

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025

Welcome to my Chairman's report for 2025. As this will be my last Chairman's report I thought I would state my personal recollections from the last 10 years, or those that I can remember.

This report will be followed by more detailed reports by organisations within High Ham parish.

The times they are a-changing sang a poet and singer.

I have lived all of my life in this parish apart from 6 months in Shapwick.

I can remember when Maisey's bread was delivered 3 times a week, Surmans the butcher, and Mrs Spearing delivered your grocery order from the shop in High Ham on a Friday. Mr Wilcox came round selling paraffin and hardware items, also the milkman and coal man delivered. Now we get in a car and have to fetch these items or a few clicks on the keyboard and you can have practically anything delivered, sometimes in less than 12 hours.

With social media and a smartphone you can read about world events immediately, whether true or not, but with the decline of local newspapers are we any better off? Den Legg, the bread delivery man would hear the local news on his round and inform everyone who had passed away. Especially during COVID some acquaintances had been buried before we even knew about their passing.

The AI man (not AI as we know it now) serviced over 15 farms in Henley alone. Now there are only 3 dairy farms in High Ham parish. My wife said that when she was home bringing up our children, the most numerous vehicles passing by in Henley were tractors. Now it is courier vans delivering goods booked on the internet. Is this making the rural population more lonely, and as many dwellings are now reserved for holiday lets although I sense a falling off of occupancy since the demise of COVID. The parish is changing from a 'working on the land' or over at Clarks or Westlands factories into a lifestyle where many have come to enjoy a quieter way of life in a rural community.

With Wessex Internet connecting many households to a faster Broadband service I can see that this will encourage more people to be able to live and work in High Ham parish. However as this has resulted in house prices being set at a high level

in this area many younger families are unable to live where they were brought up. Hopefully High Ham Community Land Trust will eventually be able to provide homes for a few local families.

It would seem that this part of Somerset has been an attractive place to live for over 2000 years, with the Roman Villa and mosaic floor from Low Ham, now displayed in the Museum at Taunton and The Time Team investigations at Sams Cross and the recently discovery of Roman remains within a short distance from the parish boundary at Picts Hill.

My mother was a newcomer to the parish after meeting my father during WWII - both serving in different sections of the RAF. It must have been a tremendous change to come and live here from living a short distance from the comparative busy lifestyle of Swansea. She was welcomed into this community and always welcomed newcomers to the parish. Several people told me at her funeral that she was the first person to welcome them when in the same situation.

During the COVID lockdown the Playing Field remained open for physical and mental relief of parishioners although we were ordered to make sure the play equipment was not to be used.

I thank the Playing Field committee for organising a Village Fete last summer – very popular. The preparation for this year's on Saturday 12th July is now underway. They are still working on providing changing rooms and toilets for the Playing Field.

Following on from the storms, resulting in the electricity supply for many parts of the parish being interrupted, I would like to thank the Village Hall for opening and providing a warm space, hot drinks and food and charging facilities for mobile phones so that many parishioners could contact family and friends and receive news reports.

Over the years this community has contributed a great deal to local life, whether contributing to National Celebrations, beacons etc for various anniversaries of our Queen to mourning her death and subsequent crowning of our King. Recently VE Day with an armoured vehicle displayed on the Village Green, was something I observed from afar on social media!

Carols around the Christmas tree outside the church was well attended again this year. Thank you to all helpers and generous donations which amounted to £280 given to Somerset Blood Bikes organisation.

The Christmas Crew with their visits around villages within this parish and neighbouring villages were very popular.

High Ham School is still thriving as we can witness by the drop off and pick up disruption twice a day during term time. However, I can tolerate this rather than the alternative of not having a local primary school.

This last year most of the planning that the parish council have been consulted on have been S73, discharge of conditions on previous approved applications or extensions to existing dwellings. The planning application for 8 dwellings on the old Agricentre site was finally approved after a considerable delay.

David and Mary Scriven will be opening their garden for their annual Open Day on Saturday 7th June – well worth a visit.

Some of the lower parts of the parish are included in the area that The Greater Sedgemoor Landscape Recovery Project is covering. This project is hoping that landowners will sign their land in for 20 years to achieve their aims. One question at a recent meeting was to what state do you want to recover the land – is it as it was 50 years ago or 200 years ago? We are still awaiting the answer! Personally I think that for Food Security in this country we should still be producing food from this land. With Climate Change occurring in areas of this planet that we are currently importing food from, they will be affected before this country and will need to feed their population before exporting their produce, but time will tell!

I have mentioned the community several times in this report and I feel that we have a good community within the parish as evidenced by all the volunteers who give up their time and expertise to make a difference for the better. More than I can mention or even know about.

I would like to thank all past and present Parish Councillors and other parishioners I have worked with and particularly Vicky Young our Parish Clerk who keeps us on the correct paths.