

Parish Council Footpaths Report

November 2021



Introduction

The only interesting footpaths activity this month has been a constructive meeting with Somerset County Council Rights of Way Volunteer and Trails Officer Martin Cooper as I've not met anyone from the team before.

Apart from that I've had one complaint about a PRow, one about an overgrown hedge with brambles on a footpath, not a PRow, and another, again about hedge and brambles, along a cycle/footpath.

T10/5 - the flooded area by the second five bar gate heading toward the canal from Ham

This was the single PRow complaint I've had and its been complained about before. This area, and the gate immediately before it, regularly floods due to a stream that runs through it from nearby and because cattle that graze the fields congregate in the area turning it into a quagmire..The complainant said while a divert bridge had been created to bypass the first gate area by warden George Montague it was useless because the second flooded gate area had not been fixed and therefore walkers could still not use the path, this despite there being a way through the nearby hedge with care. I've reported the issue again on the SCC Roam website. I'm waiting for a response. I also contacted George to ask if there was a date to fix it. No reply. So I complained to Martin that George had failed to respond to three or four queries I have put to him over the last 18 months only to be told that he had quit as warden the previous week; I'm wondering if my email to him was the straw that broke the camel's back. Anyway George has now taken up a new role. More of that at the end of this report. PS: Since recent rain the whole field is now flooded!



Hedge opposite the school in Hyde Lane

This was reported as overgrown with large brambles hanging down '...that could put a child's eye out', according to the complainant. Anyway I took a look and she was right about the hanging brambles so I cut them out. The hedge from Rocketts Cottages along to the Medical Centre could do with a trim but the chances of SCC doing it at this time of year are remote. There is a similar problem on the cycle/footpath that runs up to the recreation ground from Hyde Lane opposite the Medical Centre. I know that Ros has tried a couple

of times to get SCC to trim the latter without success. It may be worth one of the councillors having a look at these hedges for a second opinion on whether they actually do need cutting back. I think they do to tidy them up but I'm not sure they pose an inconvenience to walkers although I did get a complaint from someone with a mobility scooter!

If so Martin Cooper did give me a new contact. He said "If people wish to complain about roadside pavement overgrowth contact countyroads-tdeane@somerset.gov.uk. The SWaT website even has this wrong as it says only a-roads go to that email, but it is the right one for pavements too." I know Ros has tried a couple of times but if this contact is different it may be worth her dropping them a line; it will carry more weight coming from the Clerk rather than me. If she doesn't get a response the alternative may be someone who keeps the recreation ground neat and tidy. Is it possible for that person to trim these hedges?

T10/1 - from near Town Bridge toward Ruishton.

Last year (or was it earlier this year?) I put the old stile opposite Ham Lane up for replacement with either a Bristol gate (five bars with a pedestrian side gate) or a Marlow gate (a simple metal gate). Nothing has happened. Why not?

This is a very pleasant walk - in fact one of the nicest PRoWs in the Parish - along the river from CSM to Ruishton that should be able to be enjoyed by everyone, and at the moment it cannot. I realise that the old Chard Canal embankment is a barrier for some people but let's cross that hurdle when the stile has been replaced.



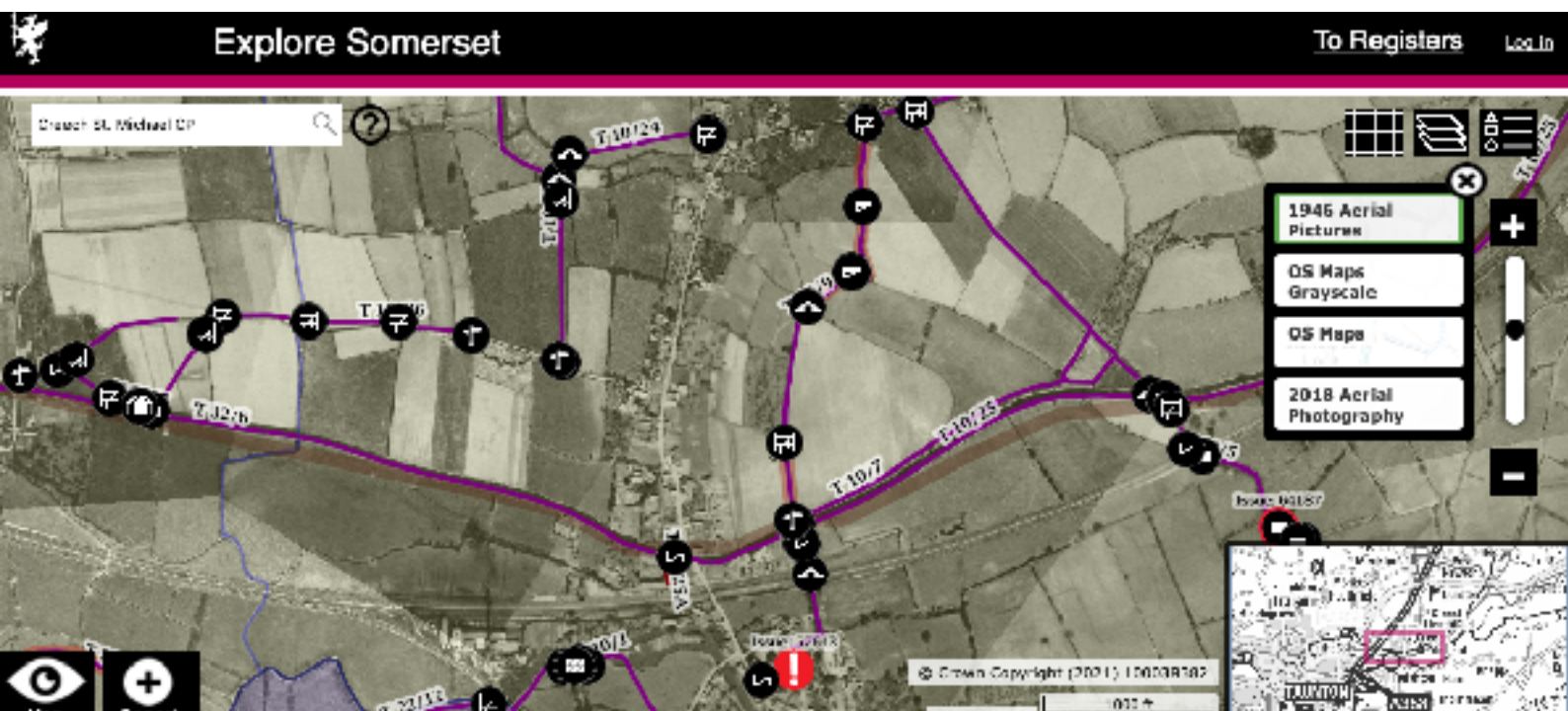
Meeting with Martin Cooper

I got so cross with not making progress on a number of issues, mainly the non responses from George and the complaints about overgrown hedges, that I complained quite loudly to Martin and he suggested a visit to talk through a few things.

He explained that in terms of getting works done it is not so much, or just, budgetary restraints but lack of manpower at the moment. SCC are currently trying to fill two warden vacancies. In terms of prioritising work two factors are taken into account - first, how dangerous is the fault or obstruction and, second, how important is the path to the local

community. Paths are ranked in terms of importance and I seem to remember we reviewed this a few years ago. I don't have the ranking for paths in this parish and I must get a copy. Does any councillor hold this?

The other frustration is not knowing who owns what and on occasions trying to contact the landowner. SCC will not move without the landowners consent. It should be possible to get all this information from the Land Registry which was founded in 1909. Apparently some land ownership records are closed and not available! I have no idea whether this is the case with this parish. The Somerset Roam map includes 1946 and a 2016 aerial photographs of the parish which may be useful in identifying 'lost' paths and features. Click on the black and white grid top right just under 'To Registers.'



As you all know a number of PRow's in this parish have been guillotined by the M5. I know this is now historic but it has probably resulted in more people having to walk along pavements and roads to get to places than used to be the case. This has been exacerbated by the growth of housing and schooling in West Monkton. There is virtually no chance of restoring these links across or under the motorway.

But it may be possible to improve existing paths to get people off the roads for some or most of the way to Langaller, Creech Heathfield, West Monkton and Ruishton.

This was one of the things discussed with Martin. Two footpaths were discussed:

T10/1 Town Bridge to Ruishton (see above) is a classic case of where this may be possible.

The other is **T10/31** that runs just north of Langaller Road. There are a number of problems that will have to be resolved. At the moment this path is not used, primarily because the entrance to it just outside North End gets flooded during winter and further along the former tarmac road section where it joins the field it is completely blocked. Furthermore the path seems to end in the field.

Getting these problems resolved - and Martin took great interest in them - would allow the path to join up with **T10/20** creating an almost circular walk between CSM and Creech Heathfield as well as creating an alternative to walking along the most narrow and potentially dangerous part of the pavement on Langaller road. It would also be a useful virtually completely non-road route from Creech Heathfield to North End and then on into CSM. There are steps up from the field to the road at the eastern (CSM) side of the motorway bridge for those wishing to get to Langaller and on to West Monkton.

If **T10/31** could be achieved proper footpath signposting and publicity would be needed to encourage people to use this route.

It is a long shot but if the PC thinks it worth pursuing Martin has hinted there may be ways to achieve it.

George Montague and his replacement

As mentioned George has quit as a warden (although I understand he may return to carry out works on occasions.) His temporary replacement as warden until a permanent replacement can be appointed is Sam Jackson (male - can I say male these days!) available on sjackson@somerset.gov.uk or 07734 854877. But please do bear in mind that Creech is an extra area for him to manage in addition to his regular one so probably best to stick with only reporting real emergencies until the new warden is in harness.

Meanwhile George is embarking on a new career aser... a film extra. (It's true, not one of my tasteless jokes) So here's a taste of what this means (with apologies to George, I hope he makes it):

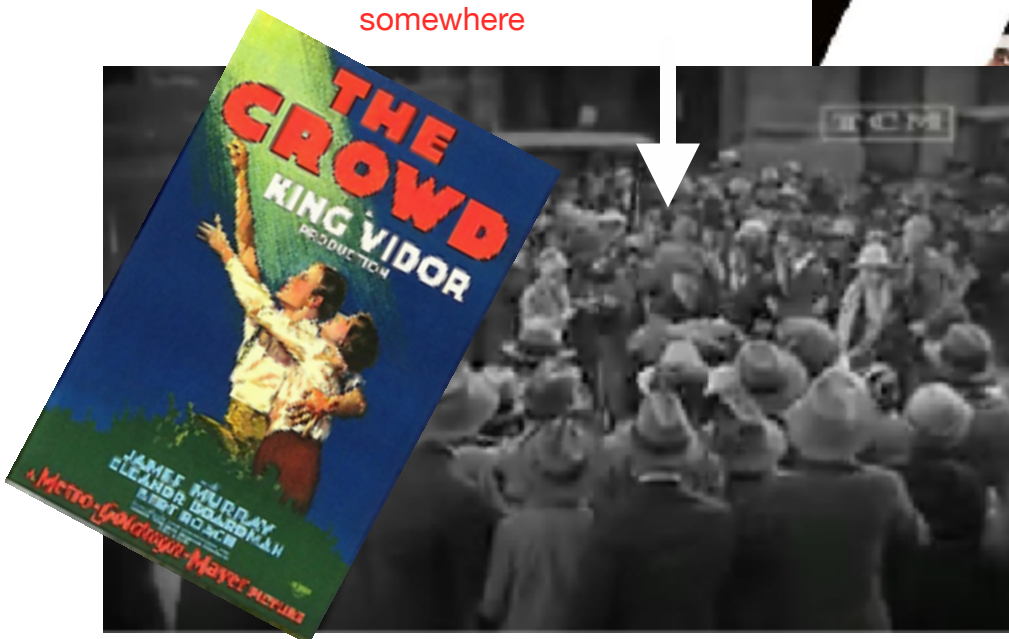


Michael

Daniel



George - he may be in here somewhere



And Finally

Flapjackgate (reminiscent of



Watergate)

We think we have solved the mystery of a minor break-in at Chez A'Court involving the theft of flapjacks. Martin Cooper offered to bring biscuits to our meeting! My wife made flapjacks instead. (They are delicious) But for different reasons neither Di nor I had any despite several being on the plate. Martin had two. I took him to the door on his departure and returned to remove the empty plate from the centre of the table, and wash it. Sue demanded to know where the remaining flapjacks were. A Bernstein and Woodward investigation followed and it didn't take long to track down the thief.



He'd scooped the lot!

