

# Mendip

the  
**mendip**  
society

*Caring for the Mendip Hills*

**The Newsletter of The Mendip Society**

**Issue No. 154 • November 2018**

The first page contains important information – please read first.



'The Living, Working Environment'



See the spectacular starling murmuration on Ham Wall p4



This would surely have made you take notice of the Preacher p8



Mendip Snowsports Yeti helps fund-raise for Mendip p11



You could have been in Ireland instead of North Somerset p12



A new ringer fledges on Mendip p14



**Victory on PROW AX/15/1**  
New access and gated entrance south of Jacobs Fold p15



Do you remember in previous newsletters what Tania's Wood looks like? Thick, tall, mysterious, beautiful? It's amazing to learn that this picture shows a planting day of that very wood, on one of the only 2 days of snow that winter, February 1991. From photos sent to us by Jan Glyn, Glynn England's daughter, more to come in the March 2019 newsletter.

## *In this issue*

**Society Business p2 & 3**

**Gone & yet to come... p4 -7**

**The Wall paintings of Cameley p8 & 9**

**An important Government Review p10, 11**

**An Amazing 330 million years old Limestone Find p12 & 13**

**New Ringer Fledges on Mendip p14**

**News from the Hills p15**

**Society News p16**

*The views and opinions of our contributors are not necessarily those of the Mendip Society. We are always happy to receive items for publication if they are signed; although we will withhold the name if asked*

## **MENDIP SOCIETY Annual General Meeting 2019**

Next years' AGM will be held on Friday 29th March at 7pm  
The venue has not yet been finalised. All the paper work will be included inside the March Newsletter as before.  
This is due out March 1st 2019

## SOCIETY BUSINESS

### Subscriptions

**Peter Janes** wanted this notice, which is relevant to all members, to be in a prominent place so no-one could miss it – and, after all what is more prominent than the first page in any newsletter?

**Tempus fugit**; 2018 seems to have whizzed by. Unless you are a life member your subscription for 2019 will be due on January 2<sup>nd</sup> and, in the hope that you will want to renew, a membership card is enclosed. The subscription rates are unchanged at: single £18, single 60 years or over £15, family / joint £25. We would greatly appreciate prompt payment which may be done in one of the following ways:

1. Send a cheque payable to The Mendip Society to: Membership Secretary Mendip Society, The Cottage, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 5EJ. Please add a note giving your name and postcode so that the payment is credited to the right member.
2. Transfer the appropriate amount to the Society's account: Mendip Society, sort code 309184, account number 00596344 at Lloyds Bank. Please give your name and initials as the reference and notify the Membership Secretary of your renewal by email ([membership@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@themendipsociety.org.uk)).
3. If you have previously set up a standing order please check that the amount is correct.

If you decide not to renew your membership please let the Membership Secretary know, and destroy the membership card.

The following businesses give members a discount on production of a valid membership card: The Gorge Outdoors in Cheddar, The Summit Outdoor Leisure shop in Portishead, Country Innovation in Congresbury and Outdoors & Active in Weston-super-Mare.

Please remember that we have no way of updating your contact details unless you let us know. Also, if you are a UK tax payer and would like the Society to benefit from Gift Aid on your subscription but have not completed a Gift Aid mandate contact the Membership Secretary. Conversely, if you have done so but are no longer a UK tax payer, please let us know. “

### Our New Website – by John Moore our Webmaster.

The Mendip Society has a new website.

[www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)

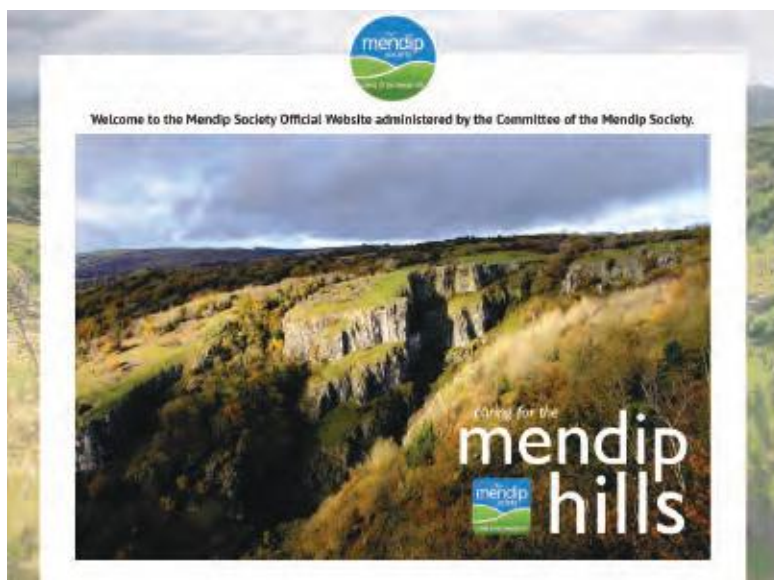
Why have we (the Committee) decided to abandon and write off the previous one? The old one ([mendipsociety.org.uk](http://mendipsociety.org.uk)) had become over complicated and expensive to maintain (£700 for one year). The new website ([themendipsociety.org.uk](http://themendipsociety.org.uk)) is simpler and designed to meet the everyday needs of the Society and will as a result, be cheaper and easier to maintain (£80 per year). The emphasis will be on ensuring members have up to date information on Society activities and reports and pictures of recent events. To make it simpler we have dropped the special membership login and the facilities to make payments via the website.

To ensure that the Committee maintains close control of the Website, we have introduced the following measures:

- The Website will be managed and maintained by an external Website Management company (recommended by several other local charities)
- All Contractual aspects with the Management company (including Finance) will be managed by the Mendip Society Treasurer
- A Webmaster will be appointed by the Committee and be responsible for keeping the Website up to date. The Webmaster must report to the Committee on a regular basis.
- At least one other Committee member will hold the access codes for the Website.

If you would like to have anything put on the website contact John on 01934 842868 or on

[webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk)





## From the Chair

By Richard Frost

It was while I was having a look at our current Membership Guide that it struck me -it has been some time since we refreshed this leaflet and I read it carefully looking to see if it needed updating and modernizing.

It turned out not to be a very difficult task because other than a couple of minor changes, the values the Society held all those years ago still hold good today. In an ever changing world, I found a lot of comfort and satisfaction in discovering that those five headings fully cover exactly what we are all about; if you have not read it for sometime, let me remind you of them.



**‘Recreation & Education’; ‘Conservation’; ‘The Living & Working Environment’; ‘Minding Mendip’ and ‘Who We Are’.**

We will be putting the new guide in our Welcome pack to new members but they will also be available at all our events and functions. When you have read it and re-familiarized yourself with our aims and values please make a point of giving it directly to a friend or leaving it somewhere public so that others in the Community can read it as well.

Sometimes we are seen as just another walking group and organizers of interesting talks, but we are so much more than that. Our close association with the AONB and CPRE, plus others, brings us into direct active partnership with those groups whose activities are going to help us all in Minding Mendip. Because this precious area cannot do it on its own; the best part is that getting involved is easier than you think.

## The Newsletter – Important news - by the Editor

This newsletter which you are currently reading is one of three printed and posted to you three times a year; we consider it a very necessary part of the Society and the main way of keeping in touch with our members. However it has to be faced that the printing and posting of said items is the major outgoing expense we have from our yearly income; we also have to acknowledge that the cost of living, and therefore the cost of printing and postage will obviously rise in the future.

For a couple of years now the Committee has wrestled with this dilemma, it has been raised at the AGMs too – we have got to cut this cost somehow – or the alternative will be, we will have increase membership fees. This we do not want to do.

So we have taken the bit between our teeth and decided to see if we can go digital with our newsletter. For those in agreement the newsletter will be in the form of a PDF file on the website and we will send you the link to it by e-mail. The file will be a really manageable size, whether you print it out or not will be up to you. As editor I receive this file from the printer in order to proof read it and I can assure you that it is perfectly readable on a computer screen, though I can't vouch for the readability on a mobile phone, however smart, because I do not have one.

This way is not compulsory and we are not intending, for the foreseeable future, to ever have this as the only method of delivery. We know that there are members who do not have a computer or an email address, or even if they do, have no desire to read 16 pages of a newsletter on the screen. Some will always want to handle and keep the printed copy to re-read much later or to hand it on to a neighbour or family member and we respect that, in fact it is a good way to spread the information about the society to potential new members. But for those members who use their computer often and enjoy using it, and perhaps don't want paper piling up around them it seems a good solution.

And bear in mind that if you suddenly want to see it again and it's mysteriously disappeared from your in-box (these things do happen, believe you me!) I can always send you the PDF file again myself.

We would like to start a digital trial run with the March 2019 edition of the newsletter.- for this we will have to ask all those who are willing to do this to please send an e-mail to the membership secretary agreeing to receive the e-mail with the link to the newsletter on the website; before the end of the year. You can of course send an e-mail saying that you would still like to receive the hard copy just to make your preference clear. For those without an e-mail registered to us, no need to write a letter to tell us you want the hard copy, if you get an e-mail in the meantime do let us know though.

You can change your mind at any time. e-mail [membership@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@themendipsociety.org.uk)

One final thing – we have thought very hard about the options of either

A) reducing membership fees for those receiving digital newsletters or

B) increasing fees for those who don't

but we have decided that it would be just too complicated to run two separate accounting systems. So we will keep the membership fees as they are, but if this initiative is not successful we will reluctantly have to raise them for everyone for the first time in several years.

## GONE – AND YET TO COME!



The MendipRocks! Festival has come and gone for another year, we were so lucky with the weather the organisers, Somerset Earth Science Centre, the Mendip Hills AONB and ourselves, must have breathed a collective sigh of relief. Spread over four months there was an increased selection of walks, events, visits, talks, and of course, amongst all this we 'blew up a car'. See the extremely happy little boy who pushed the button, below.

But on a serious note – with only a couple of exceptions, the same two Society members have made these events happen by putting up and manning the gazebo, flying the flag (literally) meeting the public and helping young visitors make exciting things with natural materials; and more importantly the Chairman has led all our walks for the Festival single handed. This can't be right, with a membership of over 400 there must surely be a few that would be willing to help on these occasions, there aren't that many of them in one year of 52 weeks (occasions that is !) Please consider it, contact Richard or any member of the committee – and say "Yes, I'll help".

**CANCELLED** – Unfortunately we have had to cancel three popular events these last four months, all for very different reasons. In July Richard had booked us a trip to Steep Holm by boat from Weston, the trip is of course highly weather dependent- where did that gale warning come from? Also in July we had a sell-out guided walk, led by expert Chris Sperring on Mendip to see the nightjars, which had to be cancelled on the day because of the sudden onset of a sickness bug. And, very much to my disappointment I had to take the decision to cancel the charcoal burning event in Tania's Wood in August because after a prolonged drought the wood was a potential tinder box from even just one stray spark.

This just goes to show that these things do happen, but even more it shows the importance of the website; John Moore, our webmaster works to keep it bang up to date so we ask if members will please do their bit by checking the site as often as they like and certainly before going to an event or on a walk or visit. The address is [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)

Judy Newberry has arranged another visit to Ham Wall as she promised, to allay the disappointment of the nightjars (let us hope we can re-arrange this next summer); the Charcoal burning event will be sometime in April 2019 and this time we hope to combine it with a charcoal drawing workshop with a top artist as our tutor. It is uncertain whether a trip to Steep Holm will be mooted next year, please keep an eye on the programme leaflet and the website. If anyone is interested in doing the arrangements for this event please contact Richard for the information he gathered.

### SATURDAY 4TH AUGUST – IT'S A BLAST AT WESTBURY QUARRY

This event definitely went with a bang – the sunshine brought out the crowds, all lined up along the edge of the cliff above the quarry, safe on the viewing platform, to see the car down in the bottom blown up by a wee boy. Society member Nigel Taylor did all the wiring and setting up and Jhamal, whose family held the winning raffle ticket, did the business with the touch of a button.

As well as all the noise and excitement there was opportunity to explore the quarry's limestone geology and local fossils with geologist Peter Hardy, and watch the darting wild life in and around the huge, really healthy looking lake that has been fashioned out of the disused quarry floor. Welcome tea and cakes were to be had too, it was a really lovely day out. The Ebbor Gorge family day and the final conference day of the Festival are being held just as we go to print so the reports from these days will be in the next newsletter.



Jhamal made his badge



Picture by Ian Sweetman



It says "I blew up the car"



## TUESDAY 21ST AUGUST – THE SOCIETY SUMMER SOCIAL

Just as it was last year, this evening was again sunny and warm so we were able to take the tables and chairs outside the Charterhouse schoolroom for our American supper; members surpassed themselves with the lovely selection of different dishes and plates full of tempting foods – we thought, ‘we’re never going to polish all this off’. Don’t you believe it – the open air and the singing obviously makes one hungry indeed!

The singing came from our friends Barley Rye choir of course, however the choir leaders were a little held up and after a bit of pitch practise, one of the members ably took charge- Emma proved a ‘natural’ conductor and the choir were good followers; she also brought the house down later in the evening with her solo of ‘Danny Boy’. Before it got too dark to see outside there was plenty of quite impromptu singing, accordion playing and solo dancing enjoyed before everyone came indoors with tables, chairs and play was resumed in the relative warmth of the schoolroom. The raffle was drawn for a Society fleece, bottles of wine etc, then the star prize for a family ticket for Wookey Hole Caves was won by choir member Alan George. Alan said he would never use it so he put it up for auction; it was very kindly bought by Keith & Joy Bristow and their two lovely Grandchildren (see page 16). All in all a very pleasant evening with friends, old and new.



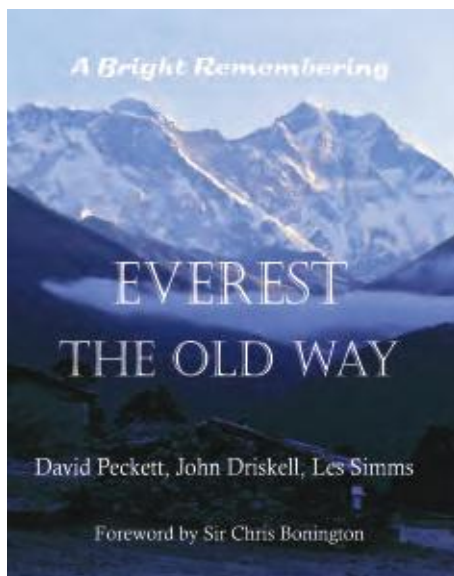
**IF you have any suggestions for a venue, date and programme for our summer social 2019, please do tell us – after all it is the members’ summer social**

*Left – Emma in charge*

P.S the reason Keith and Cathy were delayed? They were almost at Charterhouse when they had to return home to Littleton-on-Severn – they had forgotten to put the geese to bed - and foxes live there too!. A perfectly reasonable reason I would say.

## NOW TO LOOK FORWARD TO : **SOME TALKS, WALKS, & EVENTS THIS SEASON** **THURSDAY 8TH NOVEMBER – 2.30pm**

**“EVEREST THE HARD WAY” by John Driskell At the Wells & Mendip Museum BA5 2UE.**



On a family holiday to Western-super-Mare John Driskell was inspired by his grandfather’s tales of a sixteen year-old’s three year journey across America in the 1880s, to have an adventure of his own. Being a mountaineer from Lincolnshire John Driskell resolved to walk to Everest base camp (before the invention of trekking), and to drive there overland with a small group of friends.

This illustrated talk is based upon his book about that journey, Everest the Old Way, the story of four men and a woman who drove from Barnsley to Kathmandu in 1967 and then walked to Mt. Everest. John will be introduced by Terry Gifford.

Above – John Driskell. Details ring Richard on 01275 472797/chairman@themendipsociety.org.uk

**THURSDAY 22nd NOVEMBER****“AMPHIBIANS & OTHER INHABITANTS of MENDIP DEW PONDS”**

**by John Dickson of the Reptile & Amphibian Group. St. James's Church Hall, Woodborough Road, Winscombe BS25 1BA, at 7.30pm**

'The habitats found on the Mendip Hills provide homes for a diverse array of reptiles and amphibians. We will be introduced to these creatures, discussing their ecology and the challenges they face, with particular reference to the annual toad migration and efforts to help them safely across the road in Winscombe'. John is a member of the team currently restoring some of the ponds on Mendip, a project our Society is supporting.

**MONDAY 3RD DECEMBER 2pm****SPECIAL INTEREST VISIT – A GUIDED WINTER WALK TO RSPB HAM WALL RESERVE**

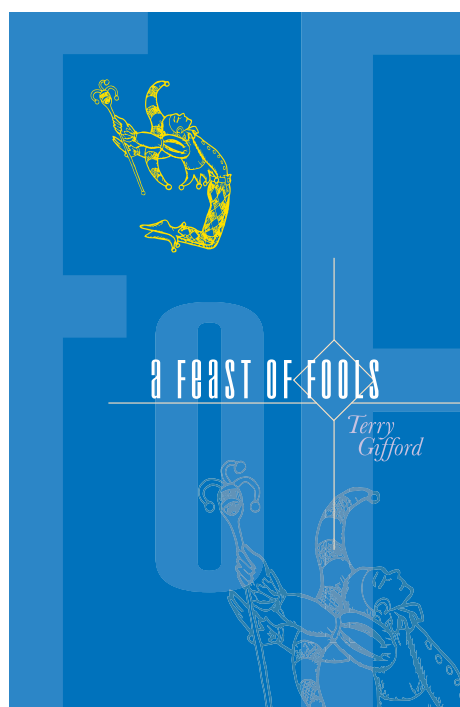
**– arranged by Judy Newberry**

Meet at the reserve car park Ashcott Rd Mere BA6 9SX (close to the Railway Inn), for a guided walk to see the many birds and wildfowl that migrate south to overwinter on the marshes escaping the bitter cold of their breeding ground in Northern Europe. Seasonal highlights include widgeon and teal, redwing and fieldfare and of course the starlings. We will stay for the murmuration which takes place at dusk when countless birds arrive to spend the night in the shelter of the reed beds, often attracting birds of prey as they do so. Warm clothing and gloves required; Cost £4 payable on the day, limited to 20. Book using the RESERVE button on the website, only. Car park charge £3, free to RSPB members. Queries- Judy 01749 672196.

**TUESDAY 11TH DECEMBER****“A FEAST OF FEATHERS” – by Terry Gifford and Stephen Moss**

**At the Wells & Mendip Museum BA5 2UE at 7.30pm**

The title of this talk is 'A Feast of Feathers'. It is followed by a joint book launch by Terry Gifford with *A Feast of Fools*, a new poetry collection asking 'Who are the fools in our world of climate change?' which features birds and wildlife, and Stephen Moss, President of Somerset Wildlife Trust, who launches his new book, *The Wren: A Biography* which follows his bestseller *The Robin: A Biography*. This will be a double act full of surprises.

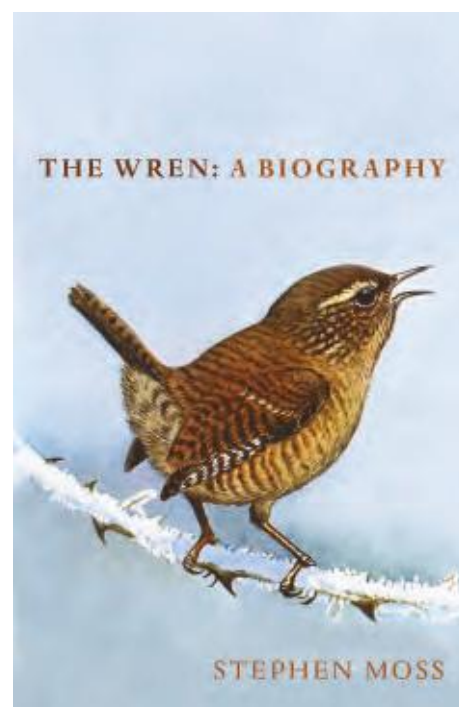


Terry writes : -

I can offer my book through the Newsletter for the discounted price of £8.50 (including p&p) of which £2.00 from each sale goes to Somerset Air Ambulance. Just send a cheque, with your name and address, to Terry Gifford, Ben Knowle Farmhouse, Castle Lane, Wookey, BA5 1NL.

For details of the evening ring Richard 01275 472797

e-mail  
chairman@themendipsociety.org.uk





**SATURDAY 5TH JANUARY 2019****THE SOCIETY WASSAIL AT THE VILLAGE OF WORTH**

Based at the Pheasant Inn, Worth, Wookey, this year's Wassail will again be organised by Terry Gifford and Gill Round. President Les Davies will be Master of Ceremonies and the ceremony itself will again be enlivened by the Barley Rye Choir, who will sing Somerset Wassail songs in all the right places, and may even organise another Mummers' play for us. We hope that warming our start once more will be Somerset Morris, a women's Morris side so come prepared for an evening of joining in!

As Worth is a small village and parking is limited, car sharing is encouraged; park up Castle Lane at the back of the pub. The address is the Pheasant Inn, Wells Rd, Wookey, BA5 1LQ. Starting at 6.00 pm in the pub car park this event is free but Barley Rye and Somerset Morris will have a collection towards the charity of their choice. Mulled cider will be on sale at the pub. Apple cake will be available for choosing the Wassail Queen/King.

Once again we will be booking all the tables for eating afterwards at the Pheasant Inn – if you would like to join us please send a deposit of £10 to Terry Gifford, Ben Knowle Farmhouse, Castle Lane, Wookey, BA5 1NL. For £15 there will be a carvery (with vegetarian alternative), plus dessert. There's limited seating, so do book now!

Very warm clothing, good shoes/boots for grass and a torch for light are all advisable. For information contact Terry on 01749 679128 or t.gifford2@bathspa.ac.uk

**FRIDAY 11th and SATURDAY 12 th JANUARY 2019****HEDGE LAYING DAYS WITH TINA BATH AND CHRIS CLAXTON****Tania's Wood , Woodbridge Farm, Ubley**

As before tuition days are open to members and non-members, both beginners and those with some experience, max of 8 places, which need to be booked. Shelter, parking and toilet facilities on site, hot lunch and drinks will be provided, included in the £20 daily rate. (members £15).

Directions, times and other details will be sent on booking by ringing 01275 874284 or email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com) and sending cheque, payable to 'The Mendip Society', includes lunch/drinks. **Please note** – places fill up very quickly, so don't delay to book.

**LOOKING AHEAD TO NEXT YEAR – dates for your diary****FRIDAY 29TH MARCH – the Society AGM; venue to be arranged.****FRIDAY 5TH APRIL 2019 – “MENDIPITY” - THE PRESIDENT'S QUIZ - 7.00PM**

at the Burrington Inn. We've had The President's Dinner & the President's Walk previously, now in 2019 Les will be Quizmaster of 'Mendipity' – a test of your knowledge of this lovely area of ours, the serious, unusual, funny, downright odd or 'warts & all' things in life on Mendip. . Jason at the Inn will provide a tasty 'ploughmans supper' at half time; teams of 4 or 6 pre-entered, or join one on the day. £10pp incl ploughmans; puds & drinks at the bar. Just come for the fun of it. We need to know numbers for the Burrington to arrange everything so please book by ringing 01275 874284 / email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com) .

**More details of the AGM and 'Mendipity Quiz' will be in the next newsletter due out on March 1st 2019.**



## Church of St James, Cameley

“Wikipedia” - The **Church of St James** is a redundant church in Cameley, Somerset, dating from the late 12th century. It is recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a designated Grade I listed building, and is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. It is dedicated to St. James of Compostela; it was declared redundant on 1 January 1980, and vested in the Trust on 18 March 1981.

We asked Peter Janes to go along to the September Harvest Festival Service and the rather special meeting, called by the ‘Friends of Cameley Church’, held afterwards in the tiny nave surrounded by the ancient wall paintings that make this gem of a church so special – and which were the subject of the meeting.

Cameley is a tiny hamlet in the north of ‘old Somerset’, mid-way between Bristol, Bath and Wells. Hiding in a tranquil valley just off the Mendip Hills it is a farming village that never grew up, mainly because it comprised one of the manors held entirely by the Hippisley family of Ston Easton. By the time the estate was broken up and sold in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bristol to Wells road (now the A37), a mile and a half distant from Cameley, had become a busy transport route. The roadside village of Temple Cloud had grown and flourished on the passing trade – becoming home to the assize courts, and in the 1920s acquiring a new, bigger, church. Meanwhile Cameley slumbered on in its rural bliss and its little church of St James slipped into decline. By the 1960s, with the population at an all-time low, the church was closed and passed to the Redundant Churches Trust (now The Churches Conservation Trust: CCT). Since then it has been cared for by local volunteers, the Friends of Cameley Church.

Cameley’s history reaches back much further than that of its usurper and was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. Over the centuries, life in this small, agricultural community inevitably revolved around its church which dates back to at least the Norman era. Various parts of that structure remain, including a lovely archway over the south door with asymmetrical capitals. Most striking of all, is how this church is a patchwork of bits and pieces from all the centuries and, thankfully, almost untouched during the Victorian era of enthusiasm for restoring and rebuilding churches. Sir John Betjeman described it as a ‘Rip van Winkle’ church and it is included in Sir Simon Jenkins’ book ‘England’s Thousand Best Churches’.

From the outside, a fairly modest structure, it appears disproportionate - almost disjointed. It has a fine, tall tower of red sandstone (once forming a Somerset fives court\*) whilst the north wall of the nave leans outwards at a seemingly precarious

angle and there is an unusual, massive set of stone steps leading to a first floor door. All most odd. But on entering the church for the first time it is impossible not to be taken aback – and to be transported back through the centuries. The interior is simply dripping with history, formed from two eras of Christian tradition, Mediaeval and post-Reformation. The first thing one notices is the array of crudely hewn timber pews which probably date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century; it’s not often one gets to sit on a 600 year old seat. Contrasting dramatically is the ornate carving on the panels of the C17<sup>th</sup> pulpit and reader’s desk. In three corners of the nave are family box-pews from the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – doubtless reserved for the gentry whilst the hat pegs along the nave walls served to remind men of the village to remove their hats. As Cameley’s population grew, more space was needed so the cheapest way to go was up: the west gallery was constructed in 1711 and the south gallery inscribed “For the free use of the inhabitants”



was added in 1819. The somewhat uneven chancel arch is of Norman origin and, until the Reformation, there would have been a rood loft in front with side chapels, evidenced by apertures and the old doorway with a stone staircase set in the north wall.

So much for the structure and furnishings but it is the lighting and wall paintings that are of the greatest interest. Sunlight pours in through the lovely, clear glass windows, brightening now-subdued colours of Mediaeval wall paintings that once covered the entire internal walls with brilliant colours and vivid imagery. Whilst originally these would have formed part of the biblical teachings for illiterate congregations, all were covered up during the Reformation in the 1640s. Such paintings and symbols were considered unnecessary, if not heretical, and replaced with the 10 Commandments and the royal coat of arms, emphasising the status of ‘The Church of England, by Law Established’. Just what were these paintings, so despised by the Puritans and others?

Typically 12<sup>th</sup> century ‘dash-and-scroll’ simple decoration around the chancel arch, whilst on either side of arch, now behind protective glass, are early C14<sup>th</sup> coats of arms: the three lions of England and the inverted chevrons of the de Clare family, the Earls of Gloucester.





On the north wall are the most interesting paintings. Almost opposite the entrance door are the remains of a huge depiction of St Christopher – just his feet remain, in water surrounded by fish and a crab. Above that a reddish, false-masonry pattern may be the oldest painting in the church as this style is typically 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Behind the pulpit can be seen the image of a jester or knave, with horned hat (complete with bells), forked tongue and holding a marotte. Possibly painted before that is a man in armour on horseback with decorative bunting, probably representing St George.

Over the chancel arch is a finely painted set of the 10 commandments in decorative frame, surmounted by the sun representing “Lux in tenebris” (light in darkness). Prior to the Reformation this was often the position of dramatic ‘Doom’ paintings, depicting lost souls falling into Hell or happier ones rising to Heaven. Who knows what lies underneath these official strictures?

Such wonderful history, depicted on the faded and decaying plasterwork of this ancient little church. But sadly, following a professional survey, it has been revealed that the paintings are in a desperate condition, the plaster having blown away from the supporting wall. Urgent work by a specialist conservator is required if the paintings are to be saved. The cost is estimated to be £80,000. The Friends of Cameley Church have recently launched a fundraising appeal and have already secured some significant donations whilst the CCT is preparing a bid for heritage Lottery funding that hopefully will secure 50% of the required amount. A programme of activities is planned including education and awareness days to involve the local community and to let them know about this gem of history, so close and yet so far from the hustle and bustle of Temple Cloud and the A37.



Meanwhile, a visit to Cameley church is unforgettable. Do not forget to sit for a while, perhaps to contemplate and certainly to absorb the peace of this wonderful little church and its direct links through the paintings with the village populations of centuries past. - written by Robert Medland, ‘Friends of Cameley Church’.

*\*The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1925) describes **fives** as a ball game played with hands or bat in court with two, three or four walls. The name may be derived from the slang expression “a bunch of fives” (meaning a fist). The game has also been known as **hand-tennis** and historically was often played between the buttresses of church buildings in England. Fives is not the same as Long Fives, which is played in a real tennis court.*

On Wednesday 6th March 2019 Peter Janes will lead a walk in conjunction with this article, this will also appear in your printed programme.

**Cameley and St James’ Church** . Meet at 1.30 at Cameley Lodge, Cameley Road (BS39 5AF) for an easy 3 mile walk and a visit to St James Church. Although no longer used for regular services this ancient church is grade 1 listed and contains wall paintings dating from the fourteenth century. We have permission to use the hotel’s car park. Contact Peter 01761 221995. ST611575.

## ALHA – Avon Local History Association

“ALHA is the umbrella group for local history and archaeology societies in Bristol, Bath, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. It helps member societies by compiling an annual list of recommended speakers, and walks and by publicising societies’ activities through its newsletter and website. A local history study day is organised each year, and the AGM is accompanied by a lecture with a distinguished speaker.” [www.alha.org.uk/](http://www.alha.org.uk/)

The Mendip Society is a member of ALHA.

A newsletter is published quarterly full of news and items which may be of interest to many members, as many concern the area covered by our Society; it can be downloaded by all our members by using the link <http://www.alha.org.uk/newsletter%20156.pdf>

## News from the Hills –

Jim Hardcastle, Manager of the Mendip Hills AONB writes this article on a matter of both national, and more importantly to us here in Mendip, of local importance.



A national review of National Parks and AONBs was announced in the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan in March this year, and in late May the Terms of Reference for this were made public. The Review is to be led by the writer and journalist Julian Glover, and is to report during 2019.

The tone and framework for the Review is very positive, about helping protected landscapes to deliver more, and potentially having more of them. It represents the biggest opportunity for positive change for the AONB family overall since the work leading up to changes in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, and potentially since the original 1949 Act.

The objectives of the Review are given below, along with some brief commentary and information in relation to the AONB Partnership.

**“In the context of meeting both local and national priorities and wider environmental governance, the Review will examine and make recommendations on:”**

### **1. The existing statutory purposes for National Parks (NPs) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and how effectively they are being met**

Issues here include:

The difference between statutory purposes for NPs, which are far wider ranging and rounded but which would be very appropriate also to AONBs.

AONB bodies especially are hampered by the very limited degree of influence over key pressures of change and especially in planning issues in the areas; the AONB Partnership is not a statutory consultee. Plus, the effectiveness and potential of AONB teams is not close to being matched by the funding available.

### **2. The alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment**

There is a need to link AONBs ‘natural beauty’ with natural capital and ecosystem services, and to our heritage, to recognise more fully the value of landscapes in delivering a wide range of benefits to society.

### **3. The case for extension or creation of new designated areas**

The Mendip Society has long campaigned for an eastern extension of the AONB, but equally we should also look west, at Bleadon Hill. The AONB Partnership needs to have a clear position regarding the extension.

### **4. How to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets**

Individual governance of AONBs at present is through a Partnership or Conservation Board, as a result of the Review this could be amended or replaced entirely, which may require legislation. Conservation Boards and National Parks have Secretary of State appointees on them.

Collective governance of AONBs may mean looking at the role of the Charity, National Association for AONBs, which currently advocates, encourages networking and good practice for AONBs but plays no real ‘governance’ role.

Interaction with other national assets – it is not clear what this means, but it may refer to other designations which overlap with AONBs, of note in our case could be the National Nature Reserves and SSSIs.

### **5. The financing of National Parks and AONBs**

Core financial funding from Defra is the same principle for both NPs and AONBs but the scale is very different being a much smaller pot for all the AONBs to share out, thereby compelling them to generate more of their overall income from externally funded projects than NP authorities. There should be a strong encouragement to government to match the current positive words on helping protected areas to do more, with continued and increased government funding.

There is at least a decade of experience of concerted effort among AONBs to raise other funds, and while there have been successes and progress, it is clear that it is not at all easy to raise significant alternative funds for core costs. Most AONB teams have more sources of income now including fee earning services, trading, charitable etc, but the sums





returned from these are often still small for the effort expended. Trying to source core costs elsewhere inevitably has an impact on delivery and indeed sometimes strategic direction if this has to follow the money.

*Left with a 'Mendip Hills Fund' contributor.*

Raising funds for project delivery remains easier and a key part of the business model, though competition for Heritage Lottery Fund funding has increased significantly.

## 6. How to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing Designations

This is to be welcomed. We have undertaken projects on most of the key habitat features of our area including drystone walls, woodlands, commons, limestone grasslands and meadows, but much biodiversity is still in decline and there is so much more which could be done. Greater involvement in new farm environment schemes would be a step forward.

## 7. How to build on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing

The 8 points, under three headings, of this 2016 plan were as follows:

### Inspiring Natural Environments

1. Connect young people with nature
2. Create thriving natural environments

### Drivers of the Rural Economy

3. National Parks driving growth in international tourism
4. Deliver new apprenticeships in National Parks
5. Promote the best of British Food from National Parks

### National Treasures

6. Everyone's National Parks
7. Landscape and Heritage in National Parks
8. Health and Wellbeing in National Parks

All of these topics are also relevant to AONBs, and positive recommendations from the Review in this area are to be welcomed.

## 8. How well National Parks and AONBs support communities.

When National Park authorities carry out the Park purposes they also have the duty to 'seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Parks'. There is no such explicit duty for AONBs other than 'Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.'

Support for communities has in the past been delivered through things like the Sustainable Development Fund grant scheme – a Ministerial initiative whose funding became subsumed in the AONB 'single pot' of Defra funding and in most areas since lost to subsequent cuts. We created the Mendip Hills Fund on the same principles but funded by visitor giving schemes. One such was started by The Mendip Snowsport Centre, Churchill. They and their Yeti are now helping the Mendip Hills Fund to give grants to help local projects; visitors making an online booking can make a 1% donation that goes into the fund. The Centre appreciates the spectacular landscape of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which they are based and want to help protect the area. By helping their visitors contribute a small amount onto their online bill they are boosting the Mendip Hills Fund.

Ourselves, and many other AONBs, are delivering more 'destination marketing' projects that enhance access and raise awareness, like the Mendip Way, but while these can be very positive they can generate expectations around the AONB role which can become hard to meet. It can also generate questions e.g. if we oppose planning applications which people feel to have social and economic value, it can have a direct impact on the amount of work the team can deliver on the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. There is therefore a need for balance, and for adequate resourcing in order to do more.



**1 Introducing the Young Rangers to the countryside and all its activities.**



**2 Creating cross drains on Blackdown to prevent erosion by rain run off**



## Where on Earth ? – In Badger's Wood – not so far away

An article in the North Somerset Times caught my eye recently – an environmental group which had helped us scything for several years in Slader's Leigh were pictured in a wood, shifting vast quantities of earth on a hillside – and I wondered why. Ian Chambers of the Backwell Environmental Trust explains why. But first my quick introduction to BET.

**BET** was founded in 2004 to protect the beautiful countryside surrounding the historic village of Backwell, North Somerset. They presently own and manage two nature reserves totalling nearly 22 acres, both containing many rare and endangered species with a history dating back at least 5,000 years. The two reserves are Jubilee Stone Wood and Badgers Wood, one on either side of the Backwell Combe road, high upon Backwell Hill, where it descends from the ridge above, on which Bristol airport is located.

The woods are a mixture of broadleaf woodland interspersed with open areas of calcareous grassland; the reserves have an amazing archaeological history and contain the ruins of a 14th century rabbit warren and cottage, (see photo below), 17th century lead mines and a (restored) 19th century lime kiln.

*OS Explorer map – Grid Ref ST494681*



### Ian takes up the story:

When the BET volunteers were busy reinstating a stretch of little-used public footpath in Badgers Wood in August this year, they made the amazing discovery of an unusual and extremely rare limestone rock formation buried under the woodland soil. Further digging and research by members of the Avon RIGS Group and Bristol Naturalists has identified this to be a 'limestone pavement' inclined at an angle of 22°, between 328 and 334 million years old, with its characteristic crevices and gullies, all buried just a few inches under the soil.

Test digging has suggested the rock formation may well continue under the soil for large parts of the hillside and so over the next few years, the BET volunteers will be gradually removing the soil to expose more of the amazing limestone formations underneath.

What makes this discovery so fascinating is that the present scientific theory is that limestone pavements were formed by glaciers scouring the bedrock during the last ice age followed by long-term chemical weathering by slightly acidic rain.

If you look at maps of how far south it is thought the glaciers reached during the last ice age and compare it to where limestone pavements are found in Britain & Ireland today, virtually all of the pavements are in areas previously covered with glaciers. So the theory goes that the reason there are no large limestone pavements in southern England or the Midlands is because the glaciers never reached this far south. So this discovery in Backwell has raised a lot of intriguing questions.



*Bet volunteers excavating the pavement*



**BET** is working closely with local geologists and they are suggesting that this discovery could well lead to either the theory of how these pavements were formed having to be re-assessed, or more likely, the reach of the glaciers during the last ice age could be under question as they may have travelled further south than has been previously thought.

So at worst, our pavement will turn out to be a fascinating and mysterious geological enigma, but at best, it may well overturn the present scientific theories about how limestone pavements are formed and/or how far south the glaciers actually reached during the last ice age.

No wonder the geologists are excited!

Ian adds:- I have come across one geologist who thinks that limestone pavements are actually quite common in southern England, he thinks it's just that they are all buried under the soil and nobody has discovered them yet. I tend to think if that was so, BET wouldn't be the only ones unearthing them.

*Ian Chambers – Backwell Environmental Trust*

## A BIT OF INFORMATION

### What is a Limestone Pavement?

A limestone pavement is a flat expanse of exposed limestone formed by a combination of chemical weathering and erosion. Most limestone pavements in the UK are formed on Carboniferous limestone and whilst there are superb examples in Yorkshire, they are an extremely rare geological feature in the south of England.

### How do Limestone Pavements form?

1. During the ice ages, much of Britain was covered by ice sheets and glaciers. During this time, the soil and weaker surface rocks were often scoured away, leaving broad expanses of exposed limestone.
2. With the retreat of the glaciers, moraine material was left behind and a forest eventually established itself. Mildly acidic rain water percolated through the soil which gradually dissolved the limestone surface.
3. Under the soil, the rain water picked out the joints in the limestone and gradually widened them by dissolving the rock. This created deep fissures called **grykes**. The blocks of limestone (or clints) were also attacked by the rain and small holes and gulleys (or **karren**) formed on their surface.
4. When the ice finally retreated, the soil on the top of the limestone pavement was eroded, washed down into the grykes and removed altogether by the drainage system. The exposed limestone pavement would have been constantly chemically weathered, resulting in the further widening of the grykes and the karren.
5. Badgers Wood's extensive limestone pavement is today buried under 5 – 20cms of soil. Probably sometime in the last thousand years, decomposing vegetation has accumulated on its surface, slowly turning into soil and has consequently buried the once exposed rock surface.



*Memories of The Burren in Ireland? – close up of pavement*



*Work on the Warrener's cottage this September*

## Clints and Grykes

**Clints** are the blocks of limestone that form the pavement. They are chemically weathered so that their surface is covered with a series of pits and hollows (called **karren**).

**Grykes** are the fissures separating the clints in a limestone pavement. They may be well over a metre in depth and formed when the joints in the limestone were widened by chemical weathering.

**This November, SAT 24th – Richard Ivens**, himself a member volunteer of BET is leading a walk to Backwell Hill and Valley. He wrote – “A 5 mile walk with good views, a limestone combe, woodland and a nature reserve. NOW – (with the discovery of this amazing limestone pavement his walk has an added bonus,) PLUS – Ian, author of this article, will accompany the group and tell us all about it at first hand. Put it in your diary straight away – meet 1.30pm at Backwell Church, Church Lane ST493683. Contact Richard 01275 852786, check out – [www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org](http://www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org)

## A successful new ringer fledged on Mendip by Terry Gifford

Members will remember Terry's article on the process of ringing ravens in a quarry near him in the newsletter last year. Here he waxes lyrical on this year's operation and, maybe not so enthusiastically on 'the stink in the nostrils'!

It must have been the 'early onset' syndrome. I'd thought I'd been copying the bird-ringing abseiler into the emails arranging a date, but at some point in my morning 'paper' cycle into Wells I realised too late, today was the day, I obviously hadn't been, - I'd have to do it myself. For the last five years I'd been abseiling from the rim of this quarry in the Mendip hills to clear the vegetation - buddleia, brambles and ash tree saplings - from the rock climbs. That was no problem. But for the last two years the experienced bird-handling abseiler had descended to the nest with me and together we'd ringed the chicks. I'd recorded the fledging date of the last one to leave the nest. Building this data is important for future unknown conservation issues, such as the possible reactivation of the quarry, or, say, a proposal to turn it into some kind of Centre Parcs. Last year, the most reluctant young raven took a week longer than his siblings. His eager wind flapping was equally matched by the determined grip of his claws on the woven nest wood. These are rare breeding records because this hidden limestone abandoned quarry was fenced and locked with access only to cavers and climbers.

I *could* remember the code to the lock, but I needed my glasses. (One evening I'd lingered too late, pruning past sunset, and then could not read the lock, even with my glasses. The bike and myself had to surmount the high fence. Such is the risk in the tempting outdoors of a Mendip dusk.) I rigged the belay loop from a tree to reach the firmest bit of cliff edge and clipped in a karabiner, a check that it was screwed up, clipped into my harness and it was time to walk backwards off the cliff edge. This is always a dodgy moment, but especially here because the top rocks are loose and need care to avoid testing my helmet when I get lower. Slowly does it, down; when I was level with it the stink of the nest hit my nostrils. And there were four giant black beasts gaping their red beaks in silent screams. Time to deploy the gardening gloves and call for the pillow case to be lowered on a line. Only the first bird called out as I gently but very firmly tried to lift it out, it would really rather not leave the nest. So a lot of wool came into the pillowcase in its claws, as was the case for each of its silent siblings. I called up and then had what seemed an age hanging on the rope as they were given a numbered British Trust for Ornithology ring which might enable their own progeny to continue to grace the skies of the Mendips in the future. The pillowcase was then lowered down and the occupants restored to their birth place.

Is this too much detail? I love this nest and its family. No detail is too much for me (except, perhaps, the smell which stayed in my nose for a week), as for Gilbert White, John Clare and the rest. Their obsession and passion for detail, for knowledge - really for the birds - is alive in so many people in the UK today that it must be a force for conservation good. On our very first occasion Mike ringed them. Then last year he'd brought a fellow ringer who'd not handled ravens before. This year he brought not only his fellow ringer but a young RSPB employee and his ringer friend's daughter, a trainee ringer, Mya-Rose.

Mya-Rose deserves a whole paragraph - no, an essay - all to herself. There will be a book - her book, or several, no doubt. I should, at this point, simply send you to the Birdgirl blog, although this 15 year old birder and BAME activist did not blog about her first ringing of a raven as a trainee. Perhaps she's quietly building her own expertise and authority for herself. I noted from the photographs that Mike sent me later that Mya-Rose had actually ringed one of the young, (right) so another initiation notch was logged and another kind of fledging had been successful on Mendip this spring.

*Photo –Mike Bailey*

*ED – you will remember the picture in the December'17 issue of the newsletter, of our President presenting the prestigious Environmental Youth Award to Mya-Rose at the Bath & West Show in June '17; she started the Bristol based organisation 'Black2Nature', getting Black and Asian city dwellers involved in natural history and environmental issues. Looks like she is still steadily adding to her own environmental skills.*





## Public Right of Way (PROW) AX15/1

I have written in a previous newsletter about the PROW behind the Webbington Hotel which had been 'appropriated' by a neighbouring landowner, who had effectively closed and diverted it, maintaining that the diverted way was the definitive path. It forced walkers following the West Mendip Way, off the Way but also stopped the folk of the Compton Bishop area getting up onto the National Trust owned Wavering Down, as they had always done. We asked members who could remember using this path any time in the last 70 years to write to the Parish Council in support of their claim that the closed path, by then partially built across, was in fact the true definitive way. This had to go through a process of legal requirements of much complexity. Richard Parker, Compton Bishop Locum Clerk said in a letter to us: -

"We are delighted that this over-long enquiry has reached the right conclusion."

This all started in 2013 so it's been a very long and arduous journey. I think the lessons learned are that one should never give up AND all ancient records should be preserved.



*New step & rail, Barton road entrance*

## A President's View



Summer has now slipped away, to be replaced I hope with a kind Autumn. These past few months were some of the hottest on record and I can't remember anything quite like it since 1976/77. This has been a good year for the holiday maker, but a bad one for the farmer. Many have had to break into the winter feed in order to survive. We will only ever feel their plight when we are hit with higher prices at the retail outlets, so let us all spare a thought for those who ensure our survival through the food they produce.

I can't believe we are heading towards Christmas, as ever I will experience the 'ground rush' of the last weeks and days, having made little or no advance preparation. Whereas I am a firm believer in keeping Christmas in December, there will not be another opportunity for me to wish you all the very best over that festive period.

Looking back, there have been a lot of things going on.

The walking group continues to go from strength to strength, the Nature Reserves are continually improving and providing both wildlife protection and public benefit. Thank you to all who are involved with the wide range of work that this Society is now carrying out. Without you it simply would not happen. Please tell your good friends and associates what is going on here and get them involved as well.

Well, here is a picture my machine cutting the last strip of grass in Slader's Leigh Nature Reserve at the end of August. Again thanks to all of those turned out to clear up afterwards.



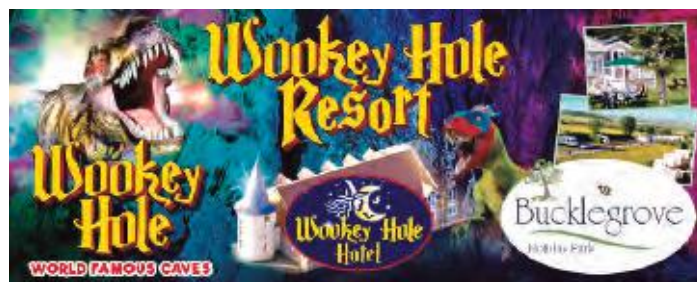
I certainly hope to see many of you at the Quiz Night in April...How's your Mendip knowledge? What ever you are doing, do it well and enjoy life! - Les

## SOCIETY ROUNDUP AND NEWS & VIEWS FROM OTHERS

**From the Editor** – You will already have read about our Summer Social on an earlier page, and the lucky family who now have the ticket for an exciting visit to Wookey Hole.



Here are Keith and Joy Bristow with their two Grandchildren on their way home from Charterhouse that night. Have a great time everyone and thank you Wookey Hole for the prize.



A very sad task again this issue, to tell you of the death of another founder member – Sue Beer (formerly Blakeney-Edwards).

Committee member Pat Farrant says: “Some of our older members may remember Sue, who sadly died a few weeks ago. She and her former husband Piers, the local Cheddar doctor, were founder members and did much to further the aims of the Society in its early days. The success of the Mendip Exhibition at the Bishop’s Palace in 1971 was mainly due to Sue’s enthusiasm and organising skills in getting people from all walks of life to take part in promoting the diversity of Mendip and the work of the Society.

After leaving Cheddar, in 1988 she and her husband David restored a C16 Manor House near Cowbridge, S Wales as a very successful guest house until ill health forced them to retire last year. Sue was a very talented lady who will be sadly missed”.

AND as the Manager of Slader’s Leigh, I was extremely shocked and sorry to be told of the death of one of our talented volunteers, Roy Betts. He was also a member of the ‘Friends of Poets Walk’ and their leader Angela Slotte writes – Roy had been with the Friends of Poets’ Walk from day 1, 15th September 2011. Twice a year he headed up our small scything team to mow the steep, uneven and often stony slope of the Wain’s Hill Iron Age fort ramparts in Clevedon. A man of few words, he worked tirelessly on this difficult terrain for 3 hours at a time, while always on the lookout for the occasional fungal species, which he would name for us.

Roy was a highly skilled and dedicated scyther and someone we could always count on – an example to us all. He is irreplaceable. His wife Sue assures us that he died doing what he loved best.

I can only add that Roy was a volunteer who never stopped until the task was not only done, but done to his own very high standards – It was his passion and the Mendip Society will also be the poorer for his passing.

*Judith T*



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