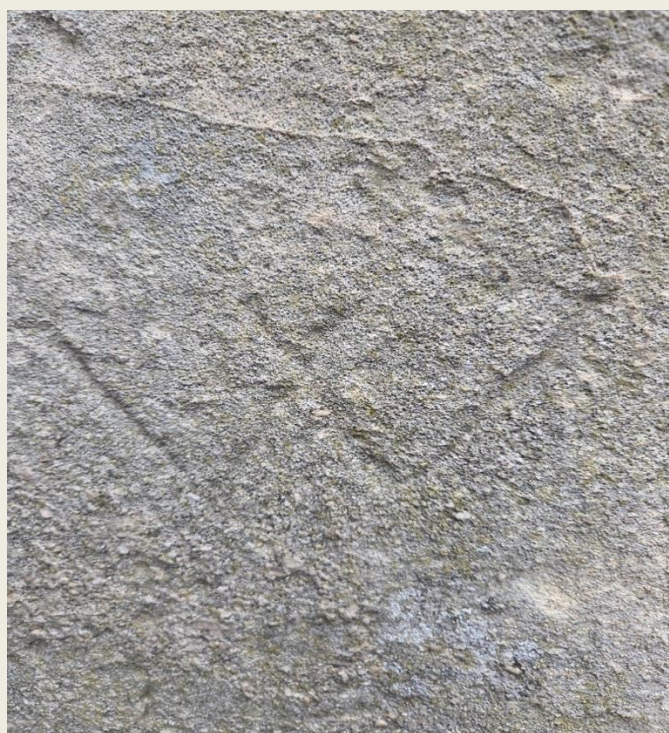
Hardly had our plans been put into action, we were met with COVID-19 and, as you all know, everything was brought to a halt.

The Society felt that this would be a most interesting and productive project and would now like to revive it. However, we cannot make such an undertaking without help. If you have any interest in historical buildings and would be willing to help please email Edward Barrett at edwardbarrett42@gmail.com to offer your help and expertise. It would be a shame not to be able to add to the Corsham story and supply more information to the already rich historical base that is our small but perfectly formed town.

The following article demonstrates some of the information that can come out of such a study.

Graffiti or Significant Markings

We had an interesting query from James Morgan through the website, regarding markings he had observed and photographed on buildings in and around Corsham which, he asked, could they be attributed to graffiti, mason's marks, or witches' marks?



A letter 'w' found on the side of the Town Hall Building.

We referred James to the Wiltshire Museum Devizes, who were able to advise him on who may be expert in this field, But then, we discovered someone in our midst, who was able to expand on this interesting subject – John Maloney, one of our previous Chairmen, who was able to provide more information, and also details of the dating of buildings which will be relevant to our plans to explore more of the Corsham High Street and its origins. (CHSP).

Since these two subjects seem to have some association one with the other, we thought you would like to read John's conclusions on the matter from an article from Spotlight in Autumn 2018.

Pat Whalley

12 Pickwick ~ dendrochronology and apotropaic and other markings

Research into our Georgian house (below left) by Ellen Leslie, *The History of 12 Pickwick*, 2015) has been reported on in previous issues (Summer & Autumn 2016). That research and later work established that the main house was built before 1756, probably during 1720-30. However, the kitchen block is a separate building (below right) and Ellen surmised that it could date to the 17th century. Many timbers in the roof of the kitchen block clearly have been re-used - indicated by joints and peg holes no longer in use – and some in the roof of the main house. We decided to contact a dendrochronological company, the *Nottingham tree-ring dating laboratory* [NTRDL] – recommended by Dorothy Treasure, Wiltshire Buildings Record - to obtain dates for some of the



No. 12 frontage (left) and back (above) with single storey kitchen block in the right



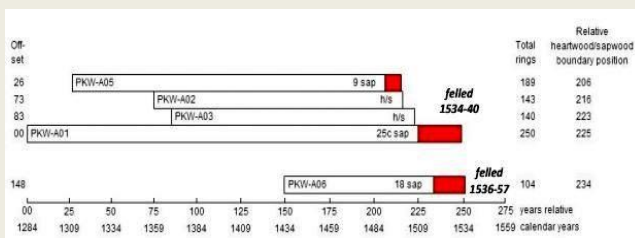
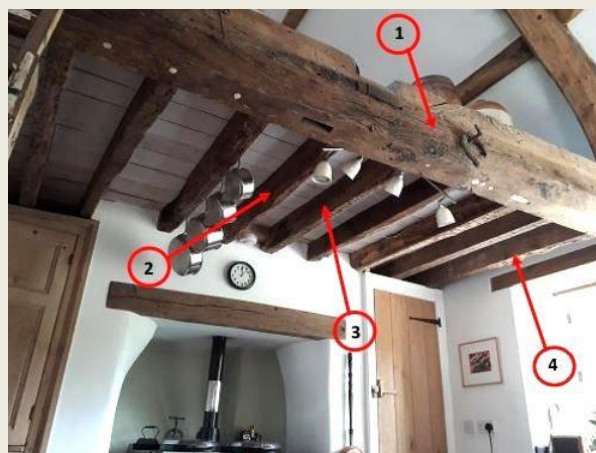
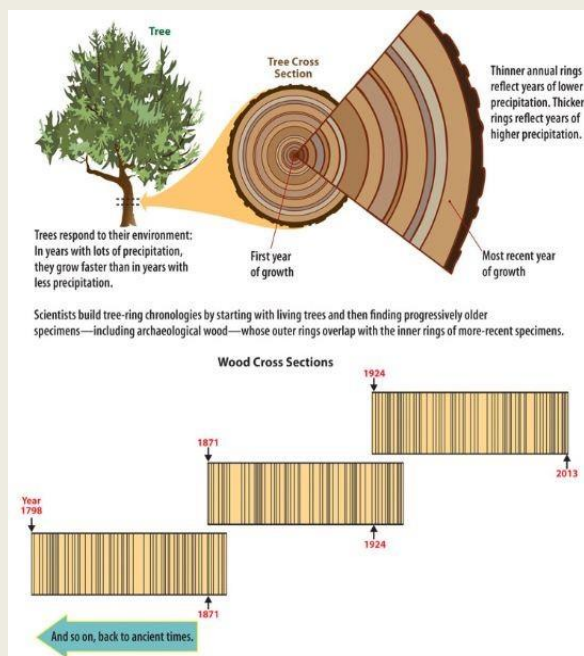
In essence, dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) is the scientific method of dating tree rings (also called growth-rings) sometimes to the exact year they were formed and, also, in order to analyse atmospheric conditions during different periods in history (see details on diagram opposite).

'Dendro' dating samples are taken by using a core borer attached to a drill. The borer is hollow and the core taken out has dimensions like a pencil, usually a diameter of 7mm. The width of the growth rings are measured to a tolerance of 1/100 of a millimetre.

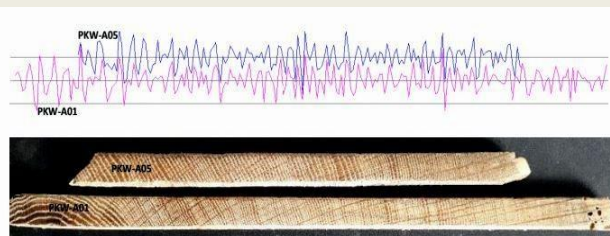
Samples were taken mainly from the kitchen with one in the bathroom and a few from the roof of the main house. The location of the samples in the kitchen are shown in the photograph opposite. All the timbers are oak. The big main beam in the kitchen (numbered 1, right) is termed a *bressummer* (a horizontal load bearing beam in a timber framed building) which produced an exceptional 250 growth annual rings including 25 sapwood rings. The fact that the sapwood was near complete allows a great deal of confidence in its felling date of 1534-40.

The report states that "..... six samples were measured and ... the site chronology is 252 rings long overall; these rings being reliably dated as spanning the years 1284-1535". The main beam in the kitchen "was planted in 1284 and felled around 1535-40!" The cross matching between five of the samples was very close as shown in the bar diagram (right). Notably, the cross matching of two timbers corresponded with a high degree of similarity (below right).

Graphic representation of two closely cross matching samples



Bar diagram of the cross matching samples in Wiltshire.



“The site chronology was compared with thousands of chronologies from all over England, there was a clear tendency for it to match best, and indeed particularly well, with those from other buildings in Wiltshire. For example, Great Chalfield Manor, at Atworth, suggesting that the Pickwick timbers were sourced from a similar, relatively local, woodland”.

As to the re-use of timbers, most commonly, house, barn, stable and ship timbers were re-used. Recycling of used matching samples timbers is a very old tradition.

On one of the beams in the kitchen are two ‘egg timer’, ‘w’ or ‘Marian’ marks (right) which according to Dorothy Treasure (Wiltshire Buildings Record) are based on the Virgo Virginum type of apotropaic mark (meaning to turn away) and, supposedly, having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck by invoking the protection of the Virgin Mary.



I 12 PICKWICK near CORSHAM, WILTSHIRE SN13 0HZ ~ TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS, Nottingham Tree-ring Dating Laboratory 2018

There is also a 'butterfly' mark (above, right) which is apparently a well-known representation of a 'spirit trap' ~ the premise was that any baleful/malevolent entities entering the house would be drawn to the trap and pinned to the wood and thereby ‘neutralised’. These are also known as witches marks.

In the 17th century witchcraft was a real concern. In 1604 King James I wrote, *“for some they sayeth that being transformed in the likeness of a beast or fowl, they will come and pierce through whatsoever house or church, though all ordinary passages be closed, by whatsoever open air may enter in at.”*

Circles were regarded as solar symbols which could dispel darkness. Those are often interconnected as in this case (below) where there are concentric circles within which are two small circles with another circle overlapping.

I 2 Pickwick: photograph of circles enhanced by CAD ~ Wiltshire Medieval Graffiti Survey



These are termed protection marks. and are usually very lightly etched or scored onto surfaces, sometimes so lightly that they are invisible unless a bright light is aimed obliquely along a beam. Another type are 'daisy wheels' can be found throughout the world. They are compass-drawn circles with six petals within and it appears on buildings and on furniture throughout Britain.

In addition, there is at least one 'candle' burn' mark (left) which were believed to guard against fire or, more generally, evil. Finally, there are medieval carpenters assembly marks which often comprise paired Roman numerals (right, in this instance xx) to indicate which joints fit together.



All in all, many forms of protection were sought! A number of points arise which are salient to the Corsham High Street Project: firstly, 'hard and fast assumptions' about buildings should not be made based just on their external appearance; secondly, how important it is to carefully to examine the fabric of buildings because it is easy to overlook all sorts of in distinct markings which nevertheless may have significance.

2 Ronald Hutton (ed), 'Physical evidence for Ritual acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain' 2015 pps. 39-67"

John Maloney

Wadswick Green

Wadswick Green, a Retirement Village of some 25 acres, in Neston, Corsham, has been built for those who perhaps wish to downsize their living arrangements, or move closer to relatives. Whatever the reason, the project is proving to be very successful. The first phase was built in 2015 and consisted of some 112 apartments. A restaurant, swimming pool and other exercise facilities were also included. Since the site is positioned a little out of Corsham (3 miles), there is a facility to order a small shuttle bus, which will take you wherever you need to go.

The second phase, started in July 2023, now complete. It comprises 90 new apartments and a new, much larger 'village hall' where the residents can perform a pantomime for their fellow residents.

The 25acre site is situated a little off the beaten track, at Westwells, Neston. Once the home of HMS Royal Arthur, a 'dry ship' which was a leadership training establishment for Petty Officers from 1947 to 1992. At the risk of 'name dropping', Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, later Prince Philip, was stationed there during 1947, and was well known for frequenting the Methuen Arms, to play skittles and darts with his student PO's and the locals, when he wasn't dashing off to Buckingham Palace to meet with his prospective bride! He is reputed to hold the speed record for driving from Corsham to the Palace gates in the fastest possible time.

Apocryphal no doubt! In the same year he was tasked to carry out his first official engagement as the fiancé of the then Princess Elizabeth. He opened the Garden of Remembrance, situated at the bottom of Station Rd, in recognition of those from the area who were lost in WWII.

The Civic Society were invited to Wadswick Green in January 2026, to tell the inhabitants about the Society and its activities. We were warmly welcomed, and hope that we might be able to welcome some of them to any of our future meetings.

This is proving to be a very successful project. Of course, the community within is very important to its success. Everyone concerned is to be congratulated.

Pat Whalley

PLANNING MATTERS

We are conscious that we might have not given enough information about planning matters in the last few issues of Spotlight. As three of them are of general public interest we thought you might like slightly fuller explanations.

Data Centres and the Land South of Westwells Road, Neston – the Donkey Field

OK so where are all those images you have taken of the grandchildren stored? 'Ah, in the cloud', I hear you say but what and where is this cloud. Well, actually it is a number of enormous, usually grey, boxes several stories high.

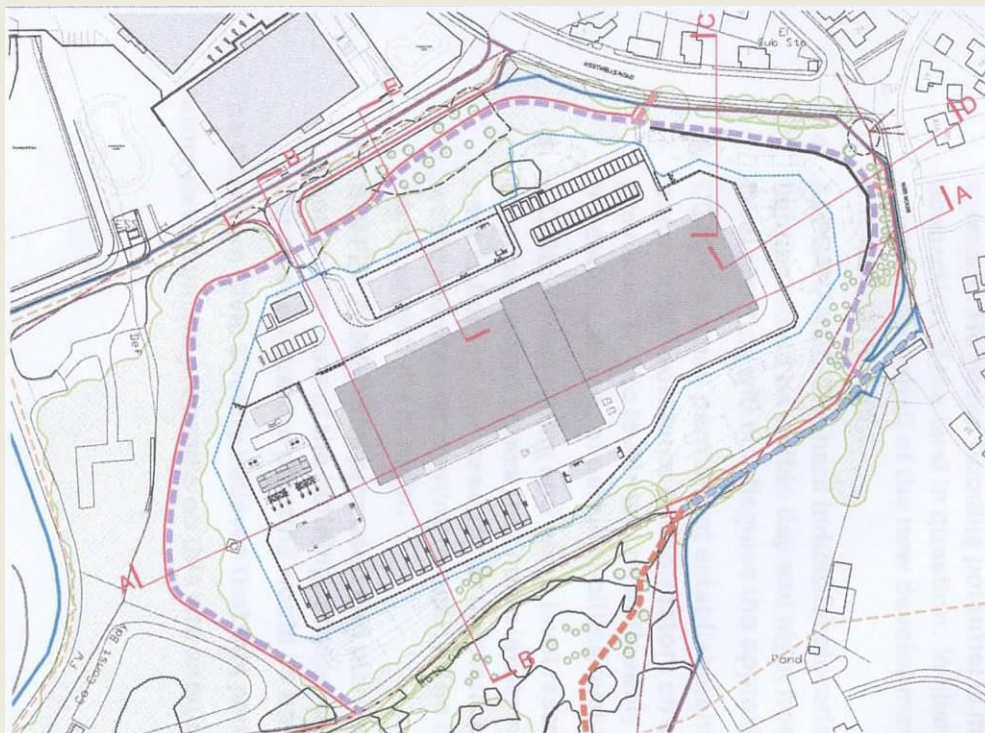
And there is one near you. Well, actually that is not true. There are already four, known as Buildings P1 - P4 on the Ark Data Centre site or more properly Spring Park opposite the MOD at Westwells.

Recently a new 6ft high blue fence was erected around the old Stevens Plastics factory and the Cinema Animation studios by Roman Lane, the entrance to Wadswick Green retirement village. All the buildings have just been demolished and the site levelled. Ark had bought this site. They originally applied for office space planning permission. Once they got it, they changed the application to build another data centre to be called Hawthorn 5.

This was approved but the Wiltshire Council planning landscape officer said, as a consequence of the approval, nothing else should be built on the Donkey Field south of Rowan Lane. The previous owners of the Donkey Field applied for planning permission for 81 dwellings in 2018. This was deferred for a year and denied in 2019. The decision was appealed and the application was allowed in 2021 solely on the grounds that housing was desperately needed.

As soon as they got the approval for Hawthorn 5, Ark bought the Donkey Field site as a speculative purchase wanting to turn it into an industrial site. They ignored the Landscape officers objections and the housing imperative and applied in November 2025 to build another data centre on the Donkey Field. This would be P6. This would be some 20 metres high. Wiltshire Council Strategic Planning Committee deferred the plan until February 2026.

Despite a protracted battle by the Neston Westwells Action Group (NWAG), and the objections by Corsham Town Council and Corsham Civic Society, planning permission has now been granted to this next development. This will be another soul-less building. It will contain a myriad of large computer like machines - you'll have seen them in films with large reels of tapes full of incredibly important information. Well, that image is a little out of date but you get the picture.



Consequently Rowan Lane is now going to have a five storey, 18m high data centre on each side and these data centres are going to run from Westwells/Moorpark up Westwells hill in an almost solid block.

In their original planning application, Ark stated there will be very few people on site as it is a storage facility. Just some maintenance engineers and a few technicians. There would be seven jobs, five during the day and two at night, so there would be no need for a traffic analysis as there would be no extra vehicles using Rowan Lane or any of the other local roads. However, within the planning officers report, they stated that the development would provide fifty local jobs and this therefore carried significant weight in planning terms. At the planning meeting, the Ark representatives increased that number 87! But no mention of a traffic analysis requirement. When the planners were asked what proof had been provided for any of these numbers and the nature of those jobs, the answer was 'none'. The wholesale contradictions within the application were completely ignored or glossed over.

At the planning meeting, two planning officers were unable, when asked, to identify the locations of Westwells and Wadswick Green on their own overhead presentation map. So how did they advise the Councillors? The map was so old they pointed to Sands Farm as Wadswick Green and Wadswick Green was not shown at all! And they didn't know whether Wadswick Green was to the South West or South East of the Donkey Field.

Ark had refused to address engineering concerns about the build, the mines underground, the flood risk to local residents and numerous other issues. This resulted in the Planning Authority placing a large number of 'Conditions' on the application. This directly breaches the process required by planning regulations but few in authority seem to be concerned. The problem with setting these Conditions is that developers can then go back to Wiltshire Council planners and state that they are too difficult to achieve and request that another easier solution be sought!

This is much easier to get away with as they don't have to notify the public of these subsequent changes.

These data centres require an enormous amount of electricity to run them and a considerable amount of water to keep them cool. The problem is that Westwells is a very small village with only a limited supply of water and electricity. Where will these massive quantities of both come from and what sort of buildings and building work will be required to produce them? This has not been explained.

The majority of Wiltshire Council Planning Committee members seemed oblivious to many of these issues and basically waved through the application without apparent understanding, or even a desire to ask meaningful questions. Even the chairman appeared fed up with the inadequacy of the process and the final outcome

The decision departs completely from the spirit of the Wiltshire's Strategic Planning Framework and Spatial Plan and risks setting a precedent that encourages speculative industrial development proposals in other sensitive locations. We are left wondering what exactly is the function of the planning process if it is going to ignore strategic policies that are in place, ignore local resident's objections and not even require developers to comply with the councils own planning process.

And who owns Ark Ltd? It is the proprietor of an American private equity/hedge fund who has been trying to sell the entire company since September 2025!

Edward Barrett and Morgyn Davies

Lime Down

The Lime Down project is a plan to create a 1,237 hectare (3056 acres) development of 50 megawatt generating photovoltaic (PV) solar panels and a battery energy storage system (BESS) on five sites north of the M4 between Hullavington and Westonbirt.



There will be other infrastructure integral to construction, operation, maintenance and ultimately de-commissioning (after sixty years of design life).

The electricity produced will then be linked to the National Grid at the Melksham sub-station, some 22 kilometre (13 miles) south and situated to the east of the Whitley Golf course.

Cables will be contained in a trench which will be dug across agricultural land, crossing several roads and within tunnels under the M4 and the railway. The developer states that all cables will be below ground, both those connecting PV sites and those connecting with the sub-station. No new overhead poles or other components will be sited in open farmland. Where the cable passes through landscape features, i.e. woodland, and important access roads and thoroughfares, “trench-less techniques” will be employed. This refers to tunnelling and micro-tunnelling and other methods for the installation of pipelines and cables below ground with minimal excavation. This is carried out by horizontal drilling taking into account the soil type, the water table and trees etc. The purpose of the technique being to minimise disruption to surface traffic and other activities.

The part of the project that will impact us in the civic parish of Corsham is the path of the trench. The route through the parish enters just the east of the Chequers crossroads, swinging first eastwards then south-westwards to the east of Easton before entering a tunnel under the railway just to the west of the Roebuck bridge. It will then travel southwest to cross the Gastard road just to the north-west of the old Silver Street garage. It will then swing south round the west of Gastard village and Chapel Knapp. It will then roughly follow a southerly route to the west of the road towards Melksham, crossing that road in an easterly direction just south of the road junction to Beanacre for the last mile or so.

The impact on our countryside probably began with the Industrial Revolution. Firstly canals, railways, sewers followed by water and gas mains and then electricity pylons. They have all blended with and become part of the man-made landscape. The exception being the last of these, which though spectacularly ugly does at least allow farming to go on around them. So the digging of the trench will be an eyesore but at least short term and transitory and after the reinstatement of the land there should be little trace. There will be an environmental impact to this project but it should not be great in our area and the fields and other land should recover well.

Disruption is another matter. In Corsham parish the trench will cut across six roads which could cause delays and diversions for a period of time in an area where the diversion routes will be on roads not designed for the traffic they will be required to take. It is hoped that the trenching technique described above will be employed to mitigate many such delays. And with the popularity of rambling in the area, what about damage to the footpaths across the very large number of fields along the route? It is hoped that bodies such as the local authorities and the Cotswold Wardens together with walking groups and individuals will monitor this matter so that it doesn't become an issue.

Information can be found on the website of the action group formed to contest this proposal – stopleftdown.com.

Neither Corsham Town Council nor Corsham Civic Society has objected to an issue that will have a negligible impact of our community as a whole. It is worth noting that although Wiltshire Council does not support the Development Consent Order (DCO), the actual decision for this National Significantly Infrastructure Project (NSIP) will be taken by the Secretary of State!

Edward Barrett and David Bertwistle

Housing development opposite the Catholic Church on the London Road in Pickwick

This proposal has been going on for several years. A developer, Gladman Developments, speculatively took out an option to buy the field on the north side of the Bath road, opposite the Catholic church and between the road and Guyers House. They plan to build 150 houses and two office blocks. The site is on top of a working stone mine.



The proposal was objected to by Wiltshire Council, Corsham Town Council, the Corsham Civic Society, the Pickwick Association and the owners of Guvers House, among others. A Planning Inspector was appointed and matter was discussed at a Public Inquiry in 2015. The developer was given permission but subject to a long list of stringent conditions including regarding noise and vibration.

The developers failed to persuade Wiltshire Council they had met the conditions submitted an appeal against the Council's decision and the Inspectorate was obliged to hold a second Public Inquiry in 2020/21. The people won.

A new developer, Great Tew, came along and submitted an almost identical scheme but this time "bought off" the mine. Wiltshire Council sought lots more information to fill gaping holes in the applications but eventually the developer lost patience and appealed to the Planning Inspectorate who were obliged to hold a third Public Inquiry in January 2026. This time Wiltshire Council, the planning authority, pinned all its objection on noise and vibration and then at the Inquiry withdrew its opposition saying it had reached agreement with the developer on this. The mine owners also changed their mind and decided to discontinue mining under the actual site and a buffer zone around it. This time the people lost.

The most affected campaigners have been the Pickwick Association, and they did not give up without a fight. They took legal advice regarding an appeal of the decision due to the way the inquiry was conducted but that advice said that although they might win the argument nevertheless the inspector's decision might not be overturned due to the national government guidelines on making building a priority.

Edward Barrett and Chris Johnson

Conclusion

So, in the end, local opinion has been ignored. The Government is very keen to build more houses. Wiltshire Council is tasked by the Government to allow more building on its patch.

Speculative, out of area, developers want to make a profit on their outlay and promise the earth to get initial planning permission and then do everything they can to weasel out of any deliverable benefit that doesn't make them a profit; no additional pharmacies, GP's, dentists, school places, green spaces etc. And, of course, the State can override with national projects. Thus most of the high-cost planning project decisions must be considered to have been a foregone conclusion.

LOCAL MYTHS OR THE TRUTH

Recently, on ITV 3, I watched a repeat episode of 'McDonald & Dodds' in which the village of Box and the railway tunnel featured very much in the plot. It seems a young French rugby player was murdered in the tunnel by a young lady and his body was left on the tracks on the morning in early April. It is absolutely true that the rising sun does shine through the tunnel, as proved by Network Rail engineers, on April 6th, 2017, when they photographed the rising sun shining through the eastern or Corsham portal. For years local people have told the tale that the sun does shine through the tunnel on Brunel's birthday which falls on April 9th, but that is absolutely wrong, but it does shine through on April 6th, which happens to be Brunel's sister Emma Joan's birthday.

Sergeant Dodds told the story of the rising sun on April 9th and called the tunnel Box Hill tunnel, which I've never heard said before. They filmed outside the Box end of the tunnel but when locating the body in the tunnel they used a different railway location because we saw wooden sleepers holding the track when Box tunnel has concrete sleepers on a high bed of ballast. I still have to identify where those film shots were made!

Michael Rumsey



Box tunnel April 6th 1904—we can just see the 'light at the end of the tunnel—low centre'

A RAILWAY STORY – SIXTY YEARS AGO.....

In March 1966, I was in my last month of the final teaching practice at Bath Hill Primary School, Keynsham. On Sunday, the 6th March, I boarded a special steam train at Bath Green Park station, organised by the Stephenson Locomotive Society to travel over the length of the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway to Bournemouth. This special was hauled by 2 engines, a BR standard Class 5 2-6-4 tank no. 80043, but the front engine needed for its power was an LMS Class 8F 2-8-0 no. 48706, one of the most powerful engines of its wheel type. 80043 was there to provide steam heat for the coaches. There was an enthusiastic send off from Bath and the 2 engines set off on the hard climb to the Combe Down tunnels. We emerged to travel on through Midford, Wellow, Radstock and Midsomer Norton to climb to the line's summit at Masbury, 911 feet above sea level. From there downhill to Shepton Mallet where water was taken on and people could stretch their legs. A further stop was made at Evercreech Junction. Then on to Templecombe where a further stop was made and here passengers again stretched their legs and watched trains go by from London Waterloo towards Exeter and Plymouth.



SDJR 68 an S&D4-40
which lasted 1925-1962.

SDJR 4 tank engine 41249 on
rear of our train to pilot it over
points to the junction signal box



SDJR 89 the famous 7F 2-
8-0 no. 53809 at Green
Park Station 4/3/2006

Trains are forbidden to reverse when passengers are on board and at Templecombe station there was a point in the track which meant a pilot engine was attached to the last coach to enable the whole train to travel safely back to the junction signal box so we could continue our journey to Bournemouth. An Ivatt 2-6-2 tank no. 41249 with specially painted white buffer heads helped us to negotiate the curved point and at last we were on our way. An hour or two was spent in Bournemouth enabling my friends and I to walk to the sea front and travel on the cliff railway. The return journey back to Bath was rather a sad occasion for we were the last train back on the S&D into Bath. Within a year the track was ripped up and after 92 years of service the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway was no more.

But two things still exist and are in working order and that's the famous S&D Class 7F 2-8-0s which spent 50 years hauling heavy freight over the line and during the summer months hauled holiday trains on Saturdays to and from Bournemouth. Nos. 53808 and 53809 have been preserved and are now in their 101st year of service. In March 2006, 40 years after closure, 53809 was displayed at Green Park station much to the delight of us enthusiasts! The other class of engine that became the backbone of S&D passenger services was the LMS Class 2P 4-4-0 but sadly these now exist only in photographic form. I am grateful to my friend Jerry Clifford for lending me a copy of a 2P in its SDJR Prussian blue livery. March 6th 2026, will be a day of memories for me and for my teaching practice colleague, Rosemary, who came too on the train trip. Happy memories indeed.

Michael Rumsey

Corsham's Beechfield Nature Reserve and its Butterflies

Corsham is fortunate enough to have two nature reserves, Beechfield and The Batters, both of which come under the jurisdiction of the Town Council. This article is about the former, Beechfield which is accessed by Middlewick Lane, to the north of the A4 Bath Road.

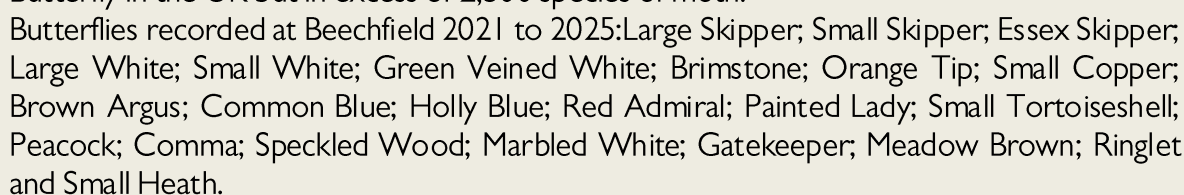
The Beechfield site was formally a playing field attached to the Bath Academy of Art. It was donated to Corsham Town Council by the owners of Beechfield House in 2002 at the time permission was given for the Academy Drive development. The Council undertook to improve the amenity, recreational and nature conservation value of the site whilst retaining its original character. The site is classified as "open and wooded limestone upland".



Four distinct types of habitat are prevalent. The central part is grassland with wild flowers. This area is cut once a year to maintain a wildflower meadow character and prevent it being lost to scrub or tree growth. The grass is removed, once cut, to help reduce the fertility, a technique which is aimed at discouraging vigorous grass and allowing wild flowers to compete. Many species of wildflowers are present including bee orchid, birds foot trefoil, herb robert, meadow vetchling and notably huge numbers of cowslips. On two sides there is mature woodland inhabited by many bird species, including woodpeckers (green and great spotted), chiffchaff, goldcrest and bullfinch. Thirdly there is a wild transition zone with some longer grass with brambles between the grassland and the woods and there are two ponds, one created in 2013 and the second was created by the Council and volunteers in 2025. In addition to these main features there are “insect hotels” constructed with the help of local school children and an extensive “dead hedge”, which not only serves as a screen but will also give shelter to small mammals and insects. The area is very popular with dog walkers who make up the majority of regular users. Since its transfer to public ownership the site has been maintained by the Town Council, assisted by volunteers.



Since 2021, detailed records have been kept of butterflies at the site and counts have been carried out on average once a week during the spring and summer. It is widely accepted that butterfly numbers can be an indication of the wildlife value of any open site and counts are carried out by volunteers at thousands of sites across the country. These counts (carried out with a technique known as transects) are not only kept locally but also fed into national records kept by Butterfly Conservation, the Wildlife Trusts and other scientific record centres. From this information organisations can see which species are doing well and which are not. Where species are declining, management plans have been drawn up to enhance the habitat of certain areas to encourage revival. This technique was famously adopted to assist with the re-introduction of the beautiful Large Blue butterfly to sites in Devon, Somerset and Gloucestershire; this butterfly having gone extinct in Britain in 1979. The records will also show when you can expect to see butterflies on the wing. Some like the Orange Tip will only be seen in spring and early summer. Others, like the Gatekeeper will only be seen in July and August. Some butterflies, like Peacock, Brimstone and the Whites are wide ranging and will be seen almost anywhere while others, such as Common Blue, Brown Argus and Marbled White will only fly around their breeding sites.



Corsham Station Campaign Update

The Corsham Railway Station Town Team has met twice – on 5th December 2025 and 20th February 2026.

The first meeting was attended by Colin Skellett OBE, Chief Executive of YTL UK Group who had been involved with a new station in Bristol (Brabazon) and also Swindon's redevelopment. He told us that what was now important to government was the contribution that a station could make to future economic growth i.e. jobs and housing. He also said that the next deadline for us to make a compelling case was the 2028 spending round.

Frustratingly, Corsham has, of course, grown by c30% over the last 20 years and whilst this had helped make the business case for opening the station a strong one it did not help in terms of future growth opportunity. However, it was agreed to consider what growth we **could** demonstrate and to that end Cllr Helen Belcher OBE and Sarah Gibson MP would seek to engage with the MOD, University of Bath, other major employers and Wiltshire strategic planners.

Sarah Gibson also managed to meet with Lord Hendy (Minister of State for Rail) and we subsequently received a response to the previously submitted business case acknowledging its strength but suggesting it needed updating(!) as it was submitted in 2022 and suggesting various areas that could be enlarged upon, including the economic growth contribution and also transport integration. It was agreed that Atkins, the consultants who had produced the previous case would be asked for a quote to do the necessary work.

Meanwhile GWR are hopeful that they will get agreement to run direct trains from Bristol to Oxford every 2 hours from May with an aspiration to increase this to hourly – this is the train that would stop at Corsham when a station is in place.



Finally, GWR and Network Rail held a drop in event on 24th March at the House of Commons for MPs, and Cllr Helen Belcher OBE and I were invited by Sarah Gibson MP to join her. The photo includes Dan Okey, Regional Development Manager GWR).

Some very useful discussions were held and a meeting is to be arranged with key staff at Wiltshire Council as it is clear that GWR and Network Rail are looking for a clearer commitment from Wiltshire Council that they are backing Corsham Station, but also to agree realistic next steps.

All in all more talking than for a while and it is clear there is now a relatively short window i.e. December 2027 to put together a realistic case in order to secure the necessary backing if there is not to be a further delay.

Chris Johnson

For your diaries:-

CORSHAM WALKING FESTIVAL

12-14 June 2026. A programme of walks of different lengths and to suit all abilities. Together with additional learning opportunities in basic navigation, map reading, and First Aid. Working with Primary Schools and family friendly walks around Corsham, there will many chances to become involved.



Please visit corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk for much more detailed information.

CORSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Saturday 16th May - A Taste of Corsham – a chance to sample the varied range of foods on offer in the town.



Saturday 4th July - Summer Fete.

WOMAD FESTIVAL

23rd -26th July at Neston Park, near Atworth. An independent festival of live and recorded music, plays and films. A lively event for the summer!

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CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY TALKS 2026

All meetings are at St Aldhelm's Church Pickwick Road Corsham SN13 9BD at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Members £2, Non-Members £5. Guests are very welcome. Please be aware that these events are subject to last minute changes beyond the control of the CCS.

- 15th May **Annual General Meeting**
Town Hall Corsham 7pm
- 26th June **Restoration of Assize Building, Devizes**
Talk by David Dawson – Director of Wiltshire Museum, Devizes
- 24th July **The Characters of Bath through History**
An insight to be given by one of the Mayor of Bath's guides
- 29th Aug **Annual Garden Party**
At the Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouses 3pm
- 25th Sept **The Mines and Tunnels under Westwells**
Morgyn Davies reveals all!
- 23rd Oct **Climate Change and Bio-diversity**
A talk by Gary Ford of Corsham Town Council
- 27th Nov **TBA**

Please note that the programme may be subject to changes.

For more information email: corshamcivicsociety@gmail.com or see the website: www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk

Corsham Civic Society was founded in 1963 to represent the people of Corsham in all aspects of conservation, preservation and the promotion of this delightful Wiltshire town. The Society is a registered charity, a member of ASHTAV (Association of Small and Historic Towns & Villages of the UK). It is our aim to promote high standards of planning and architecture, to create a wider awareness amongst the local population of environmental issues, the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area, and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of features of public amenity and historical interest, in Corsham and the surrounding countryside.

Corsham Civic Society, 12 Pickwick, Corsham, Wiltshire, SN13 0HZ. Registered Charity No: 275321