

# Mendip

the  
mendip  
society

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 164 • April 2022

*Caring for the Mendip Hills*

## ENSURING THE WELLBEING OF OUR SOCIETY AND WE HOLD A LIVE AGM 2022



ABOVE. Mick Fletcher adopts some of our Small Leaved Limes; they will all be found new homes in a year or two.



TOP: A wet hedge laying training day in Slader's Leigh, they still enjoyed it!  
ABOVE: Wassail Queen (Vanessa Dennett in disguise) together with Les Davies, Master of Ceremonies, taken by Richard Frost aka 'scarer of evil spirits'.

### MENDIP SOCIETY AGM

**THURSDAY 21ST APRIL 2022 AT 2PM for 2.30PM START IN  
ST. JAMES' CHURCH HALL, WINSCOMBE. ALL PAPER  
WORK FOR THE MEETING IS ON PAGES 2 & 8-12.**

## From the Chair

Dear Members,

My first year as Chair has flown by.

We have finally been able to resume some of our popular walks in and around the Mendips, and our and other local rural skills trainings are opening up popular volunteering opportunities within the Mendip Societys' Nature Reserves.



**I would personally like to thank our Members and Volunteers who have worked so hard to make these activities happen once again.**

It is inevitable that the recent pandemic and worldwide atrocities will have a long lasting effect on everyone's life, it has certainly shown how quickly 'staycation' and 'working from home' has altered the way people use and regard the Mendip Hills, but it is unfortunate that recent Planning developments have done little to enforce the special qualities of the Mendips. I hope that within the aftermath it will strengthen our drive on how and why we need to make the changes that help to save and secure our precious Mendip Landscape and water sources.

Information on the Mendip Society Small Grants Scheme is available on the website [www.themendipsociety.org.uk/about](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk/about), where you can download the leaflet as a pdf

*Tina Bath, Chair*

## And From the Secretary

The Committee felt that it was time that we ventured out into a society which is trying to get going whilst 'living with covid', so we plumped for a live meeting for this years' AGM on April 21<sup>st</sup>. All the details are in the middle of this newsletter as usual, so that they can be pulled out for reference. Members and non-member friends are welcome to the business part and the talk afterwards. (Actually, they aren't quite the middle pages, you might prefer to bring the whole newsletter with you?)

We will be taking all the precautions we can to make it a safe meeting – the doors will be open, the chairs distanced, please wear masks if you are able but definitely please don't come if you feel under the weather in any way at all. Doors will be open at 2pm and the meeting will start promptly at 2.30pm. After refreshments our very first illustrated talk in far too long a time will be given by Dr. Andy King, a colleague of Danielle Schreve, who will introduce him.

Obviously we hope that things proceed as planned, but life is still quite uncertain sometimes; covid is still around and if the hall or ourselves feel that a live meeting is an unnecessary risk it may have to be cancelled at short notice. In this case we will send a circular e-mail round to all on our email database, it will be on the Home page of the website and also on our Face Book page. Please do check for yourselves anyway; if you would like to be on the database, which is the

quickest and best way for us to contact members, please send a request to Peter at the address below.

Item no 5 on the AGM agenda is the election of the Committee. You will see that our longest serving member (since January 1974 – practically a society founder member Pat), feels it is time to hang up her Committee Hat. We do understand Pat –



but we will miss you tremendously, with your wisdom, all your local contacts, the tremendous store of local knowledge and your great willingness to help where-ever and when-ever you can. But – I expect your ever growing family will keep you busy enough.

But this also means that, more than ever, we will have to ask for some volunteers to join our very small number of committee members in order to keep running efficiently. If anyone is willing to stand/nominate another person please would you send me an email stating your name, their name and that they are willing to stand. This must be endorsed by the nominee, so we are certain they will not be surprised on the night!. A printed, or hand written copy should be given in before the start of the meeting.

Several nominations would be wonderful!

Judith Tranter – [secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk)

Peter Janes - [membership@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@themendipsociety.org.uk)



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## WE HAVE ENJOYED – A FIRST MENDIP WASSAIL by Sally Davis



January 17<sup>th</sup> 2022 – twelfth night in the Julian calendar. It's a very cold, beautifully clear night as I arrive in Burrington for my first Mendip Society Wassail. Away from the bright lights of Weston I am greeted by a sight I don't often get to see so clearly – a perfect starry sky.

We assemble in the Village Hall and Tina and I begin preparations – mulling lovely apple juice from Rickford Community Orchard and cutting the traditional Wassail cake. One piece has a small bean hidden within and the person discovering it will be our Wassail Queen or King – but which piece was it?!

No matter, with cake shared and Queen Vanessa duly robed and crowned, we process, with lanterns, torches and songs, down the street to Fry's Orchard led by Les, our Master of Ceremonies, and the Barley Rye choir.

Under a full Wolf Moon, (no hungry, howling wolves in Burrington as far as I could tell) but incantations, songs and a hullabaloo to wake the trees, banish evil spirits and ensure a good harvest. With trees toasted and blessed, we process back to the hall for hot, spiced apple juice and lots of apple and orange cake and enjoy traditional songs and a mummers play from the Barley Rye Choir. Below: Barley Rye Choir, taken by Sally



So, besides being a very enjoyable evening with a great sense of fun and community spirit how do I reflect on the traditions of the wassail? Is it all just a bit bonkers?

It seemed to me that the wassail is an important reminder of our connection to the land and the importance of community. It's a chance to get together, to share and celebrate the traditions that are such an important part of the landscapes and cultures of cider making regions. In these fast-paced times, it's great to slow down a bit with a night out in the orchards, singing the songs of generations before and harking back to a simpler age and it underlines if nothing else, how out of touch with seasonal traditions Dry January is! Cheers!

## THE WRINGTON AND BURRINGTON HEDGING SOCIETY COMPETITION MATCH 12th March 22

From Beginners to Champions – there were 39 entrants in the 4 classes of the competition; it was a perfect day for it and the hedge was perfectly laid at the end of it, and those watching full of admiration for the skill displayed in the execution of this ancient country craft. As usual our Chairman will not blow her own trumpet so



I will do it here for her; because Tina won firsts in the Open and veteran Classes (two hands full, above); it must have been all that practice when laying the two hedges in our reserves earlier in the year, Tina!







## AND SOMETHING ELSE TO LOOK FORWARD TO



Following on in the footsteps of our first time all Mendip quiz a couple of years ago at the Burrington Inn, our Master Quizzers have come up trumps with another occasion to put on our thinking caps and remember things we never even knew we knew – with the

### “Something of Everything Quiz”

**FRIDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE @ 7.30PM**

An evening for members, friends, families and non-members alike, playing in teams of 4-6, to include a light supper. The venue is not finalized yet, but it is likely to be at The Wellsway Inn, Wellsway Hill West Harptree, ticket price likely around £10; The contact will be Mr Les Davies and all details will be put on the website, on our Face Book Page and also sent out by e-mail shortly, as soon as they are confirmed. So, form your best team and get in the quiz mood.

### GULLY CAVE SUMMER DIG – Society Visit. Tuesday 27th July 2022



We have booked our visit this year for Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> July. We will meet in the Ebbor Gorge car park probably around 10am and all walk up to the cave together. It would be great if anyone who has not yet had the chance to even visit the site before could join us this year.

The way up the side of the gorge is admittedly a little bit of a challenge for the ‘not so agile as they used to be’, (and here I definitely include myself) being quite a climb up a flight of cut steps for most of the way but for those members we might be able to find another way.

We limit the numbers to 20 because of the available room on the site, all the arrangements and how to book for this day will be in the July newsletter. July 27<sup>th</sup> is near the end of the fortnight’s dig, so there is a fair chance that the team might then be near to reaching the very bottom of the original cave and who knows what they might find there? Photo by Clive Burton.

### A ST. GEORGE’S DAY MUSICAL EVENING IN BURRINGTON – Saturday 23rd April 2022

You may remember a poem in this newsletter last year by Mike McLennan of Rickford entitled The Vale of Wrington? Mike is now compiling a book of his poems, written over many years about everyday life in his beloved neck of the woods, including his worries about the threats he sees to it in the great rush for development. Entitled ‘A Mendip Corner’ and illustrated by another village resident, the proceeds from its sale will be donated to Burrington Church and the Childrens’ Hospice South West.

Whilst the publishing process is going on, a group of talented musicians have put together a programme for a ‘Musical Evening with a cheese Ploughmans’ – to be held in Burrington Village Hall on Saturday 23rd April (St. George’s Day) with the proceeds to go to the two same organisations. Doors open 7pm, for 7.30- 10.30pm, tickets are £12.50 each.

Just guessing – but some drinks available might just be the lovely apple juice and cider that the village has made from its own apples from their orchard. Contact Mike for tickets on 01761 462586.

### SUNDAY 24TH APRIL 2022- WALK FROM EAST HARPTREE at 11AM



Meet at the corner of Water Lane and Whitecross Road, East Harptree, BS40 6AA. ST56854 55873. A 11am start and bring a snack/picnic lunch. This is the walk that was cancelled on 20th February because of the stormy day. The walk is four and a half miles long, one steep climb up towards Smitham Hill with views to Chew Valley Lake.

Members and non-members welcome. Moderate. Please pre-book; maximum number of fifteen. Walk leaders: Phil & Shirley Ousley 07866869241

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F4DA4AA2BA6F8C34-sunday1>



## THE WINSCOMBE ROUND –

### A circular walk around the Vale of Winscombe and Lox Yeo Valley – Mike Turner

In the June 2016 issue of the Mendip Times Lincoln Garland described the Vale of Winscombe in the Mendip Hills as ‘an unsung natural treasure’. In that article he gave details of the geology and natural world contained in it from ancient woodlands, lime rich grasslands to limestone outcrops and lowland mires. Standing by the remains of the Rabbit Warreners’ hut on the top of Dolebury hill fort you can observe for yourself this splendid valley to the west, formed millions of years ago by great flood waters and to the east the flat red sandstone top of Black Down and Beacon Batch at its head.

Having lived in Winscombe for over 25 years and walked many times around these areas, either taking groups of local Scouts on activities and hikes, walks with family or friends or a peaceful individual stroll, there is always an enjoyment of ever-changing sights and sounds, whatever the weather. However, one thing that never seems to happen is getting weary of doing so. From this enjoyment of the Mendip Hills and the region around Winscombe an idea was hatched to create a walking route for everyone to enjoy.

In this article the background to the walk is given to help you in capturing the knowledge about our ‘unsung natural treasure’.



*Dolebury Warren © Chris McAuley - geograph.org.uk*

#### Creating the Winscombe Round

As many of us found, one of the very few benefits of Covid 19 lockdowns was the opportunity to walk more locally, directly from our doors. But it also gave us more time to work on projects. Knowing, and talking to, locals in the Winscombe area, people have spoken about a walking route around the hills that surrounds Winscombe, but as far as it is known, no one had actually defined what it was. So, with ‘lockdown time’ available, boots that needed exercise, a map and waterproofs, out we went to create a route which could be used as a challenge, a walk of discovery or just for enjoying the fresh air.

With the Strawberry line neatly cutting the route in two and other available paths it was found that it was possible to create a selection of routes enabling the whole route to be split into two halves or quarters all starting from the same place – the Millennium Green in Winscombe. This enabled Rounds to be defined from 12km (8miles) to 36km (22mile). Having defined the Round, the next stage was to make locals and visitors aware of it and so [The Winscombe Round Website](#) was born. The website contains route descriptions, blogs about the walks and the points of interest it passes to increase enjoyment.

#### The devising of the route

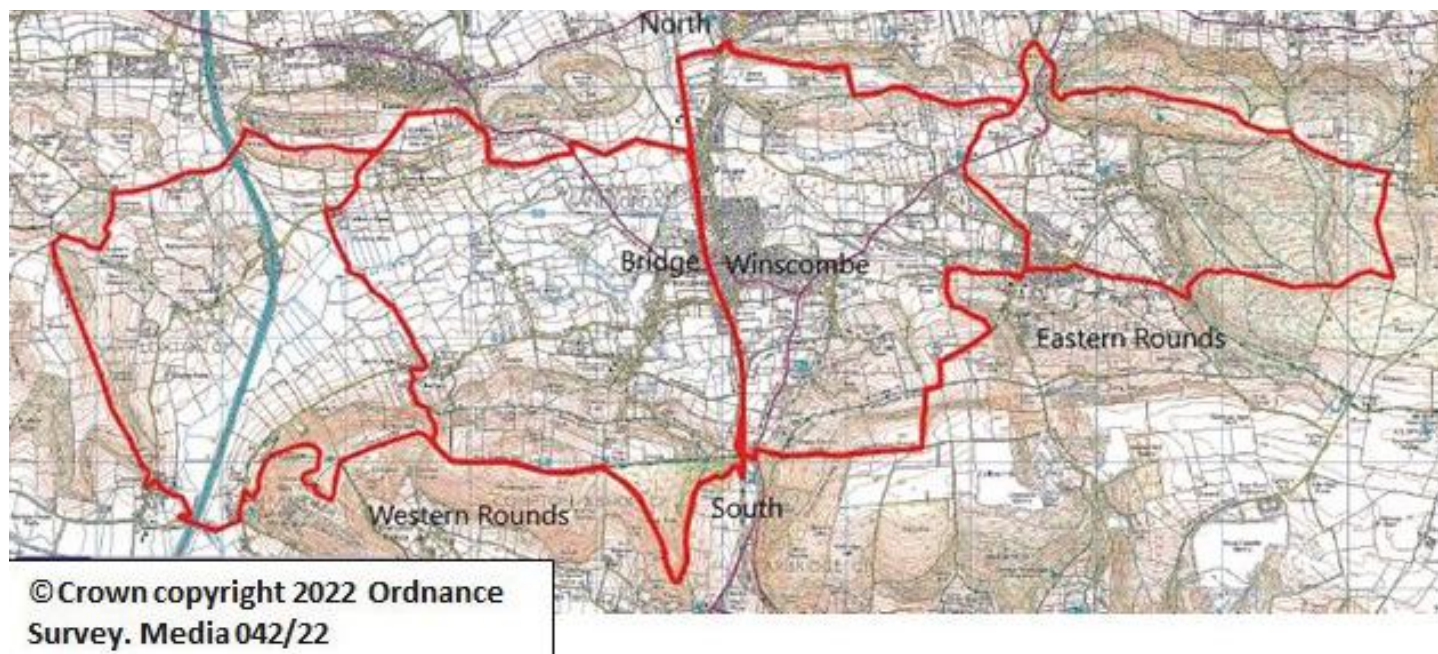
When looking at possible routes for The Winscombe Round challenge a set of rules were followed although like all good rules these could be broken if necessary. These were:

- Going over as many hills as possible whilst still in view of Winscombe – there’s 10 of them
- Keeping fully to public accessible paths and access land
- Keeping away from the Mendip Way and other popular paths
- Making road crossings as safe as possible
- Not to go along stretches of roads
- Going through as many nature reserves or past ‘items’ of interest as possible
- Providing the possibility of short cuts and variations to the route
- Don’t start routes at popular walkers car parks

The result was a route that, apart from being totally within the Mendip AONB, passes through 15 Nature Reserves, 4 SSSIs and nationally important bat conservation areas, all with different characteristics. The Round is also full of history with a main thoroughfare to and from the Mendip lead mines of the Romans running through the Lox Yeo valley, limestone quarries and kilns, calamine and yellow ochre mines, iron age settlements, disused railways built in the 1800’s, pretend castles, Prehistoric ritual Standing stones, medieval boundary earthworks and caves containing bones of animals from a long time ago. The difficulty was covering all these in one route.

The Mendip Way and Limestone Link, long distance paths, are met during the Round and like some of the roads are impossible to avoid. In the area there are many paths which have become very popular and with the necessity of getting to them, car parks are overflowing. Therefore the idea of starting the route in Winscombe which has public car parks, not over run by walkers, was born. By doing so this also provides many facilities at the start and finish which can be used before and after a long day exercising.

### The Route



The route initially starts along the Strawberry Line and going clockwise, it goes over Sandford Hill and Dolebury Warren before turning back westward on Blackdown. Dropping through Rowborrow Warren and Shiphams, it heads back uphill to Callow Hill. Dropping off from this high point there is a loop to do, taking in Slader's Leigh, before heading through Kings Wood up onto Cross Plain and Wavering Down. Doing another loop around Crooks Peak the West Mendip Way is joined until it gets to the top of Christon Hill. The final leg, now going eastwards, heads along the sides of Banwell Hill and Banwell Plain before re-joining the Strawberry Line to return to Winscombe and the facilities which it provides to enjoy! If you do the whole round as above you will have covered nearly 36km (22 miles) and walked up 1100 meters (3600ft), but you don't have to do it all at once to earn refreshment in Winscombe.

### The website – The Winscombe Round

Leading on from developing the walks it came to mind that, wouldn't it be good to provide a forum for people to add information about the route. So 'blog posts' have been added to allow the site to grow over time. These have been broken up into five categories



The Gallery – Pictures from around the Rounds, at different times of the year and in all types of weather

The Ground Below – What is the geology of the area: the rocks, mines, and caves etc etc ?

The Nature Above – What could you come across on the Rounds: the animals, insects, plants, fungi etc etc ?

The History Around – What history do you pass on the way: buildings, settlements, remains, life etc etc ?

The Step Stories – Stories from around the Rounds by those who may have been on them

Therefore if you have information you would like to add to the website it would be great to hear from you so the site can be developed further.

By the time this is published in the Mendip Society Newsletter, the Vale and Hills of Winscombe will be bursting into life so please go and enjoy your walks and wildlife and if you have the time also drop an email to the [winscomberound@gmail.com](mailto:winscomberound@gmail.com) about what you have seen or know about, along the route so the website [The Winscombe Round](http://The Winscombe Round) can expand.

**Mike Turner, a local and a Scout hill walking District Instructor, is also a volunteer with the AWT and Mendip Hills AONB.**



## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, THURSDAY APRIL 21ST 2022 to be held in the St. James's Church Hall, Winscombe, OPEN 2pm for 2.30pm start.**

### **AGENDA - Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President**

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on March 26th 2021. As this was a 'postal meeting' held through the newsletter and all necessary documents had been circulated before the date of the meeting, the resulting responses form the short Minutes as written below. There were no queries from any member arising from the reports as published in the March 2021 newsletter.
2. The Chairman's' report (not given here) and the Annual report
3. Summary Report of the accounts for 2021. Copies of the income and expenditure account 2021 will be available to members at the meeting, and on request from the Treasurer otherwise.
4. Other Relevant Reports – Membership, the website, Rights of Way, and Walks Organiser, and for the two Society Reserves. Any questions and points of information on these.
5. Election of Officers –, including any new nominations: the President takes the Chair.
  - a) Election of Prime Officers – The Chairperson and the Treasurer – both are willing to stand.
  - b) Other members of the Management Committee. Mrs Pat Farrant has decided to retire this year; all others are willing to stand again. (Peter Janes, Richard Frost, Clive Constance, Judith Tranter and Mike Rolfe).
6. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor. The date of the Annual General Meeting 2023
7. TEA AND CAKE followed by our 'After Meeting Talk'

### **BUILDING STONES OF THE MENDIP HILLS Dr Andy King**

When considering the geology of the Mendip Hills, one usually immediately thinks of grey coloured Lower Carboniferous limestones and purple-red Devonian sandstones.



*Dr Andy King at work*

However, the geology of the Mendip Hills is much more varied than 'just' these rock types, as important as they are for helping to create dramatic gorges and stunning landscapes as well as providing aggregates for large-scale quarrying activities.

In this presentation, Dr Andy King (Principal Geologist with Geckoella Ltd) describes and illustrates a selection of the locally sourced building stones (approximately 240 to 170 million years old) that contribute so much to the special character and built heritage of the Mendip Hills. Several of these building stones, and their form of architectural use, are unique to the Mendip area.

### **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – VOTING RESULTS**

Congratulations to Tina on an unanimous vote for the position of Chairperson of the Mendip Society . The returns were as follows: 78 members responded of which 12 sent postal votes.-

- 57 approved the annual report / 21 didn't vote on this at all.
- 77 voted 'yes' for Tina as Chairman
- 78 voted to re-elect the committee 'en-bloc'
- 67 voted for the constitutional change /11 either didn't vote at all or abstained.



## The Annual Report for March 2021 – March 2022

It has definitely been a year of ups and downs, hopes and fears, lock downs and opening –ups, multiple jabs in arms, masks-yes or no? and often seemingly endless zooming! But we are nevertheless still here, maybe a bit quieter, but still visible and active in parts.

For some members a major outlet has been the two reserves, because you can't stop nature growing and spreading, thank goodness. Tania's Wood has seen much coppicing of overgrown rows of hazels and a day of hedge laying training whilst Slader's Leigh had its normal autumn cut and rake, courtesy of the President, four days when pupils from Sidcot School came and learnt about 'hard volunteering' work and an over-grown hedge facilitated another training day. The flower meadow has been very popular with the public, who instantly informed us they couldn't get through when, in Storm Arwen our ancient oak cracked in half and completely filled the entire top end of the reserve. (very luckily falling in the middle of the night!). Footpaths are very important to people and during the year we learnt more about the two important projects now running – the Slow Ways Paths Mapping system of the entire UK and the recovery of our footpaths which no longer appear on our maps, the latter being co-ordinated by the Ramblers Association.

Of course, the talks programme was in abeyance for the whole year, however we did enjoy one zoomed from Professor Danielle Schreve on 'the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain', in particular our part of it, and then Dr. Roger Moses impressed us with his volunteering energy on 'The Bird Islands of Pembrokeshire'. For the rest of the year many members have had to rely on the Zoom and Teams talks offered by the many other societies we belong to.

In July we had a welcome return visit to the annual summer dig at Gully Cave by Danielle and her team from the Royal Holloway, University of London, of which we were a sponsor although a cancellation victim was the MendipRocks Festival in the autumn. Another project which also remained cancelled from 2020 was the StarFish City recovery, in partnership with other organisations, this is still on hold for the future. We were able to sponsor the programme/schedules of the Mendip Ploughing Society Match in autumn 2021 and it was a great day out with our gazebo quite busy with visitors. At this event we also launched our new Small Grants Scheme for groups of all kinds with plans for creating or restoring environmental areas for people and for wildlife. In 2021 we also helped Burrington Parish Council keep the public toilets they are responsible for in Burrington Combe open for the use of visitors to Mendip; several others are still in the complex important planning stages.

Our planning scrutiniser, Mike Rolfe, continues to keep a close eye on the planning applications on Mendip and to put in our objections if appropriate; this past year has had its fair share of protests, mostly because of the proposed expansion of Bristol airport, it's refusal by the planners and subsequent appeal, which was then granted. Another protest, not on the streets but by way of a petition on line, was launched by Cat Lodge, the North Somerset Archaeologist when Dr. Jodie Lewis, Head of the Archaeology Dept. at the University of Worcester, (and one of our members) was told the department would be closed and all the staff made redundant. In spite of a huge flood of impressive testimonials to the value of the course headed by Dr. Lewis' Department the University went ahead with its closure. But – big congratulations are in order for Dr. Lewis, who joined the School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences at the University of Bradford in February 2022, where she is very happy; Bradford's gain is definitely Worcester's loss. All Mendips' strong active archaeological groups owe their existence to Jodie and her many years of Mendip digs. She also assures us that those will still continue with her new students.

In August our walks programme started with a training refresher day and continues cautiously with a new 'on-line' booking system; in October we held two dry stone walling training weekends, one for beginners and one for 'improvers' at Chancellors Farm both were over subscribed (and two more will be held in 2022).

Last year ended with a much enjoyed event, the traditional Wassailing of an orchard in Burrington, with all of the requirements present to guarantee a good harvest next year – lots of noise and singing of traditional songs to scare away the evil spirits, cider to refresh the trees, and (mulled apple juice to drink and apple cake to eat by the revellers). Thanks are due to Sonya, the owner of the orchard, the Master of Ceremonies, our President, the Barley Rye Choir and Rickford Orchard group for the beverages, not forgetting member Sally, the organiser.

The Society owes a lot to the volunteers who keep all the various strands of our activities running together as a whole, without them there would be no Society – please consider how and where you could make a difference yourself in the coming year as we continue to climb out of the pandemic legacy. **Judith Tranter, Secretary**

## Financial Report for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 (overview)

A brief overview of the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021

The Mendip Society had a Surplus of £12,460.32 including a legacy of £20,000 (2020 a deficit of £1,714.08) after payments from the heritage fund totalling £3,890.00 (2019 £2,700.00)

Without the above mentioned legacy the income of the society was lower than in 2020 due to Walks, Talks and Events in 2021 not happening and subscriptions being voluntary due to Covid restrictions

The outgoings for 2021 were similar to those in 2020 but with some variation in types of expense i.e.

- Publicity down due to no films being made in 2021,
- Walk costs up because a leaders meeting/training was held to restart walks after Covid
- Management cost were back to a more normal level in 2021 as 2020 was low due to a cost that was provided for in 2019 not materialising so being reversed in 2020
- Postage varies due to when stamps were purchased.

The Small Grants made, were higher than in 2020, this was a post Covid reaction with other groups restarting up their activities so the society received more requests for grants.

The Society Accounts show it to be in a good position and it is slowly restarting its activities and hopes to have its usual range of Walks, Talks and Events again soon. [Marilyn Cattell – Treasurer](#)

NB: Last year the Treasurer reported that our auditor, David Woodliffe is retiring from extra-mural auditing and therefore appealed to our membership for anyone with profession skills to contact her with a view to assisting us this year with the auditing of our accounts. Unfortunately no-one came forward and she had to enlist the services of the Wells and Mendip Museum, where she volunteers, for the signing off of the accounts for 2021. Therefore the appeal for a volunteer to help with the accounts for 2022 is repeated now. Marilyn reports **that it can be someone who is not a qualified accountant, but who understands kept accounts and can sign them off as an 'Independent Examiner'**. (As can be seen on the 2021/22 accounts sheet reported on above – copies of these will be available at the meeting.)

### Membership Report for 2021/2022

The table shows memberships over recent years (as at March). As members are given until the end of March to renew, the totals include those whose renewals are outstanding (there will be a reminder inserted into your copy if you have not yet renewed for 2022). There is no entry for 2021 as we did not collect subscriptions last year as most activities were curtailed by Covid. Let me add a big thank you to those members who nevertheless made donation to the Society.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	Subscription cost
Single 60+	204	205	189	210	222	216	201	£15
Joint / family	122	117	112	117	114	107	110	£25
Single under 60	38	41	47	45	31	25	24	£18
Life members	18	17	16	16	16	16	15	60+ £375 < 60 £500
Small business	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	£50
Large business	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	£100
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>351</b>	
						302	279	
Subscriptions paid						64	72	
Subscriptions unpaid as at 07/3/22								

It may be seen that membership is slowly declining. To reverse this and allow the Society to thrive we need new members. Please encourage your friends and family to join. We also need members to assist the Committee; if you feel able to help please talk to the Secretary, Judith Tranter.

If you pay by standing order please ensure that it is for the correct amount (shown in the last column of the table). Thanks to a generous legacy, we have kept the subscription rates unchanged again (they were last increased in 2015). This is despite a steep increase in postage costs.

About 70% of members have signed up for gift aid. Gift aid allows the Society (as a charity) to claim an extra 25% of the value of your subscription from the Government. This is at no cost to you but you must pay sufficient UK income tax or capital gains tax in the current tax year to cover the sum reclaimed by the Society. A higher rate tax payer can claim tax relief (the difference between basic and higher rate) on sums given as gift aid, see [www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid](http://www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid). If you wish to sign up for Gift Aid, or if your circumstances have changed you should let me know and I will either send you a form or delete a current gift aid mandate as appropriate. [Peter Janes – Membership Secretary](#)

### The Mendip Society Website: [www.themendipsociety.co.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.co.uk)

We try to minimise the number of emails we send out to members so please keep an eye on the website, [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk), for less urgent news and information. For instance, details of walks and other events are shown there as we no longer produce a printed programme (for the time being!).

The Archive page now contains recent issues of the Newsletter and details of recent walks.

If you have any material – photos or news – which you think might be of interest to other members please contact Peter Janes at [webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk). [Peter Janes](#)



## The Mendip Society Nature Reserves in 2021/2022

Both the Society's reserves have contributed positively to the well being of both our members and the general community during the past year, the more so in Slader's Leigh flower meadow as there is much better access there via a permissive footpath through it, connecting Kings Wood and The Strawberry Line, whereas Tania's Wood is crossed only by a Public Right of Way at the very southernmost tip of the Nature Reserve. Our thanks to all our dedicated volunteers who seem to like coming to Tania's Wood and Slader's Leigh and working really hard all day; we certainly couldn't manage without them.

**Slader's Leigh Meadow** has been quietly looking after itself during the year of very mixed weather conditions, managing to have an exceedingly good flowering year – maybe there is a lesson to be learned here? We did manage to repair and strengthen the access steps from 'Muddy Lane' and replace the damaged reserve signs on the gates.

We had to call on the services of our President this year to get the scything done with his new power Allen Scythe and the help of the AONB volunteers. During the autumn we were pleased to welcome some students from Sidcot School, who walked along the Strawberry Line and over several weeks learned to handle the tools for clearing back our overgrown hedge boundary and also how owl and dormice boxes were annually checked. During a very wet winter spell the hedge behind the pond at the lower end of the meadow, last managed in 2009, was very well laid by a group of beginners learning this vital skill. (see front cover).

The ancient small leaved limes at the top of the meadow had a very narrow escape during the November storm 'Arwen' when one of the ancient oak trees on the opposite boundary, looking completely healthy, nevertheless split from top to bottom and fell across the the path, the fence around the limes and into the top of the one still standing. Amazingly not one of the little new lime saplings shooting from the layered branches around the mother tree was broken. But it did decide us to find a safe haven for those saplings elsewhere, 'just in case'! Mick Fletcher, (left) of Westbury Trees' came to their rescue, carefully digging them up, severing the branch above them, and planting them in their nursery to grow on before moving to a new home somewhere nearby. The branches can now be pegged down again to root once more. Our thanks to local Winscombe people who keep an eye open for us during the times when we can't.



**Tania's Wood, Ubley**, unlike Slader's Leigh, receives far fewer visitors but has seen far more activity during the last year. After the spring planting season, where we created a whole new hedge of small holly bushes donated by the AONB and planted over 500 whips from the Woodland Trust to bulk up our hedge boundaries, we had a summer of ad hoc work parties controlling the rampant growth of the deer bank and hedges between ourselves and the surrounding farmland. Work also included, as a result of various high wind storms experienced this year, the mending of farm fences where various trees had flattened them. At the end of July we had a 'one-off' visit from the top year of Blagdon Primary Forest School before they went their separate ways to Secondary schools – they had a lovely day, and Blagdon will repeat it in the coming year.

The autumn brought another planting season with over 700 whips from The Conservation Trust ('I Dig Trees') where we created a new hedge between us and our neighbours as a wildlife corridor. In January we held an event which involved the very first thing we ever did in Tania's Nature Reserve. This was the planting of a new hedge along the boundary of the portion of grazing field Glyn England added on to his gift of the wood to us, when he realised we would need a place to park cars for our volunteers and visitors. Because the field is fairly damp in nature the hedge grew extremely well and formed an ideal candidate for an early laying; a group of hedging beginners had a lovely crisp day for it, in contrast to the one in Slader's Leigh two weeks earlier. Finally just before the end of the planting season we took delivery of three lovely big trees (5-10 yrs old) provided by the AONB as part of their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative trees, a Hornbeam, a Sweet Chestnut and the one shown, a Green Beech, which is one species we don't have in the reserve. There are many in the surrounding area so we are sure it will like Tania's Wood.



*Left – planting the Beech to form a part of the newly laid car-park hedge  
(photo Malcolm Parsons)*

### Rights of Way Officers Report 2021/2022

In the past year, we have been consulted by Somerset County Council on eight proposed public footpath diversions, in the Parishes of Ashwick, Croscombe, Ditchet, East Pennard, Mells, Priddy, Shepton Mallet and Shipham.

All proposals were of a comparatively minor nature, relating to diversions away from farm work areas and private gardens and to provide safer and more convenient routes for path users. In each case, the new lines were considered acceptable and no objection was raised to them.

No diversion consultations have been received from either North Somerset or BANES during the year.

Aside from rights of way diversions, we have been in contact with North Somerset regarding, inter alia, a dangerous footbridge, the replacement of dilapidated stiles with pedestrian gates and the obstruction of a footpath with rampant maize (a perennial problem).

We have also been involved with the A.O.N.B. Service, re-waymarking the Butcombe Trail to conform with Butcombe Brewery's new corporate image.

**Dave and Margaret Parker. Rights of Way Officers. 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### Walks Programme Report - AGM March 2022

At the time of writing, I am finding that my comments and plans are all once more up in the air, as yet another wave of Covid does the rounds, changing the whole social situation yet again.

Both leaders and walkers have moved from a stage where things were beginning to flow again and we were getting back into our stride, to now again, one of a split situation, divided into two camps with some carrying on regardless and others going back into their own Lockdown. I say this because at this moment there is only one walk on the programme, scheduled for 24th April when there would normally be another two or three, and a recent request to the leaders for a few more planned walks, had no response.

Our new booking system has of course been running since August 2021, when those leaders on their refresher training day after the year or so shut down of all walks, decided to limit the growing number of walkers on any individual walk for practical reasons. In the early days of the new computer based system, things got off to a "cautious" start with an unknown system and the loss of momentum due to all inactivity. However, things slowly improved from having only a handful of walkers to twelve on the last one (mine), which was definitely a sign of a slow drift back to normal. Maybe the excellent weather helped !

My feelings were that most leaders were happy not to commit themselves to making arrangements for two or more months in advance. Any anti computer feelings have been solved by leaders accepting phone bookings beforehand etc. However, I am disappointed that some of the original leaders, whom we had at our days' training, have yet to step up to the mark. Maybe the recent Winter weather is a reason ?

I think we should remain positive about it, and continue to put on as good a programme as we can, as the alternative is not an option. I also know that three of our leaders have been Covid victims, so this may in time be seen as just a blip.

In passing I must heap praise on Phil & Shirley Ousley, without whom this whole booking system would not have started. Shirley's ability to research, and set up and run the booking system has been excellent and done without complaint. My intention now is to have another try at backing her up when needed, its necessity brought about by my personal failure to make the cyber system work for me!

**Richard Frost – Walks Coordinator 29/03/2022**

**5: ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** The President takes the Chair for the election of the officers of the Society.

- 1 Re-election of the Chairman and the Treasurer as prime members of the committee, both are willing to stand next year
- 2 Re-election of the Management committee. These serving members of the Management Committee: - Peter Janes, Marilyn Cattell (Treasurer), Mike Rolfe, Clive Constance, Judith Tranter (Secretary) and Richard Frost are willing to stand again. Proposed 'election en bloc

**6: A.O.B. from the Committee or the floor –**

### Now a message from the Committee \*with no apologies for repeating it from last year.

You will realise from the list of members standing for election to the Committee that we are a very small number, taking on the much bigger number of roles and tasks needed to run an organisation like the Mendip Society.

Maybe you didn't know that any member can volunteer for a specific task – such as press secretary, visits organiser newsletter editor etc, without being a member of the Committee- we can co-op you to be a member of the working group/ team that doesn't need to attend meetings, (unless you want to), is not a Trustee of the Society, but is vital to the efficient life of it, to the benefit of all, and the satisfaction of yourself.

If there's something you feel you could do in this way please contact one of us at the AGM or by email or phone afterwards, for a chat about what it would entail for you, and how it would work. Thank you



## Winscombe Community Centre Re-development receives Planning Approval

Since 2014 a group of Winscombe Community Association (WCA) Trustees have been openly examining ways on how to renew the community centre facilities in Winscombe. This led to a planning application being submitted last Summer to North Somerset. The application incorporated the refurbishment of the existing old school building and the replacement of the old annexes with a purpose-built facility, providing the additional space for the growing needs of the community.



Recently the Local Planning Authority (LPA) approved this application giving the green light to the next phase of this thrilling local project. From the onset the WCA challenged the Architects (B2 Architect) to create a design which would sit comfortably in its surroundings, be environmentally and ecologically friendly to build and run and to provide the right facilities that the community will need for many generations to come. This was truly recognised by the LPA who stated in their report

- 'the proposed development has been designed to be sympathetic to its surroundings as well as providing the community with an improved community facility'
- 'the location of the proposed development is well related to the community it is intended to serve and is genuinely accessible by sustainable modes of transport'.
- 'the results of a protected species survey conclude that there is negligible potential for protected species to be affected by the development'.

In Summary, this is a massive step forward with an approved design to take forward to funders and potential users. With nearly £1.3m of funding already identified, we have just 40% left to go. Individually, we can also dare to start dreaming of how we will use the Centre and the activities we would like to see.

The Trustees are now putting a step-by-step plan together for this next stage, challenging ourselves to ramp up the momentum to obtain funding, to make this much needed and sought after facility a reality.



To share this and hear from you, we are planning to have a 'drop in Q&A' session from 5:30pm to 9:00pm with a formal presentation at 7:30pm on the 27<sup>th</sup> April. We will also be at the WCA book sale on the 30<sup>th</sup> April. We would love to hear from you and as many locals as possible to answer any questions but, more importantly, to hear how groups want to use the new centre.

For more information send us an email: [info.winspace@gmail.com](mailto:info.winspace@gmail.com)



**BITS & PIECES: being a collection of snippets, musings, facts and information of all sorts sometimes to fill little spaces on a page – like this one!**

### From the Editor:-

I received an e-mail from Mr Roy Parrish RE- Pilton House Red Cross Auxiliary Army Hospital 1914/1919

*"Is there any possibility you could assist me with a search I am undertaking. I have recently come into possession a photo of a nurse dated 1919 and written on the back it states it was taken at Pilton House Shepton Mallet where she worked as an auxiliary Red Cross nurse in the Army hospital there. I have tried to check into all auxiliary hospitals with this name but I'm afraid I have drawn a blank!*

*Is there any chance you may know of this establishment as to where and when it may have existed?*

*I checked the Red Cross Archives online but there is no mention of Pilton House as an Auxiliary Red Cross Hospital".*

I replied to Mr Parrish that we are an environmental society rather than a history group but it could well be possible that one of our members would be able to help him. We are all of diverse ages, have many diverse interests and there are many of us who volunteer in museums and like places all over Mendip. Any one of us could have come across the place he is seeking in diverse records somewhere!

He thought it a very good long shot and would be very grateful for any knowledge so unearthed.

His contact is: Roy Parrish: [roy.parrish@icloud.com](mailto:roy.parrish@icloud.com)

## WINSCOMBE & SANDFORD MILLENNIUM GREEN (MG) TRUST, 2020 GRANT REPORT

In celebration of the new Millennium in 2000, Winscombe's former station on the Cheddar Valley 'Strawberry Line' was regenerated as a quiet place where local people could appreciate heritage and nature. Since that time, the site has been managed and maintained by the small band of dedicated volunteers of Winscombe and Sandford Millennium Green Trust. When operational, the branch line was kept clear of vegetation, but in the thirty years of neglect that followed, trees and scrub rewilded the site making it green, lush, full of birdsong, butterflies and wildlife. In the 90's, when the station site was in private ownership and threatened by development, concerned locals ensured T.P.O.'s were placed on stands of the now mature trees, mostly Ash, the dominant species of the five acre site.

Many are now succumbing to the deadly Ash Die-back, predicted to affect 80%/90% of around three hundred Ash on site, seventy of which carry T.P.O.'s. Public safety on our popular 'open to all' site is a major issue. Most of the work confronting us is beyond volunteers to do safely and contractor costs of felling a mature Ash is around £500! The MG is reliant on a small band of Trustees and volunteers, regular costs are covered by fundraising, but the scale of the problem is way beyond our usual scope and we were extremely grateful to the Mendip Society for a grant of £1,000 towards this work awarded in 2020.



Currently we are monitoring all Ash on a weekly basis so as to be aware of any problems which could endanger the public using the site. Any issues arising are dealt with as quickly as possible using our own volunteers or professional tree surgeons depending upon the problem. To date we have used two teams of tree surgeons to fell 12 Elms and 2 large Ash. Another 9 Ash with TPO's have had high level lopping and branch removal using a cherry picker (left) to make the adjacent Strawberry Line cycle path safe. Another 47 smaller Ash have been felled and cleared. Also, as we see signs of Dieback on young saplings these are removed. Replanting is on-going with over 300 saplings planted to date. (right) Some 12 different species have been planted which will provide a bank of young trees for later use.



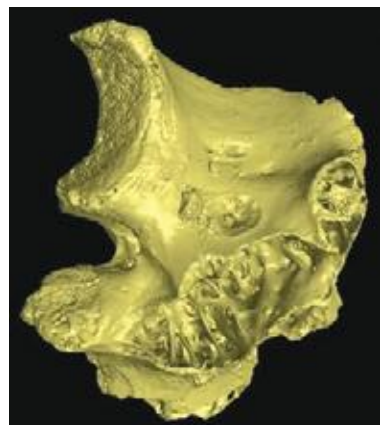
Another consideration is the rich wildlife of the old Station Green, much of which is dependent on the tree canopy and roots for food and shelter. We are looking at ways we can best protect these species and compensate for the expected loss of habitat. [Lois Brenchley](#)

## GULLY CAVE DIG – Update by Professor Danielle Schreve

Society members will be familiar with the Gully Cave research project in Ebbor Gorge and many will also have visited the site during the summer excavations, led by Professor Danielle Schreve and the team from Royal Holloway University.

The Society has been supporting the dig for several years but in 2020, because of the pandemic, Danielle was not allowed to conduct any fieldwork and therefore requested that the Mendip Society grant be put towards radiocarbon dating of some of the fossil remains from the cave instead. This was readily agreed and the Society accordingly

"sponsored" the dating of a large vertebra that had been identified as a great bustard, a very rare species in the fossil record and an exciting new find.



Today, this large and imposing bird is on the cusp of being an endangered species and is found in open, temperate grasslands from North Africa, southern and central Europe (Spain and Portugal hold around 60% of the world's population) across to East Asia. The last wild bird in Britain was shot in 1832 but the species has been reintroduced on Salisbury Plain in recent years with considerable success.

The radiocarbon dating was carried out at the laboratory of the Scottish Universities Environment Research Centre (SUERC) of the University of Glasgow. The bustard bone returned a date of 13600 to 13495 years BP (Before Present), placing it within

a brief period of temperate climate conditions known as the Lateglacial Interstadial, just before the end of the last Ice Age. **ED:** *what exciting bones will they unearth in this summers' dig?*



Photo right: A great bustard (credit: Attila Terbócs CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons)  
Photo left: 3D laser scan of the fossil vertebra (credit: Neil Adams)



## ABOUT THE MENDIP HILLS AONB UNIT and THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY – Tim Haselden

In 1972, the announcement was made that the Mendip Hills would be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognising the landscape as one of England's finest and worthy of national protection. The AONB team are planning a series of exciting activities throughout the year to help people share their love for the area in recognition of the 50th Anniversary. Playing an instrumental role in this designation, the Mendip Society will, of course, also be taking part, helping the AONB with its celebrations.

Covering 77 square miles (198 km<sup>2</sup>), the Mendip Hills AONB includes the spectacular Cheddar Gorge over to the tranquil lakes of the Chew Valley. Not only is it one of England's special landscapes, for its geology and natural habitat, it also provides millions of people across Bristol, Bath and Somerset with exceptional outdoor and underground adventure – not to mention a regular supply of fresh water.

Many exciting and unusual events and activities are planned throughout the year until the actual designation date in December, and this year the popular MendipRocks festival will be incorporated into the programme as well.

Fifty large trees are being planted, fifty special stones will be embedded in the walls, memories of the past and hopes for the future will be captured on film, the fifty miles of the iconic Mendip Way connecting Weston Super Mare with Frome, will bring people together, and a celebration of the unique geology will take place at the end.

Visit [www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk](http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk) and sign up to the newsletter to be the first to hear how you can celebrate the special Mendip Hills AONB as the programme details become available.

In fact it has all already started, with the AONB Unit joining forces with local people and landowners to plant 50 special trees thanks to funding from Network Rail and support from The Tree Council. A wide range of native species has been planted at suitable locations across the whole Mendip Hills area. Locally grown English Oak trees in Bleadon, Churchill, and East Harptree by local schools and environment groups, Common Beech and Rowan on the exposed top of the Mendip Plateau, as well as sites managed by The Mendip Society and Mendip Activity Centre, a Field Maple in Sandford with the Parish Council, and in several other locations along hedgerows, a Scots Pine near Shipham, with Sweet Chestnuts in community open spaces in Priddy, Cheddar, Burrington Primary School – and also in our own Tania's Wood.

Some of the 50 trees have also been planted with farmers along public rights of way, on Wildlife Trust nature reserves, at Bristol Water's Chew Valley Lake visitor centre, on National Trust sites and in Cheddar Gorge with Longleat. Small-leaved Lime and Hornbeam have also been planted around Wells, at Ebbor Gorge and in Westbury-sub-Mendip, where the local tree group is working with landowners to create a new hedgerow and public route along the old Strawberry Line railway.



*Right: The Common Beech planted in the recently laid hedge of the car park in Tania's Wood, photo taken by Tim Haselden*

All the planting took place between January and March, and information on each of the 50 trees will be available on the Mendip Hills AONB website and social media #50 Trees).

**ED** – As a footnote I'd like to add that several of our own Small Leaved Limes are taking up residence in the Westbury Tree Groups' site, to grow on for a couple of years before being given permanent homes somewhere on Mendip. P11



### **BITS & PIECES** Conservation is the process of managing change whilst sustaining heritage value.

Jim Hardcastle sent us some information from the Southwest Heritage Trust which he thought might interest our members because we are so often around in all areas of the Mendips and are interested in what we see whilst out and about, and might like to get involved. The Trust maintains a record of all listed buildings, scheduled structures, conservation areas and registered parks and gardens. How often have we said to ourselves "Why was that lovely place left to fall into ruins? Couldn't it have been saved?"

**A new way to see our heritage:** What buildings are important to our life and culture? And how do we preserve them for the future? Across the UK, thousands of significant structures are recognised and protected through **national listing**. However, many places that matter to local communities still go unrecognised.

**The Local Heritage List (LHL)** is different from the national list. It focuses on the exceptional places which enrich a very local area, even if they don't meet the strict requirements of the national grading system. Local listing doesn't put extra restrictions on owners, but stops these places being overlooked, and offers some increased protection – as well as giving everyone a say in what's valuable to the community.

Local heritage lists are one way in which local heritage – buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, historic parks and gardens or other designed landscapes – can be formally identified, as part of the wider range of designation, so that their significance can be taken into account in planning applications affecting the building or site or its setting. Nominations for the local list are made by the local community.

The South West Heritage Trust is now reaching out to all members of the public for nominations. Whether it's a factory or a front doorstep, choose a candidate for the LHL – and help shape local heritage. You can find guides to the List, **how to nominate** and the criteria that we're using on <https://swheritage.org.uk/local-heritage-list> Or contact **Dr Hattie Induni**, digital and Community Engagement Officer, Somerset Local Heritage List Project, [hattie.induni@swheritage.org.uk](mailto:hattie.induni@swheritage.org.uk) / 07961 674094



## A PRESIDENTS' VIEW

The start of Spring and another year really begins. Not the best of starts it has to be said, but the hope of warmer days ahead are a pleasant distraction from the cares and worries that the World faces at the moment.

In this edition is all you need to know about this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM). This time it will be a meeting for real, so I would encourage as many people as possible to come along and support. As always the main objective is to update you all on the past year and obtain your support for the year ahead. A lot has been happening with walks and practical skills programmes now

running and we now have our own small grants scheme which is making a difference to the smaller local projects that are often overlooked.

We are organising another quiz night in June, nicknamed 'All Kinds of Everything', this intends to be just that and not restricted to Mendip. Friends will be welcome and supper provided in the entry fee. Start thinking about your teams and more information will follow. Also being looked at will be a film night. Those who can remember an organisation called 'Trilith', may remember some local films that were shown at Charterhouse Centre. All from the dim and distant past, mainly black and white, these depicted a way of life long gone in such areas as the coal fields of East Mendip. Again more to follow!

This year sees the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB) founded in 1972. I well remember the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and can hardly believe how fast the time has gone by since then. The installation of a memorial plaque on the trig point at Beacon Batch and an exhibition at Charterhouse Centre were two things I remember. This year I'm sure that Jim and his team at the AONB will have much more planned. For us this is an important occasion, as the Society was instrumental in having the area designated and we will be playing a major role in helping with the celebrations.

I recently paid a visit to St Cuthbert's Infant school in Wells to talk about how trees grow. Representing the Society was an important way of showing we all care about education in environmental matters. When it came down to working out the age of a tree in the school grounds, I have to admit that we abandoned the metric measurements and went back to good old feet and inches... Very old-school indeed!

This time the photo is not from me, but from Andy Chamberlain, a Society member now living in Cheddar. This is 'Lil' the adder, taken by Andy on a wall at Charterhouse where she could be seen on most sunny days. She got her name from a young lady who was working with the Prince's Trust when I was Senior Warden. The real 'Lil' was terrified of snakes and would give the wall a wide berth whenever we passed this particular spot. Finally, just before she and her group left we paid a quiet visit at Lil's request to take a look on the wall. There, as always, was the snake soaking up the rays and lying quiet. After a few moments Lil was able to stand alone and overcome her fear, "There" she said "I've done it... You can call her Lil now"!



A little lesson for all of us. What don't kill you makes you stronger!

My kindest regards to you all. **Les.**

**ED – After Les had written his piece for the newsletter, the news was announced that Andy Chamberlain has been appointed the new AONB Ranger Volunteer Coordinator. The Mendip Society sends Andy our warmest congratulations.**

## A 'WINDROSE FILM NIGHT' PLANNED FOR THE AUTUMN

As mentioned by Les, above, we are working with another charity on a film evening, which we will be hosting in the autumn. We remember them as 'Trilith' and it was great fun to see all the films they had collected from our area. Trilith was set up in 1984, its purpose to use the media to undertake educational, archival and creative work in rural communities. Its archive is large dating from 1903 to the 1990s and Windrose, as it is now known, is in the process of being up-dated by being digitised.

All of Windrose's work is based on outreach into dispersed communities and upon close involvement of local people from a very wide range of ages and backgrounds. Old films and recordings of local life are living history and a vital window onto our past- but- they are delicate and constantly under threat of being lost or destroyed.

This then, is where another large project, in which we, led by our President will be much involved. Part of the 50th Anniversary Celebration Programme for the AONB is entitled 'Mendip Memories' and will see the recording, in sound and film, of the memories of those who have been involved in the ordinary, both country and town, life of the Mendip area in years past. Coupled with this is the realisation that the Mendip Society should have its own archive, kept all together in one safe place, an idea which the President is working on now.

This then is where our members come in. Our members, who may have the 'pot of gold' in their own b/w photographs and crackly video films, and most of all the memories in their heads of days gone by. Not only of our Mendip Society life, although that would be great for us, but also of all Mendip life, which would be great for the 'Mendip Memories' of the AONB project. When the project is finalised and up and running could you have your memories ready to join in the celebration of this 50<sup>th</sup> Year? We will keep you posted. **Judith Tranter**

**THE MENDIP SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 262867 [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)**

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