

Mendip

the
mendip
society

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 163 • December 2021

Caring for the Mendip Hills

CLIMATE CHANGE : DESTRUCTION AND RE-CONSTRUCTION : WE HAVE BOTH



Inevitably we do lose some, but we are always replanting more wherever we can. With thanks to The Woodland Trust for the whips – and the AONB for the volunteers.



One of our beautiful 850 year old boundary oaks, in Slader's Leigh Nature Reserve; victim of Winter Storm Arwen, Nov 2021. Thank you to all those who rang to tell us it was down

Our iconic dry stone walls inevitably decay from weather and human interventions. We can always dismantle the original Mendip stones and re-create the original, maybe even better than before!



From the Chair

We have now been able to get actively involved in training and events over the summer leading into the autumn. Thankfully the Mendip Society has made progress on some of our projects including the restart of our walks programme. Whilst we didn't have the best weather on the first day of the dry stone



walling beginners class everyone turned up and got stuck in. The improvers class were luckier with a fine weekend and a satisfying result, which you can see on the front cover of this newsletter.

Clearing Slader's Leigh is always a mammoth task but what a transformation, well done everyone who volunteered and got the task completed in just 2 days, Sidcot School has also been able to use the reserve for their extra-curricular outdoor environmental education, clearing the overhanging hedges and tree branches.

The joint venture with Somerset Reptile and Amphibian Group and 'Wanderlands-Earth' saw an Edwardian dew pond on the latter's flagship site at Paradise Hill, Croscombe, cleaned out to be restored for pond life and amphibious biodiversity; we will also be involved in educational projects with 'Whitstone School', Shepton Mallet on the site in the future.

Another joint project just starting is with the Mendip Hospital Cemetery, Wells; we have provided some lovely hedging plants grown and donated by Society member Jean Mantle. Jean lives about a mile from the cemetery so you can't get more 'locally sourced' than that!!

The design for the Children's garden is going to be rotated on the original drawing with the discovery of a dilapidated existing dry stone wall already in the chosen corner, discovered now that the initial clearing of the thick undergrowth has taken place. The Cemetery volunteers will be applying to the Mendip Society's new Small Grant Scheme to help with the next phase of their plans.

This is an ideal project for funding; if you know of a Community or School project in the pipeline that needs some financial assistance, please let them know about our Small Grant Scheme. (You could show them your grant leaflet enclosed with this newsletter).

Finally, we have two hedge laying training days on January 7th & 8th in our reserves, there may still be a place available- to find out contact Sally at sallydavis99@hotmail.com or 07816 266531.

My Christmas good wishes to you all. **Tina**



And From the Editor

You may remember that in the last newsletter I asked if anyone had 'the urge' to volunteer to take over producing the newsletters for the Society, even if just for a few issues or so. Unfortunately, from my point of view anyway, no member did.

However, one very kind non-member who has been a contributor in the recent past, and gets to see a copy of the newsletters, has offered me a helping hand towards with gathering information, following up leads, suggesting ideas and writing up articles- for which I am very grateful. A couple of years ago she wrote the report from the Wells talk on the future of the Mendip Hills AONB by Jim Hardcastle and an article last year on bumper 'mast' years of acorns and beech mast - her name is Karen Andrews, she is also known as Botany Karen, a lady of many talents, one of which is writing a blog under this name. See: [www.https://botanykaren.net/](https://botanykaren.net/)

I have asked her to introduce herself here:-

I grew up exploring the Mendips and was fascinated by plants from an early age. I studied languages at university and have spent most of my working life as a translator and project manager in multilingual marketing communications. An MSc in Plant Diversity at the University of Reading led to a career change, and I now work as a plant health inspector in both Somerset and Wiltshire. In my free-time, I enjoy voluntary wildlife recording, going on walks with local botanical groups, blogging and photography. I am looking forward to getting involved with the Mendip Society's newsletter.

Karen Andrews



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**A BETTER
NEW YEAR
2022
TO US ALL**

BLOWING OUR OWN TRUMPET

On October the 24th this year the National Hedge Laying Championships were held on the Rotherfield Estate, Alton, in Hampshire, and local Mendip hedge layers took part in several different classes.

And here, The Society Secretary has to take up the story as our Chairman, Tina Bath wouldn't blow her own trumpet.

For the third year in the National Championship competitions Tina was named 'Best Lady in the Competition', which makes her once again National Ladies Champion; – the Society is so proud of her. Picture below – receiving her 'Best Lady' Award.



Later in November a Saturday Telegraph reporter managed to tie Tina down to an interview in connection with an article he was writing about Prince Charles and his mission to highlight how hedgerows can help combat the environmental crises, and to support the traditional country skill of hedgelaying. The article, by Alex Preston, appeared in the colour supplement on December 4th and here is the first page which contained the interview Tina gave. There are three pages in all, and the whole makes very interesting reading. So that you can read the whole article it has been put onto the website with a link to download it.

The first lines of our Constitution state:-
The principal objects of the Society shall be the conservation and enhancement of the beauty and character of Mendip and its surroundings. In pursuance of this aim the Society shall seek to: "Support and encourage all forms of conservation and enhancement, with particular regard to landscape, wildlife habitat, archaeological, historical and natural features".

What could be better than having the National Ladies Hedging champion as your tutor whilst learning to lay a hedge in the traditional way; read about the courses this January on page 6.

Judith Tranter

Tina Bath is outside when we speak – the wind is whistling in the hedges about her and she has to raise her voice to make herself heard. She pauses in her work to talk to me. She tells me about her family: Somerset farmers, who in years gone by had employed dozens of labourers. Part of the seasonal work of these labourers was hedgelaying – renovating hedges through a process of cutting and weaving – and yet, with the passing of time, knowledge of this ancient practice had died out. 'My dad asked a friend of his who was a hedgelayer to come and look after the hedges on the farm, because with the labour-

reptiles. You can think of them as an almost endless nature reserve, stretched long and thin. But not all hedges are the same and you need to care for a hedge if you want the life within it to flourish.

'Everybody who has hedgerows in their garden will notice how important they are for garden birds,' Bath tells me. 'If you look at the activity of birds in a hedge, you'll see there are areas where the hedge is dying out at the bottom or where it has developed gaps or just been allowed to grow so high that it has no coverage value any more. There will be no birds there. So, you want to keep it cut in winter to



ers not there any more, we'd lost that craft in the family. I thought I'd have a go at it – and I really enjoyed it.'

Thirty-five years on, Bath, now 60, is still at it. Hedgelaying has become her greatest passion and her profession; while she spends the summer months working a variety of jobs, from mole-catching to building dry-stone walls on the Mendip Hills, where she lives, she spends her winters turning thin, straggly hedges into dense and vigorous barriers.

Hedges are one of the most complex and wildlife-rich elements of the British landscape. There are half a million miles of hedgerows in our countryside and they provide vital shelter and food for a vast range of species, from songbirds to butterflies, lichens to rare mammals and

stimulate that low growth, but not cut back at all during nesting season.' Then, every decade or two – hedges live slower lives than we do – you need to get your hedge laid by an expert like Bath.

There have been hedges in Britain since Roman times: the oldest surviving one is Judith's Hedge, next to the B1090 in Cambridgeshire, planted by a niece of William the Conqueror in the 11th century. It was during the agricultural revolution of the 18th century that hedges were established as the boundaries of choice for the British countryside, though. As common land gradually passed into private ownership with the Acts of Enclosure, the hedge became a symbol of

RECENT GRANTS AWARDED BY THE SOCIETY

We are slowly becoming known as a grant-giving society by the smaller groups and individuals who are often shut out of the criteria of the larger charities and which/who only need a small(ish) amount to tide them over or to function.

You will see that we have also launched a new strand to our grant programme, do have a look at the leaflet included with your newsletter to see that this grant award is very much in tune with current thinking and present needs in the way life is panning out for a great many people at the present time.

Over the past year we have given out several grants – here are the reports on just three of them.



Grant no. 1

Tess Gill, Chair of the Campaign, sent us this update:

Campaigners were out at the Axbridge Farmers Market on Saturday fourth September to update local residents and visitors from outlying villages on the campaign to have a safe off road path between the village of Cross and Axbridge so as to avoid walking or cycling along the dangerous narrow Cross Lane. They also encouraged completion of

the Axbridge Town Council questionnaire referred to below.

RIGHT: The Society grant enabled them to stand out from the crowd with bright red sashes emblazoned with their name.

“The Campaign has made considerable progress as there is now a pedestrian refuge on the A38 north of the junction with Cross Lane and a safe footpath along the verge up to the gate into the right of way across the fields. But there is still the urgent need to make the footpath across the fields to Axbridge safe and accessible to all.

The most urgent step is protecting users of the footpath from cattle following an attack by a cow which caused serious injury to a walker on the path. There is now a temporary electric fence along a section of the footpath but the remaining section has no protection from the cattle and reports still come in of cattle blocking pedestrians trying to walk on the path and chasing users of the path including children.

In addition the current gate giving access to the path is inaccessible for users with buggies or mobility scooters or bikes and there needs to be a firm surface similar to the strawberry line to avoid an unsuitable muddy route.

Axbridge Town Council has issued a questionnaire asking Axbridge residents their opinion on upgrading the existing right of way path across the fields between Axbridge and Cross for example by altering the existing gates laying a footpath and erecting a stockproof fence between the path and the rest of the fields. It gained overwhelming public support”. Tess adds – **Join us at our informal meetings either at the New Inn, Cross or the Lamb Inn, Axbridge, details on the website. Contact us: www.coffinlane.com or email coffinlane@gmail.com Follow us on twitter @Tess_Gill27**



Grant no. 2

MENDIP PLOUGHING SOCIETY 1858-2021: 163RD YEAR

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 2021, ON LAND AT GREEN ORE FARM, GREEN ORE, BA5 3EP
BY KIND PERMISSION OF MR B KING AND MR G BOWN**

Like many other Societies on Mendip, Mendip Ploughing suffered last year from the postponement of their annual Competition Match and subsequent loss of income; this is why The Mendip Society was very pleased to be able to support them this year with some sponsorship. One of the most read and referred to items of the whole show is the Show Catalogue, so we chose to sponsor its production thereby getting our name and logo in front of as many people as possible. We have our own embryonic dry stone walling team, some of them also belonging to the Mendip Hills AONB team, and we made a good showing in this class. It was a good day all round, if a trifle windy, and we talked to many visitors, some new and some with the familiar faces, in our gazebo.



And so to number 3

Amanda Boyd, of Winscombe, joined a training course in using bat detectors to monitor our local bat habitats. Detectors have certainly moved on from the days when we began to use them in the 1990s/2000s. The grant was for its use by the W & S Millennium Green Trust & herself.

BATS ON YOUR PATCH? by Amanda Boyd

Amanda's Profile

I am a conservation volunteer for The Winscombe & Sandford Millennium Green (MG) and also the Strawberry Line Society (SL) and have been awarded a grant from The Mendip Society for an Echo Meter Touch 2 pro, bat detector. The bat monitoring is taking place at various spots along the SL, MG and in Slader's Leigh LNR throughout the summer months and into the autumn; I am also simultaneously training with The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) and Tragus Training.

Amanda says: 'The aim of the project is to get an impression of the species of bats we have on our local patch so we can better support them, work closely with the nature reserves to discuss planting schemes, undertake habitat evaluations and roost awareness, as well as educating local school children about bats and their importance to the environment.'

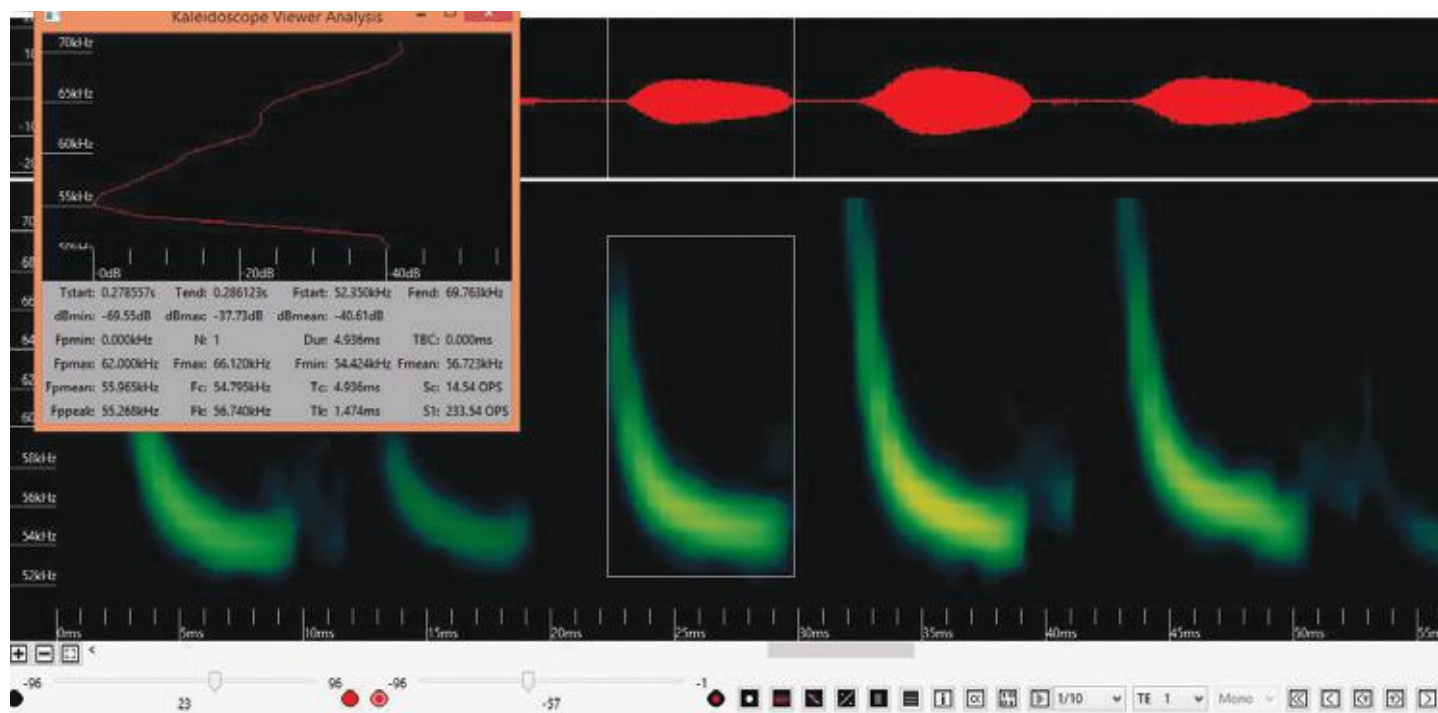


The Echo Metre device is about 4 x 3.5cm in size and fits in the end of a smart phone. The Echo Meter app is downloaded onto your phone in order for it to work. You can listen in heterodyne mode and it will record the calls, so there is no need to watch the screen. You can then focus on the sky. It has a GPS function and when the file is downloaded it links to Google Earth.



The bat calls can be identified through sound analysis software called Kaleidoscope. Being able to analysis the bat call is important. The auto ID function on the Echo Metre is great, but

if there is more than one bat on the recording, you need to sort through them, so none are missed. This is achieved by measuring the start, end and peak frequencies and pulse intervals. By looking at the sonograms you can see also the shape of the bat call, which is another clue.



I work in the arts and heritage sector predominately with local folk songs, collected over a hundred years ago from people who lived and worked within the Mendip landscapes. There is a symbiotic relationship between my heritage work, the songs, the landscapes, and my conservation endeavours.

There are constant threats to our bat populations. Our landscapes are increasingly under siege from large building projects. Top tip: Keep a look out for planning applications. The ecological impact surveys can also tell us something. Whilst the building companies are not interested in protecting bats per se, we can see this information and put it to some good use! Encroachments on habitat and green space is becoming more and more prevalent. If we know what we have on our patch, we can seek to protect it. We have yet to see the full impact of felling, due to ash die back and how this may affect bat populations. This will, no doubt also need monitoring over time.'

Resources: <https://www.bats.org.uk> and <https://www.facebook.com/TragusTraining>; British Bat Calls a Guide to Species Identification – Jon Russ.

GETTING ON WITH THINGS: LOOKING BACK AT – AND FORWARD TO

It's been a funny old Autumn season this year, blowing hot and cold, dry and wet almost on a whim, lasting for several weeks longer than usual and seemingly finally producing far more leaves to lie all over the roads, woods, gardens and parks. Autumn is the time for readying the land for the winter ahead, when Tree Week is held and everyone is busy planting trees and little whips and bushes for new growth and when the Ploughing and Hedging Societies hold their competitions to find the best of the best.

The Mendip Society has been no different, having been busy with readying our two nature reserves and also teaching others the necessary skills. Already mentioned by Tina Bath we ran two weekend courses on dry stone walling, re-building two 'derelict' walls on Chancellor's Farm, Priddy for the Somerset Wildlife Trust. They were over-subscribed which indicates the level of interest by Mendip residents in protecting their own environment.



Beginners weekend L - Starting to get your eye in – the right stone for the space R - It all starts to look right



If any members would like to join the small team of Mendip society wallers, we will be running another course sometime in the spring/summer, please let us know on secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk

Left: Improvers weekend: getting the width and height of the wall right is important

Right: the stone has got to be the right shape needed for the hole, Tucksey chipping a stone to size.

Also high on our list of necessary skills is that of laying a hedge so it rejuvenates properly – to this end we are running two separate days training early in the New Year. These have been advertised in the

Mendip Times but there may be still places available if you are interested in this old country craft. Friday 7th January will be in Slader's Leigh and Saturday 8th January in Tania's Wood. Contact Sally, her details are page 2.

COME A'WASSAILING: MONDAY 17TH JANUARY IN BURRINGTON ORCHARD, AT 7PM



We have booked the Master of Ceremonies, our President, we have picked the orchard to receive our blessings and protection, Burrington, we have the cloak ready for the crowning of the queen, and the 'spirit frightner' is ready with his gun. We also happily have the company of our friends from The Barley Rye choir, who love Wassails. YOU, YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY ARE ALL INVITED.

The only uncertainty, of course, is the progress of the Covid virus, with its ability to impose all sorts of restrictions on us; as I write we would certainly be able to hold the ceremony in the open air of an orchard, and hopefully be able to gather before and afterwards in the village hall. But if things deteriorate badly in the next month or so, then the decision will have to be taken to cancel the event.

Read on for arrangements for as normal – but also for how we plan to cancel if necessary.

We will be meeting in the village hall in Burrington Square at 7pm, to choose the Wassail Queen (or King); this is done by everyone having a piece of the apple cake and the one who finds 'the bean' in their piece is 'it'. We then process through the village to the orchard for the Wassail ceremony, accompanied by singing (and dancing if you like). You will need a light (torch) of some sort from now on as Burrington is not a 'lit-up village'. Also with you you will need something to make an unholy noise with to scare away the evil spirits, (a sauce pan lid and spoon are ideal). The Master of Ceremonies, The Barley Rye and the Wassail Queen will conduct the ceremony with aplomb and much noise; and everyone will then return to the hall for a hot drink and a piece of orange cake, – with more lovely songs from Barley Rye, for listening and joining in with. *Right.*



However – should we need to cancel the wassail altogether we will by the 13th January –

- 1 post the news on the home page of the website: www.themendipsociety.org.uk**
- 2 Peter Janes will send out an email to all those on the database.**

If you are not yet on the database with your e-mail and would like to be kept informed about this and other arrangements during uncertain times like the present, please email Peter on membership@themendipsociety.org.uk

LOOKING FORWARD – WITH RICHARD FROST'S' PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR 2022

1 Subject to any Social restrictions due to Covid, I am planning to put a firm date on the walk around the old Bedminster Coalfield, " Different times, Different people ", which we had to cancel before.

This walk gives us an amazing insight into our recent history and is all done on firm pavements! There is almost nothing left of this original industry that helped turn Bristol and its suburbs into the thriving industrial area that helped kick start the Industrial Revolution.

All you need is a strong imagination and a keen sense of history, and it's hard to believe that all this only happened about 200 years ago.

2 A visit to see a Stone Circle at Regil and learn about the Megalithic Portal, with an expert to tell us all about these amazing structures that were common in Neolithic times, and still are built into our Mendip landscape today.

Both these outdoors events are being planned for Spring / Summer 2022 as we will hope for suitable weather to take advantage of them.

We also hope to continue our usual programme of walks and request that our present team of Leaders submit their ideas for us to advertise in the Website. Richard Frost.



ED: in case, like me, you are wondering what the Megalithic Portal is – this is what Wikipedia, says: -

The Megalithic Portal is a web resource dedicated to prehistoric archaeology and closely related subjects. The Megalithic Portal's mission is to document, publicise and protect ancient sites and help to ensure their preservation for future generations.

ALSO LOOKING FORWARD TO : - THE SPRING QUIZ - What, Why, Where, When?

Get your thinking caps on for a light-hearted Quiz in Spring 2022. Unlike the previous one which we compiled, this will not be just about Mendip. It will cover wider general knowledge with lots of different subjects together with a few puzzles and fun questions.

So make sure you book and come along to a good evening with members and friends at a location somewhere in mid Mendip. The evening will include a light supper. We hope to have a venue with a bar and of course, good parking.

WATCH THIS SPACE – Sue Gearing and Les Davies

NEWS FROM AROUND OUR RESERVES – by Judith Tranter

In spite of this Autumn coming late and lasting longer it all seems to have speeded up – and now is suddenly over, blown away by the two fierce storms of November. In Slader's Leigh flower meadow, every Wednesday afternoon during October, we were visited by a group of Sidcot School pupils, who walked along the Strawberry Line to work with us as part of their Extra Curricular Environmental course; they had each picked us as their choice from a list of 10 activities, and were all ages from first years to those whose last year it was.

And boy! Was it an eye opener for them – and for us. Most of the group of ten boys and girls were boarders, many from Asia and China and had never been out of their city and into the countryside before and had certainly never held a tool in their lives. So the first thing was to have a 'using a tool safely talk', when it comes to saws, loppers, and other sharp things. I know we shouldn't have done but we had to laugh quietly to see how gingerly and daintily they held the tools as they approached the tough undergrowth and the thick trunks and branches growing through our boundary fence. Since we had first cleared the Railway Line boundary fence and hedge back in 2004, we had made only minor attempts to stop the big trees retaking the meadow – now they are thrusting through the fence holes and have taken at least six feet of meadow grassland and now rear up to a soaring overhanging height; taming and controlling this was to be their task, chosen by their accompanying teacher.

We were allowed to take photos to put in this newsletter, or elsewhere, but not to show their faces fully in view.



Tool handling session



The hedge at the beginning

But it didn't take long for most of them to become comfortable with us and enter into the work with enthusiasm, and the end results were great. The boys especially enjoyed the actual cutting and pulling and pushing with fierce abandon and huge piles of brash soon accumulated, although we didn't stretch to suggesting bonfires at all.

We got them to cut out and stack against a tree, all straight lengths which could be used for den building on our next summer open day. It was very sad that not one child recognised the concept of 'den building', one in fact, about fourteen years old, said rather wistfully "I've never built anything before"



Getting down to work - R - A lot has been cleared back by the end of the afternoon

October was also the month when the Environment Team from 'Kier Utilities' were to come to check the barn owl and dormice boxes they put up around the reserve; this was one of the mitigation factors they made for the use of the meadow for the two years of the installation of the Bristol Water pipes to the Axbridge Reservoir a few years ago. So we co-ordinated the visit with one of the Wednesday afternoon sessions, and their chief Environmental Officer, Grace Tremlett was marvellous at involving the students in her checking process. Because it was rather late in the season there would have been no chicks, but maybe signs of being used by adults; so once she was satisfied there was nothing to record she let them have a go at the checking themselves. Before she left she had offered one sixth former help for him to do a survey in the Sidcot School grounds to gain more ecological experience that might help towards his UCAS application. She told us she was also happy to come out in March, to show them what was in our pond, when we told her they were going to do another month of sessions in the Spring term 2022. All in all a very good experience all round, of the sort we should be encouraging in our reserves.



L – dormice on the Strawberry Line,
R – holding the ladder for Grace.



OF OAKS AND BLOGS – Botany Karen and Judith Tranter

The night of Friday 26th November this year was the height of Storm Arwen, a powerful extratropical cyclone that was part of the 2021–22 European windstorm season. It affected the United Kingdom, Ireland and France, bringing strong winds and snow.

What horror we felt when on Saturday 27th November several people, members of the society and the public, told us that they couldn't get through Slader's Leigh because a huge tree was blocking the path. Our fears immediately went to the one remaining ancient Small Leaved Lime at the top of the Reserve inside its protective wire cage. Only of course, no wire cage on earth would protect against winds of over 100 mph, only against damage by deer and humans. Thankfully, when the photo on the front cover was sent to us we could at least be grateful that it wasn't our *Tilia cordata* down, but still be very sad that it was one of the ancient oaks on our boundary, an outlier of the nearby King's Wood, of the same age.

Riven right down through the gigantic trunk it had crashed across the old iron railings, taking out a fully grown holly tree on the way to end up across and through the wire cage, its branches tangled in the Lime, completely filling the top end of



the Reserve. Salvage work began; we had to direct the many interested walkers still using our permissive path to go around the other side of the cage, because of our use of chain saws, but by Sunday the way was clear and the fallen giant made safe, and there, up to now, it remains.

Prompted on hearing about our tree, that weekend Karen Andrews (see p2) wrote her blog on the subject of 'Quercus and Christmas'. An excerpt (with her permission) introduces the whole blog which can be read through the link here <https://botanykaren.net/author/karendawnandrews/>

Welcome to my blog on wild, naturalised and garden plants! Themes include wild flower tours, garden visits, nature conservation, biodiversity, climate change, the environment and plant names.



Quercus, Oak is a much-loved British tree. © Karen Andrews

The deciduous Oak may not be considered a viable Christmas tree, but are you aware that it may have played an important founding role in the tradition? The mighty Oak has long had a special place in our folklore and culture. The Pagan Germanic tribes venerated trees. They worshipped the Thunder Oak sacred to the God Thor.

St Boniface's Outrage

St Boniface (675-754) was an English Benedictine monk sent as a missionary by the Pope to convert the Frisians and Germanic tribes to Christianity early in the 8th century. He was outraged to come across Pagans worshipping an Oak tree and about to sacrifice a child to it. He sped into action and chopped down the Oak. Thus, he demonstrated the power of his God over theirs.

The Fir Tree: It is said that he converted the Pagans then and there. There are multiple versions of what happened next in the legend.

ED: To find out the whole Legend of our Christmas Tree, you must read Karens' blog – thank you Karen.

None of the work done in our two Reserves in any year, but especially in this year, could have been achieved without the constant help of all our marvellous volunteers, in all weathers and all times asked of them. THANK YOU ALL



Concerning the petition by Cat Lodge in the last newsletter. Despite all the evidence given by many hundreds of people against it, the University of Worcester is refusing to overturn its decision to close the Archaeology dept., making all the lecturing posts redundant by July 2022. Thank you to everyone for your high level of support in so many ways, showing just how wrong this is. Congratulations to Dr. Jodie Lewis, Principal Lecturer, who will be joining the School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences at the University of Bradford in February 2022; Bradford's gain will most definitely be Worcester's loss. (She will still be a 'Mendip Digger' tho'!)

AN EXCITING NEW PROJECT AT SOMERSET EARTH SCIENCE CENTRE – AND A LOVELY NEW WALKING GUIDE

Simon Carpenter is a member of Bath Geological Society, a keen geologist and naturalist

For members who have been to the Centre on one of our activity days – or visited their gazebo at an event where we also have our gazebo, such as the last day at Ebbor Gorge of the Mendip Rocks Festival, will understand the excitement this huge fossil collection donation has generated.

Simon writes for us :- I have recently started volunteering at the Somerset Earth Science Centre (www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk) to help them repurpose an old geological collection formerly belonging to Kingswood School, Bath. This is an exciting opportunity to examine an important historic collection, containing some exceptional fossils and minerals, many found over a century ago. Kingswood School, Bath was founded in 1748 by John Wesley, who with his brother Charles, started the Methodist movement in the Church of England.

Sir Arthur Dixon (1867- 1955), an accomplished mathematician and Fellow of the Royal Society as well as a former pupil of the school, donated a substantial geological collection to Kingswood School. His collection, as well as many other fossils and minerals added by former pupils and staff, was used by generations of children studying GCSE and A level geology. With the introduction of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s, a steady decline in the teaching of geology in schools began. These collections, once an important teaching and learning resource, were now no longer needed and often abandoned. Some like the Kingswood School Collection were rescued early on, before serious neglect took hold, but many other teaching collections faced a much bleaker future and were simply discarded.

The Kingswood School Collection is an important, relatively intact, early example of a school fossil and mineral reference collection. It includes many fine examples of invertebrates and some vertebrate fossils. These were collected at a time when there were many more active quarries to collect from, with fewer access restrictions and without the intensity of fossil collecting we see today.



The collection is also associated with a number of prominent and famous geologists including William Jocelyn Arkell (1904 – 1958) who was regarded as the leading authority on the Jurassic Period during the middle part of the 20th century and was friends with Alfred Barrett Sackett (1895 – 1977), the headmaster of Kingswood School between 1928 – 1959. Towards the end of Arkell's short life he had been working on Bathonian ammonites discovered during the excavation of a new hockey pitch on land below Kingswood School.

Somerset Earth Science Centre is rescuing as much of the collection as possible to repurpose it as a reference collection for the Centre, with some of the more interesting and important fossils and minerals put on display for visitors. An immediate priority has been the careful cleaning of fossils, the rescue of specimen labels and tackling conservation issues such as pyrite decay. At the time of writing, only about 50% of the fossil collection has been processed. The Centre has approached the Russell Society to help sort through the minerals.

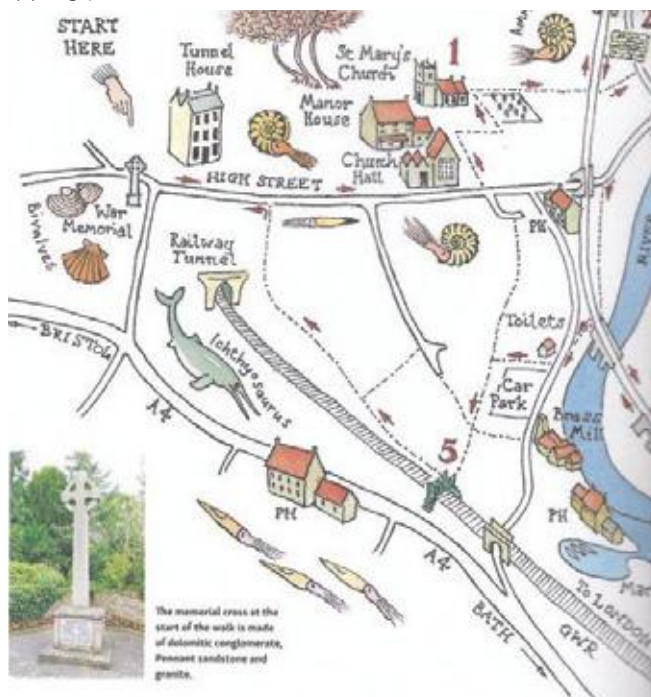
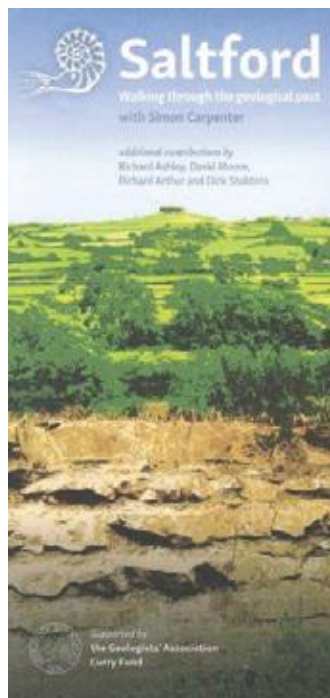
It has been immensely satisfying to see this old collection rescued and revitalised and a real delight to handle so many fascinating fossils. I hope to bring you updates as the project progresses.

Above: Simon hoovering the specimen boxes, being careful not to suck up any of the very tiny specimens.

ED – Simon first contacted me through one of our members – Richard Ashley- who had passed onto him the obituary of Desmond Donovan, by his daughter: both are, as was Desmond, members of the Bristol Naturalists Society. Simon wrote:

“Richard and I (and a few others) have recently completed a printed walking guide covering the geology of Saltford near Bristol. We've dedicated the guide to Desmond. I first made contact with Desmond when he was living temporarily at the bottom of St Michaels Hill, Bristol and he came out a few times to my home to look at my fossil collection, particularly the ammonites I had been collecting from around Saltford and Keynsham. He was a really lovely man and he was always very supportive and encouraging of my collecting activities”.

LEFT – the front cover of the leaflet and from the inside the pictorial map of Saltford and the guided Geo trail, (shown here because I love this form of mapping!).



You will notice the word 'Ichthyosaurus' positioned on the map, and perhaps remember the article by member John Chapman, also a keen geology and history buff, in the March Newsletter this year? He mentions one thought to have been found in Saltford but which was later re-attributed to the Banwell area, undoubtedly it's this one illustrated here John!



Ichthyosaurus skull

ED – it's well worth exploring the website given below.

The Saltford Geo trail guides are intended to raise funds for the work of the 'Saltford Environment Group (SEG) (www.saltfordenvironmentgroup.org.uk). But Richard Ashley has a few which are available for any member who would like to try the trail, which looks extremely interesting, it might interest our own walks leaders eager to find new places to explore for our walkers?

To obtain a copy send a SAE suitable for an A4 sheet folded in three, to Richard at 6 Nomis Park, Congresbury, BS49 5HB.

For this initial offer the Society is sending a donation to SEG for these, so there is no need for you to include any money in your envelope.

AND ABOUT WALKS FOR THE SOCIETY: Richard Frost

We have been able to resume our programme of walks, although with a limited number of Walks Leaders we may not be able to run a walk every week. If you would like to lead a walk please contact the Walks Coordinator on walks@themendipsociety.org.uk. To manage numbers, booking will be needed for most walks. Please go to the website at www.themendipsociety.org.uk /walks page and follow the appropriate link to SignUpGenius and follow the instructions there.

Non members are welcome on walks but we ask for a donation of £2 each. Some walks aimed at attracting non members will be advertised in the local press, for example, *The Mendip Times*.

Here is the first walk of the New Year, which, while members are welcome is also being advertised in the press as it is

aimed primarily at attracting non members. Please spread the word about our walks to those you know who might be keen walkers but are not (yet) members of the Society.

Sunday 9th January. Blackmoor Reserve and Hazel Manor

Meet at 1.30 pm in the car park at Blackmoor Reserve near Charterhouse;



ST505556 (BS40 7XR) for a 5.5 mile walk with views over the Blagdon and Chew Valley lakes. Non-members are very welcome. Moderate. No need to book. What3Words / referral.redouble.decoded.

Contact: Peter 01761 221995



Above – The mining information sign in Blackmoor car park Right – Herriots' Bridge on Peters' Walk in October

WESTBURY COMMUNITY TREE NURSERY By Buffy Fletcher



It started with a 'throw away remark!'

It started with a throwaway remark. At an early, virtual meeting of the Westbury Sub Mendip tree group someone wondered aloud about whether it might be possible to start a tree nursery. One member left the Zoom call and returned after five minutes. He had consulted his wife and they were happy for us to use a spare piece of their land for that purpose. Our bluff was called.

The land was close to the centre of the village and adjacent to a public footpath. Unfortunately, it was also waist deep in brambles and nettles and littered with all kinds of debris – old pig netting, builders waste, hedge trimmings and the like. It took several months of regular work parties to subdue the unwanted vegetation and clear the ground of all the rubbish.

While several of us were well practised in bashing scrub none of us had ever run a tree nursery so we cast around for help. We were fortunate to come across 'Moor Trees' nursery in Devon – a community enterprise that a decade or so ago had been in a similar position to us and was now solidly established. They agreed to a visit and were very generous with their time and advice. They told us of the importance of protection against mice and squirrels; the need to keep careful records

of the source of seeds and the importance of weed control. Most importantly they introduced us to the complexities of tree propagation.

Flower and vegetable seeds from catalogues normally germinate well and over a short space of time. This is not true for tree seeds. Many need to experience alternating periods of heat and cold to break their dormancy so end up spending weeks or months being moved in and out of the fridge. Even then their germination is uneven, spread across weeks or even years. Some, like small leaved lime have a very low proportion of viable seed. Others, like dog rose, seem very fertile. We are working out from experience how many seeds we need to plant to produce a given quantity of seedlings. 'Moor Trees' taught us a simpler method of handling stratification – the technical term for periods of alternating heat and cold to break dormancy. Big tanks (or old bathtubs) are part filled with suitable compost. Large quantities of seeds are then scattered in, lightly covered with compost, protected from birds and rodents and then left to the weather. As and when seeds germinate, the seedlings are pricked out into trays until big enough to go in the ground.

The AONB Young Rangers came to help us set up our first tank, intended to produce large quantities of hawthorn which is the tree we need most of. As well as picking the berries and mixing the compost with sharp sand they had the messy job



of separating the seeds from the fleshy outer casing. The fruity part of the hawthorn berry is there to encourage birds to eat them and excrete the seeds, usually well away from the parent bush. It also contains a germination inhibitor that stops the seed starting to grow until it is removed, whether by a bird's intestines or a young ranger's boot.

Acorns are also good candidates for the stratification tank. Although they germinate fairly well it is easiest to throw lots into the tank and put them into individual pots as and when shoots start to show. Oak trees, however, like to root deeply, sending an initial tap root deep

into the ground. It makes them hard to transplant without damaging the finer feeding roots needed for a good start in their new location. Rather than put them in the ground therefore we were advised to keep them for two years in root trainers – deep but narrow plant pots that encourage the development of a compact root ball.

We got all set up to grow our oaks this way in 2021 but found that there were very few acorns around. Oaks, and other trees like beech, try to outwit their predators by simultaneously producing exceptional quantities of seed every few years. Predator numbers reflect food available in the average year so in the 'mast' year, as it is called, a higher proportion go uneaten. For us it was another valuable lesson learned – take advantage of good years to allow for the bad.



On the basis of what we have learned, we now have a plan to produce around 2,000 young trees per year, ready to plant out at around 30cm to 50 cm in height. It will take two years on average to get to that stage from seed so we will have some 4,000 trees in the ground at any one time needing to be weeded and protected from rabbits, deer and countless thousands of insect pests (without using pesticide!) We have had generous help from the Westbury community and Mendip Hills AONB to get established. By autumn 2022 we should be in a position to start repaying that investment.

Buffy Fletcher

CAN YOU HELP US GROW AN 'INVENTREE' FOR THE MENDIP HILLS AONB?

By Tim Haselden, Project Development Officer, Mendip Hills AONB Unit



There is a national drive to plant trees to help combat climate change and recover nature. It's a great time to get involved and make the most of this opportunity. However, it's vital that we also see the wood for the trees before we get the spades out. The Mendip Hills is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) because of its special character.

This includes the drystone walls, the windswept plateau, the amazing views, and the area's unique geology and archaeology. The AONB is also home to a variety of important habitats including species-rich grasslands, heathlands, wetlands, and caves. These habitats are home to many rare species such as the

adder, small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly, skylark, and horseshoe bats.

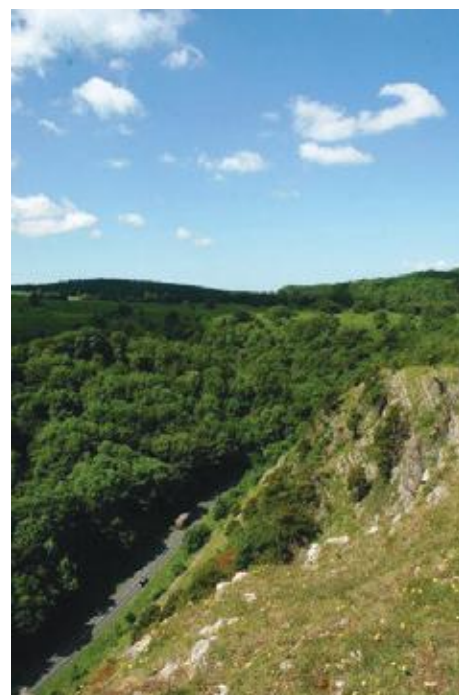
Plant the wrong tree in the wrong place and it's possible you won't be storing carbon or helping wildlife; the trees might die, you could upset your neighbours, and you might be destroying important habitat and the landscape character that makes the AONB so special. Ash Dieback is also having a devastating impact on many of our woodlands and specimen trees in the landscape, and this also needs to be considered.

The Mendip Hills AONB has approximately 12% woodland cover. The AONB Unit would like to increase this to about 13.5% (that's 280 more hectares) to play our part in this national drive to plant more trees. We need to do this by working together to allow both natural regeneration and to plant the right trees in the right places. Our developing Nature Recovery Plan will give people a clearer idea of where these areas are and highlight some of the more sensitive locations to avoid. You can also find out more in our Tree Planting Guide, available to download from www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/planning.

We have kindly been given some funding from the Forestry Commission, Mendip District Council and The Tree Council to support tree planting in 2022. This fits neatly with the Queen's Green Canopy initiative and our celebrations for the AONB's 50th Anniversary of Designation.

Which brings us to the root of this article. We're looking for land across the AONB where we can work with landowners to plant trees as funding becomes available. This might be in the form of a new or restored hedgerow, wood pasture, individual trees in gardens and field corners, or by creating new or extending existing woodlands. By working together, we can grow a list – an 'inventree' if you pardon the pun – of locations that are suitable for tree planting and that support the wider nature recovery network. We would love to hear from you if you have suggestions!

Tim Haselden, December 2021 – tim@mendiphillsaonb.org.uk





A PRESIDENTS' VIEW

Dear all,

Christmas is coming! Its a time of the year when I wonder where did it come from? It only seems a short while ago that everyone was talking about staycation holidays in this country. The now Christmas is here. I hope that for you all this will be a good Christmas. Its a time for gathering the family around you if you can. For some that may not be possible, but modern technology has its way of covering the miles. I will be having a Christmas Day zoom with my daughter in China and my son and his family in Cambridgeshire. This will be the first time we will have been together at Christmas

in years! As always there will be those who are missing from the family for the first time. Maybe they have moved away, are working overseas or serving with the armed forces. There will also be those missing because they are no longer with us and at Christmas that can be especially hard to come to terms with.

Memories are a great comfort and I would encourage everyone to take some quiet time to recollect the times gone by. Nostalgia is certainly not what it used to be! I think we are all turning back to a simpler celebration of the Christmas season. Maybe the Covid pandemic has made us all think about the pace of life and the tread wheel we often find ourselves on in a modern world. One thing is certain, the only way is forward and we do not know what tomorrow will bring. I always describe 'tomorrow' as that thing in a crisp clean wrapper , (re-cyclable of course) that no one has yet taken out and trashed.

This has been a good year for the Society, in which we have seen its influence being felt for the good and benefit of the Mendip Hills as a whole. Our previous chairman , Richard Frost handed over to Tina Bath who is doing a great job. She brings with her a great many skills that are of benefit to Society. Richard however may have thought he could sit back a little , but in truth has been involved in a lot of important work, getting the walks programme up and running again.... Always remember, you can run, but you can't hide!

Nothing and no one goes on for ever. On Thursday the 18th of November I gathered with what seemed to be most of Mendip, as I read a tribute to the late Bill Small of Charterhouse Warren Farm. Bill was an iconic figure on Mendip and his knowledge of its history and characters was well known. Always ready to chat, be that on the gate or from the open window of his truck, Bill would hold people spell bound. However in the early hours of October the 2nd he stepped quietly out of this life. His final resting place is on the farm, as he wished, overlooking Velvet Bottom; Mendip has taken back that which she gave!

My thoughts also go out to Councillor Nigel Taylor and his wife Vivvy. Nigel, who is the AONB Partnership Chairman and long time Society member is recovering from major surgery in hospital. Come home soon Nigel. Everyone please stay safe and well over the Christmas and enjoy every moment you can with those close to you and whom you care for. Finally this months' picture ... The best place to be on a winters night! – **Les**



ED – absolutely agree with you Les –

And to follow – another slice of Mendip Life from the President with an article entitled –

Education isn't just about the BIG 'E'

On two recent trips, I have taken both school children and adults onto the Mendip Hills. Both were for different reasons, but both would raise awareness as to what Mendip has to offer in the way of health, well-being and education. These guided walk requests had come via The Mendip Society and I was in a position to provide the answers to both. The first trip involved eighteen adult delegates from a pharmaceutical company who were returning to work after spending a long time apart due to Covid working restrictions. They had not seen one another for a long time, so the mood of elation and sheer joy at meeting up again had to be seen to be believed!

I wrote a proposal to the organisers based on both a suitable route and venue for their lunch, putting them and the Queen Victoria pub together. Sue Gearing and myself would lead the walk taken from our 'Miles more Mendip' book. Basing it on Priddy, we were able to take in the highest settlement, the history and the industrial past of Mendip, as well as getting a feel for its rugged landscape and weather. Briefing is all important for those who may not be familiar with an area that has its own weather pattern and guards it jealously! Instructions on what to bring and wear are important and an emergency procedure plan needed to be put in place.... Walk leaders within the Society will be more than aware that time spent on reconnaissance and planning is rarely wasted.

The weather was kind to us and the walk up to Ashen Barrows and Nine Barrows was cold but dry. I always listen to the conversation within a group. If its 'buzzing' all is well and dropping back to chat to those on the walk is also good. Whereas many were involved in their own catch up, questions and jokes are always a welcome aside. After all, that is the leaders POGU, (Position Of Greatest Use) and it's not always at the front.

Returning to Priddy was back across the fields to the Church Via Eastwater Lane and a long awaited lunch at the Queen Victoria pub. Sue and I left them with memories of a great day out, a signed copy for each of Miles More Mendip and the latest Mendip Society Newsletter.

Adult groups are one thing, school children are another! Next came fifty one pupils and ten adults from a primary school at Yate in Bristol. Again from a request through the Society I was able to provide the support they needed to put some meat on the bones of their 'Misty Mountains' project. Black Down was the ideal location, so I devised a route that the teacher in charge was able to walk and check herself. From this they drew up their own risk assessment and preparation work for the big day out. Part of that preparation was to look at the short Introduction to the Mendip Hills videos that are on the Society's You Tube account. How wonderful when children get excited about a day out! Apparently, one little fella was up so early in the morning just so he could prepare. His Mum said it had never been known before!

As you can imagine, progress was slow with the numbers involved. The first wonder of the day were several of the Red Devon cattle being brought in off the hill. These are massive animals and although docile they can seem pretty intimidating. The group discretely moved around them and the first lesson of the day was pressed home about behaviour and body

language with animals. Lunch was at the trig point, where, to their horror, I informed the group they were sitting on the grave of an ancient Celtic Chieftain.

Geography and geology covered we all moved on to our next appointment with the ponies. Again the behaviour lesson was put into practice and everyone moved through the herd quietly and respectfully. A first for the children and a real close encounter that will stay with them forever.

Waiting for us at the bottom of the link was their bus and a trip back to Bristol for some very weary people. A day out on the Hill and more work for them to follow up on, including what is this Mendip Society they had been hearing so much about?



SOCIETY ROUNDUP

It's been a funny old year all round – and right now, the old uncertainty is back again, just as we were beginning to emerge from our 'cocoons of safety' and begin our normal activities.

But hopefully you have all been keeping as active as possible and up with all the happenings in your local area. This last thought is an important one as it is vital that we are aware that all around us are doing as well as possible too. No-one can have missed the huge explosion of activity and information around the subject of the state our planet is in, with regard to its climate and its impact on our natural world and all that we can do to put things right. Here the Society is no exception.

Focussing on our local area, our own communities and neighbours, we have launched a new strand of our grant programme, with a leaflet entitled 'Small Grant Scheme', a copy of which you should find inside your envelope this time, together with a half page Membership Renewal form. (If either of these is missing please contact membership@themendipsociety.org.uk or 01761 221995)

Who but our members are more ideally placed to know of an individual, small un-official group, club, farmer or anyone with a bit of spare land, and the desire to make it better for wildlife, more resilient, more useful to other members of the public, more sustainable – no need to add more – you know all about such aims and objectives, being members of The Society. And who better to make them aware there is help to make these things come about.



And here's a reminder of one of our Corporate Members putting their best foot forward for a sustainable planet, in the beautiful Chew Valley – Yeo Valley Organic

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ROGER PENNICEARD – 27/7/1939 – 23/7/2021

It is with much sadness that we learn of the recent death of our much loved group walker, and Cheddar resident Roger Penniceard.

To all of those lucky people who knew him, then you will recall a fellow member who always had a ready smile for us which immediately preceded his natural, great sense of humour. We all found ourselves automatically seeking out his company, which guaranteed an interesting and entertaining time.

Roger loved the Environment and supported a number of National and Regional groups and was only too happy to share his well versed and enthusiastic views.

The care of wildlife and its place in our lives was high on his agenda and it was coupled with his enjoyment of all things technical, illustrated by his own designed and built electronic feeders and shutters for his chickens !

His attention to detail when designing and improving items came naturally to him when solving both technical and human problems. This quality came in handy when he worked as an Educational Physiologist for the handicapped and impaired.

Modern digital technology came naturally to him, and he always had some sort of device with the latest "app"; plotting, recording or exploring outside exploits. He even made his own device from wood, for removing his Wellington boots.

I suspect that this love of problem solving and great interest in the technical world stemmed from the day that he and his brother helped to build a radio with his Father.

His generous nature extended to helping those who were baffled by technical things to researching his family history with the result that two people are now united who were unaware of each other !

Another of his passions was the knowledge and appreciation of fine wines, which lead to the formation of his own enviable collection.

Here we think of a man of many talents and strings to his bow, who will be sadly missed by us all, and we offer our thoughts and support to his family and Life Partner, Lyn.

Richard Frost

