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A finer vintage

IF blame has to be laid anywhere, I suppose it should be laid at the door of John and Ilana Alder.

I mean if they hadn't upped sticks all those years (about twenty, I think) ago and left their bijou apartment in Fulham for the rural splendour of Brompton Ralph, things might have been very different.

I wouldn't have spent all those weekends trying to fit two children, two dogs, two in-laws and one wife into the mighty Peugeot. Nor would I have begrudgingly set off on the Sunday, usually with hangover, for that return journey to what seemed like the other side of the world.

Anyway, we did, and we fell in love with Somerset from the start. So taken were we with our new affair that much of our precious time down here was taken up with visiting estate agents and

looking at properties.

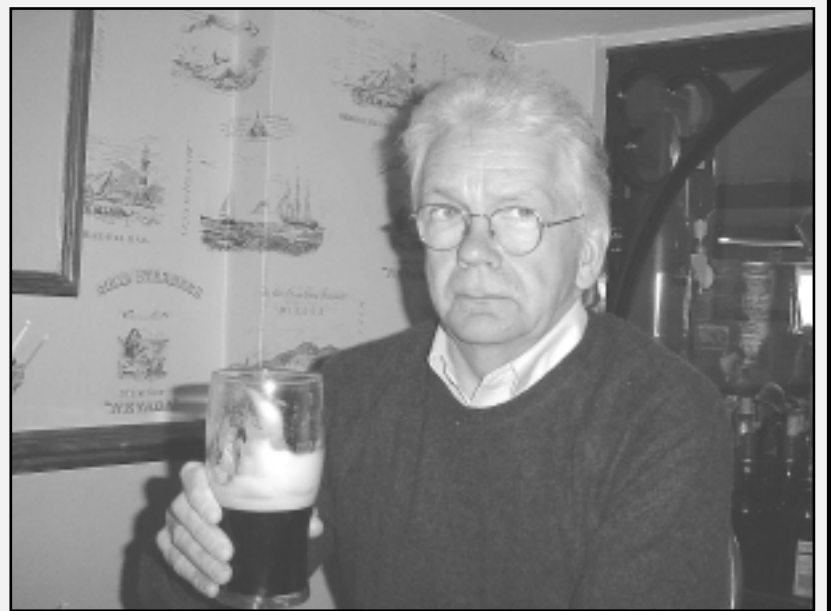
As I recall, we actually started making offers on places which was totally barmy as our kids were half way through their schooling and to move at that stage would have been ridiculous.

So, our weekend visits to Somerset continued over the years. John and Ilana had now moved to Wivey (via Penarth) and we were able to acquaint ourselves with this beacon of the county.

I was continuing my career as a jobbing actor which generally means being out of work when, in 1999, following my father's death, I was asked to join the cast of 'Last of the Summer Wine'.

We had now decided that we would seriously begin looking for property in the Wivey area and, the following year I was in Yorkshire filming when I got the call.

Mary, my wife, had gone to visit Ilana (always



dangerous as she usually returned either with a house or a great deal of shopping) and on their travels had stumbled across a bungalow in the beautiful village of Combe Florey. I dashed southwards, saw the property and knew immediately that it was for us.

To cut a very long story short - we were gazumped, there were hold ups selling our London house, my faith in financial institutions (if I ever had any) was destroyed, the dogs got a

bad attack of fleas but, eventually, we bought Combe Ford.

Not quite in Wivey I hear you say. Correct. But near enough to get our meat from one of the best butchers in the world, get our nails from an almost traditional hardware store, wander round a couple of antique shops and follow the Wivey Trail.

I have been asked to write a regular article for the Messenger on the antics up north on the set of 'Last of the Summer

Wine'. This will be a pleasure but I warn you that if I should see even one person on the streets of Wivey at 6.15pm on a Sunday evening, there'll be trouble!

We love it down here and though I spend so much of my time on motorways going from north to south and east to west, I now, really look forward to coming home.

I never knew that summer wine would travel so well.

Tom Owen

I'm Sure You'll Have Noticed . . .

I'M sure you'll have noticed that there are others than Jas who contribute to the Messenger with words on matters that trouble them and hopefully most, if not all, readers.

Last time, an anonymous column kicked off about using a mobile phone when driving a vehicle. Jas did that one a while back but, of course, it didn't make any

By our columnist Jas

difference. Some people still do it.

The difficulty seems to be that one feels obliged to switch on when you get the ringtone and then, for the ladies anyway, the thing's in the handbag.

Jas's better-half heard that noise as she was driving towards the lights in Church Street the other day. Of course, the caller hung up long before she could stop the car.

Such is modern technology, a flick of the wrist, as it were, and she traced the number and returned the call.

From observations casually made when in town, it does seem that if you are carrying a mobile then it must be used as often as possible.

You have to keep checking to see if there are messages for you, and that's just for a start, because the thing hasn't made a sound for several minutes.

If there aren't any then make one to somebody even if you've nothing to say. That's when you're walking so no hazard worth mentioning. When you're driving is the no-no.

We enjoyed Herbie Best's Problems With Words (last edition) and so far have been extra careful in the placing the apostrophes in this piece. Let's see if we can get it all to rights.

As far as Messrs M&S's trading title is concerned, we can suppose that Mr Marks was singular despite the "s" and that Mr Spencer was singular too as there

was just the one of him.

So when they set about opening their first stall in Leeds market they needed to say whose it was. It was Marks & Spencer's stall. Any questions?

Well, what about that ampersand? We consulted the Oxford Companion to the English Language (two pages and many thousands of words on apostrophe, so we quickly moved a dozen pages back) where it has "Once a common replacement for and, it is now largely a flourish on business cards and letterheads". To which we could perhaps add storefront fascia boards.

A long-gone aunt never wrote "and" in her letters, always a form of "&" and doubtless that was what she was taught a hundred years ago.

During the big dig down South Street in August (during which some of the signs

directing Milverton as a route apparently took to their feet), we wandered along for a nosey round.

Amongst the general chaos we spotted a newly installed road sign just by the entrance to the school grounds. It read a little odd somehow so we checked elsewhere.

On the wall of a cottage on the corner, the road name sign said, in white enamel on blue, "Russel's". Which suggests, perhaps, that this bit of land once belonged to someone named Russel.

Then we looked in Wilkie's useful street map booklet and there it's "Russell's" so down the years the man had his name a touch lengthened, it seems.

Back to that new road sign and, yes, we knew there was something odd: "Russells". Apostrophes anyone?

Jas

Up on the Farm

SEPTEMBER - is this a summer month or the start of the Autumn?

The last few days have been really hot haven't they? I do not mind if autumn is nearly here as it is a colourful time of year, my favourite season.

I mentioned last time that Mandy was off to Zambia on a Kingsmead student exchange. They all had a fantastic trip and learnt a lot about living in a different country with a completely different culture.

Mandy said how dusty and brown everywhere was and how pleased she was to see green grass and rain when she came home.

Most of the harvest is now complete and many fields are being prepared for planting the seeds for next year. An arable farmer's job follows that of nature, a never ending cycle throughout the year.

We have a good supply of straw under cover for the winter months when the cattle come in and for how long is anybody's guess!

We met up with the farmer who bought our first bull, Topper, the other day. He has been really pleased with



him and is waiting for his first offspring any time now. It will be really interesting to see how they turn out.

All our calves have grown well this summer except perhaps one, but there is a very good reason for that.

His mother, Mitzy, had to be shot as she had injured herself badly. We had the vet to examine her as she had a badly swollen and inflamed leg.

Nick said that she had ruptured the tendons in her back leg and although he could treat the injury it would not

get better and would just prolong her suffering. We immediately agreed with him that putting her down was the best and only kind option.

We then had the problem of what to do with her bull calf. If we had left him out with the herd he would have wandered away trying to find his mother and so we have brought him indoors.

He has the company of the young bulls in the next pens and is fed well. However, for a young calf there is no substitute for a mother's milk and love, so he has not grown so well. He has some catching up to do, which he will do given time.

The vet has been back since that sad day to examine a couple of cows to see if they were in calf, some good news, some bad.

The cow we thought was in calf is not but he is hopeful that she will be with the help of an injection to boost her hormones.

The other one is about four months in calf which is good. You win some, you lose some, so they say! Have a colourful Autumn.

Gill Turner