

# COGNATUM NEWS



No.20 Summer 2018 [www.cognatum.co.uk](http://www.cognatum.co.uk)

## Editorial

The snowy winter is now a distant memory and has been followed by a marvellous summer with sizzling sunshine, the royal wedding of Prince Harry to his American bride Meghan Markle, Wimbledon and the World Cup. Closer to home, the garden party and opening of the stylish new houses at Stuart Court by The Princess Royal was a joyous occasion, and Alex Matthews' first public duty since becoming Cognatum Chairman in April. These events have all been welcome distractions from the pervading uncertainties and paralysis of Brexit which, with just nine months to go, still appears as irreconcilable as ever.

We have included some extra pages in this edition of Cognatum News to celebrate the royal visit and to delve into the ingenious historical irrigation system discovered in the water meadows enjoyed today on our estate at Barton Farm in Dorset.



The Princess Royal visits Stuart Court – see page 3



## Les Blancs Bois in the snow

Winter 2017/18 was one of the snowiest, with much of the country blanketed on several occasions. At Malthouse Court in Towcester they recorded a foot of snow! The south east of the country, and Guernsey especially, had more than its fair share, keeping Ali Merrifield, the estate manager, busy helping with shopping and snow clearing.

## New Chairman begins with a royal appointment

In April Alex Matthews, who has been a non-executive director since 2013, took over from Henry Thornton as Chairman of Cognatum Estates. His first official duty was to welcome HRH The Princess Royal to open the new development at Stuart Court, Minchinhampton, in June.

For much of his career Alex was at Marks & Spencer, rising to running their flagship store on Oxford Street and launching the M&S credit card. During this time he was also seconded to the Cabinet Office, helping to develop the government's Citizen's Charter Programme, an initiative designed to improve the performance of key public services.

Following his time with M&S he held senior positions at HSBC in London, Moscow and the Middle East, before setting up his own consultancy advising such diverse organisations as the government of Trinidad and Tobago and

Jaguar Land Rover. Conservation and the countryside are two of his main interests, together with politics, travel and, above all, his family.

In his last annual statement as chairman, Henry Thornton wrote:

"Ten years ago we created a unique club of 60 of the best private retirement estates in the country, with a common ethos and identity, and with freeholds protected within a not-for-profit company without shareholders. It has been a turbulent ten years politically and economically, underlying the importance of holding true to strong values and sound finances. Whilst maintaining buildings and improving our beautiful gardens are fundamental to our estate management, tastes change and smart technology has been moving apace and so we are making plans to address these and see how we can improve both the delivery and range of

services and ensure that our residents and owners can truly retire in style.

Whilst Cognatum Estates concentrates on estate management, and Cognatum Property provides a tailor-made sales and valuation service to owners, during the year we set up two new companies, Cognatum Projects and Cognatum Services, to help meet some of our future objectives. Over the past few years there have been three small developments linked to our existing estates. Through Cognatum Projects we now want to use our expertise and reputation to increase the number of our estates from the current 60, promoting new top end retirement schemes, contemporary and energy efficient, partnered with like-minded funders and developers.

Over time Cognatum Projects involvement in new developments should not only be a valuable source of funds for Cognatum Estates but also enable us to stay abreast with the latest technology and innovation. We will be exploring through the second company, Cognatum Services, how this can be developed and delivered for the benefit of all our current estates, particularly in property refurbishment work and alongside other new app based services."



## MP Visit

Robert Courts, MP for Witney in West Oxfordshire, visited The Playing Close in Charlbury earlier in the year and met Wendy Bailey, the estate manager, and owners Rachel and Brian Farr, who have lived there for nearly twenty years. Mr Courts is investigating leasehold and rented property for the over 55s and has been vocal about the need for new developments to be less nondescript and to complement the character of towns and villages, two ideals all Cognatum estates are designed to fulfil.

## Planning a colourful future

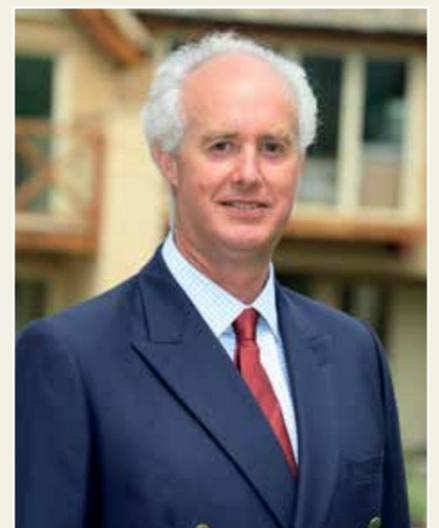
We are now two years in to rolling out thoughtful and attractive 10-year garden plans designed to improve all estate gardens in a practical and cost-effective way while ensuring great variety, colour and tidiness throughout the year. Garden Adviser Charles Gilchrist has been working with owners to get their ideas and support, and he reports that nine estates now have full planting plans agreed and ready for their first autumn planting season. Others are in various stages, pending consultation, with the goal of being completed over the next few years.

In Charles' latest update he notes that the planting philosophy remains true to

the original concept in that we are using low maintenance plants to give as much colour impact as possible. However, where we differ from the original plan is that we are taking a more long-term view on planting densities and the careful positioning of each shrub, taking into account the criticisms of existing gardens that point to too much evergreen and overlarge plants.

Charles is very aware that the 10-year plans are ambitious, and also bound by various seasonal and contextual practicalities, so require much patience and understanding from owners. For example, if one of the reasons for the replanting is to rid the ground of perennial weeds, there may be a delay of a year or two where beds sit empty whilst they are being sprayed. Equally, many of the existing beds are difficult to improve without entirely starting from scratch, so owners are faced with a garden that appears to get worse before it gets better.

However, once an area has been replanted, and the soil weeded and refreshed, the ongoing maintenance is far easier. If the same amount of money and effort were



spent on ad-hoc infills there would be no noticeable difference. So although short-term dissatisfactions are completely understandable, they should be outweighed by the very visible long-term benefits.

# Grazing under the Giant

Richie Moon looks back in time via a renovated Cerne Abbas watermeadow



Hatches on the Barton Farm Watermeadows

Barton Farm, the setting for one of four Cognatum estates in Dorset, is an unspoilt place, with a magnificent 14th-century Grade I tithe barn, with beautiful square-knapped flints, as its backdrop. Most of the farmland was sold off when the 24 retirement cottages were built in the early 1990s, but several acres of water meadow bordering the river Cerne, in reality little more than a chalk stream, were retained for walking and the enjoyment of the owners. Yet these pleasant meadowlands are not merely scenic. They began life as an innovative response to irrigation issues faced by local farmers in the 17th century.

In the days before fresh fruit and veg from Africa and South America was flown into supermarkets, the growing season applied not just to vegetables, but to the most important crop of all for livestock farmers and horse-users alike: grass.

Being able to extend the grazing season, or the growing season for hay, could be a matter of the survival of one's animals and indeed of the farm. From medieval times there had been attempts to extend the growing season by deliberately flooding fields to irrigate them in dry times or to protect them from the frost by blocking ditches and rivers so fields were underwater and would not freeze.

According to Historic England, most pre-17th-century irrigation was by means of 'floating upwards' - blocking a watercourse, causing it to overflow and flood the surrounding farmland. Floating upwards deposited beneficial silt and provided some frost protection, but if water failed to drain off quickly, it could create anaerobic and toxic conditions which would damage the grass. More sophisticated 'floating downwards' systems using a constant movement of water through the grass sward allowed strict control

of the flow of water on and off the meadows. Two main forms of floating downwards were used: 'catchworks' and 'bedworks', each suited to different landscapes.

Catchworks used spring water or hillside streams or farmyard run-off from a specially-constructed feeder pond to run into a contour-following ditch or 'gutter' which skirted the top of the meadow. When the gutter was blocked by 'stops' of turf, peat or logs, water overflowed down the hillside and irrigated the area of meadow below it. Lower gutters, parallel to the first, caught the water and redistributed it in a similar manner to lower pastures.

Bedworks, used on flatter river valleys, emerged at the beginning of the 17th century - the first mention of them in the UK is actually at Affpuddle in 1605. These were more sophisticated than catchworks, as we can see by looking at the example renovated at Barton Farm in Cerne Abbas, which shows clearly and on a visible scale how they worked.

John Staley, who was intimately involved in the Barton Farm renovation in 2014, wrote: 'The water meadow was fed by water from the river Cerne diverted by a series of boards manually

moved up and down in a channel called a carrier. The first sluice controlled a series of four smaller hatches supplying a flow of water to the meadow. Each section of the meadow was irrigated by a small channel, called a main, that carried the water to the crest of each ridge where it slowly overflowed and trickled down the sides (the panes) to enter a ditch and so return the water to the river (see diagram).

'An irrigated watermeadow accelerated the growth of grass as water warmed the land, encouraging vegetation. This was a result of a steady flow of water keeping frost at bay. This early growth of grass enabled farmers to give their flocks, both cattle and sheep, "an early bite" some four to six weeks before normal pasture.

'The watermeadows were a remarkable feat of agricultural engineering constructed entirely with hand-tools and over long hours of work. The men who did the work were known as drowners and meadmen.'

Diverting rivers so that meadows could be flooded by night and grazed by day gave a crucial extra few weeks' grazing to local farmers, but because rivers could be blocked and unblocked at any point along their length,

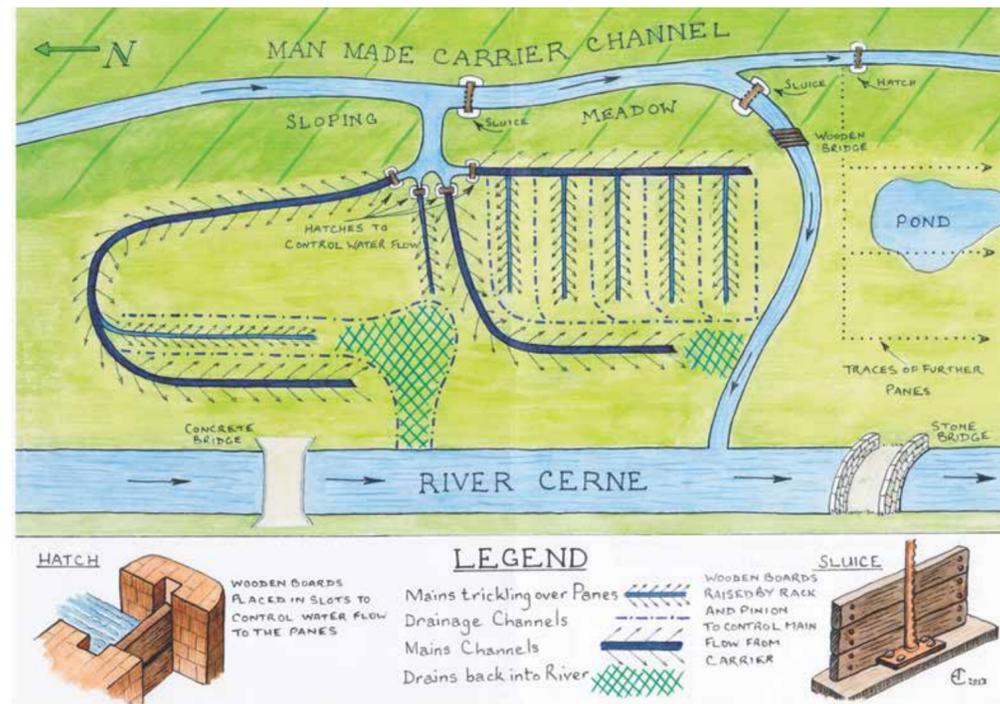
complex negotiations in longer river valleys would be needed so that the people at the top of the river valley kept their drains clear and did not steal all the water from those at the bottom.

Likewise those at the bottom had to make a contribution - either physical or monetary - to keep the communal water moving. Watermeadows eventually died out for three reasons: the advances in - and the increased use of - fertilisers and crops that could be planted, the prolonged dip in sheep prices, and the introduction of tractors that could either not be used in, or would destroy the structure of, the watermeadows themselves.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the old Ministry for Agriculture Food and Fisheries (MAFF) gave grants to farmers to destroy the bedworks in their water meadows to increase productivity.

*This article was first published in June 2018 edition of Dorset Life - The Dorset Magazine.*

*All rights reserved; reproduction without written permission forbidden.*



Above: Water returning to the River Cerne  
Right: The wonderful illustration from the watermeadow leaflet showing how the panes were arranged  
Below: Close up of a hatch



Clockwise from main photograph:  
HRH with Alex Matthews and Gill Ellis  
Jessica Kelly, Milton and Sarah Hussey, David Collicott  
John Lavin  
Julia Gough and Nicola Ratcliffe-Wilson  
Alan Roe, Noel Shuttleworth, Betty Shadbolt and Maureen Roe with HRH  
In the foreground, Gilly and Mike Roe  
David Boden with HRH  
Guests in front of the new houses



# The Princess Royal visits Stuart Court

Stuart Court in Minchinhampton had some very distinguished guests at their garden party at the start of June. HRH The Princess Royal, accompanied by her husband, Vice Admiral Sir Timothy Laurence, attended the event and performed the official opening of the seven new properties on the estate.

Preparations had been set in train many months earlier, following Estate Manager Milton Hussey's suggestion to invite the royal couple. The princess' home, Gatcombe Park, is less than two miles from Minchinhampton, and she and her family are often seen around the village.

The day dawned with gentle sun and intermittent cloud, and temperatures had reached a pleasant 18 degrees as tables and chairs were set out on the lawn, adorned with freshly-picked flowers from the gardens of Stuart Court. The deputy estate manager, David Collicott, a retired police officer, was the natural choice to assist with security for the event, welcoming guests at the gate, checking their invitations and handing out name badges.

All the residents of Stuart Court, along with Cognatum staff and guests, were in place to see Princess Anne drive her Land Rover into the grounds shortly after midday. There she was met by Her Majesty's Vice Lord-Lieutenant for Gloucestershire, Robert Bernays, who in turn presented the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, Charles Martell; local councillors, Milton and

Sarah Hussey; and Cognatum chairman, Alex Matthews. As the princess walked towards the receiving line, the sun broke through the clouds for a few moments, bathing the estate in soft sunshine and provoking a ripple of excitement. Alex and Milton then escorted Princess Anne to the show house where she was introduced to David Boden, CEO of the development company, Pacalis. Sarah Hussey accompanied Sir Timothy.

Whilst the guided tour was taking place, everyone meeting the royal party was ushered to their correct positions. As Princess Anne emerged from the show house the sun shone again, and she was introduced to the assembled guests. She and Sir Timothy then circulated amongst all the other garden party guests, and enjoyed several minutes chatting with Noel Shuttleworth, Life President of Cognatum Estates.

Enjoyment was high and time flew by. Alex Matthews gave a short speech, thanking The Princess Royal for her visit and praising the new development, the beauty of Stuart Court and the vision of Noel Shuttleworth in setting up the English Courtyard Association. Princess Anne then unveiled a beautiful hand-carved plaque and was presented with a posy of flowers by Mrs Gill Ellis. By now it was time for her to depart for her next engagement.

Drinks and delicious canapés were served and the garden party continued into the middle of the afternoon. Everyone agreed that it had been a lovely occasion.



# COGNATUM PROPERTY

RETIRE IN STYLE



No.20 Summer 2018 [www.cognatum.co.uk](http://www.cognatum.co.uk)



It is fair to say that the housing market is quiet. In our own niche, aimed at buyers downsizing from more expensive houses, enquiries have remained remarkably consistent over the past few years but, with many buyers' properties taking longer to sell and prices static, the process requires more patience and some planning.

In attracting downsizers, nothing is normally gained from simply cutting prices. In a difficult market there are other ways to improve salability and sale prices. Whilst some buyers are looking to stamp their own mark on their new home

through major refit and decoration, others are not and are more attracted by the idea of moving straight into a comfortable house. Either way, when a property is put on the market both the time it takes to sell and its price will be improved by anything from a simple redecoration and new carpets to a major refit. With this in mind, we are working with Cognatum Estates to provide a new bespoke service for owners to make this process as smooth and easy as possible.

For more information about properties for sale please see [www.cognatum.co.uk](http://www.cognatum.co.uk) or get in touch with us direct on 01491 821170 or [property@cognatum.co.uk](mailto:property@cognatum.co.uk).



£525,000

## 12 Bramley Grange, Bramley, Surrey

Just 100 yards from the high street in a pretty village, this large two-bedroom second floor apartment has lovely views over five acres of mature gardens. There is a splendid indoor swimming pool and secure garaging.



£330,000

## 22 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

In a near picture-perfect setting a two-bedroom cottage forms one end of a former flax barn, with a garden room and two private terraces.



£375,000

## 2 Frosts Mill, North Mill Place, Halstead, Essex

On the Essex/Suffolk border, a large and highly-unusual three-bedroom cottage, with two attic rooms and some original mill machinery.



£450,000

## 3 Wyke Mark, Winchester, Hampshire

In a wooded suburb on the north side of the city centre, an open-plan two-bedroom ground-floor apartment, with private terrace and garage.



£499,950

## 8 Wye House, Marlborough, Wiltshire

A two-bedroom cottage set in an elevated position overlooking a beautiful garden, just 250 yards from one of the grandest high streets.



£299,950

## 14 Badsworth Gardens, Newbury, Berkshire

A spacious one-bedroom second-floor apartment with lift access, it has a large central sitting room, with a Juliet balcony over the gardens.



£500,000

## 22 Eylesden Court, Bearsted Green, Kent

Next to the village green and with a backdrop of oast houses, this two-bedroom cottage is set in four acres of grounds to enjoy.



£410,000

## 4 Bluecoat Pond, Christ's Hospital, West Sussex

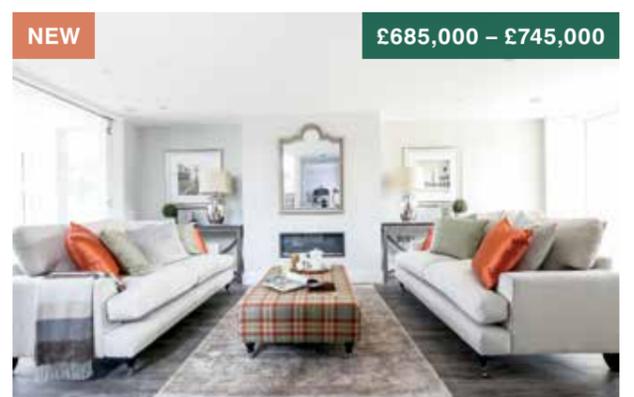
Close to Horsham this two-bedroom cottage with a small conservatory offers delightful views over an ornamental pool and gardens.



£399,950

## 8 Framers Court, Lane End, Buckinghamshire

In ideal walking country, tucked into a sheltered hollow just off the high street, a two-bedroom cottage with a private terrace and garage.



NEW

£685,000 – £745,000

## Stuart Court, Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire

Brand-new, stylish and very spacious energy-efficient properties. The show house can be viewed by appointment – just four available.