

Mendip

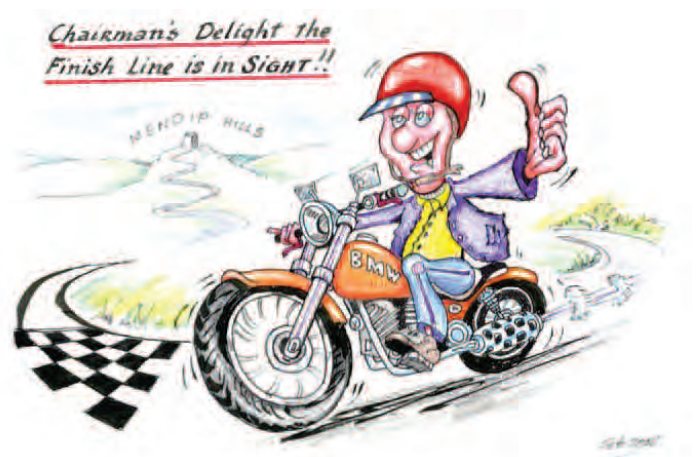
the
mendip
society

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 161 • March 2021

Caring for the Mendip Hills

KEEPING WELL, FIT AND OCCUPIED DURING A PANDEMIC



THE MENDIP SOCIETY AGM PAPERS ARE ON PAGES 8–13 OF THIS NEWSLETTER



From the Chair – AU REVOIR BUT NOT GOODBYE

By Richard Frost



So my term of the last five years as Chairman is drawing to a close. It has been an experience in more ways than one, but it was one which I chose to do at a time when I felt that taking over was the correct way to go. I am not going down the road of listing what has been achieved during this time but let me say that none of it would have been possible, had it not been for the sound and positive back up that the Committee supplied to me in many ways. Together they have helped to furnish a successful result of the numerous plans and projects that faced us.

I will spare the blushes of individuals but let me say that they are all unstinting in their knowledge and efforts and all have qualities that, when joined together make a formidable team. Having said that, I must put two people in the spotlight and say that all of what I have tried to do would not have been possible without the expertise and guidance of our President, Les Davies. M.B.E. whose qualities are best shown in the Society U-Tube videos. The other is our Secretary, Mrs Judith Tranter, (and husband David), who together have a spirit and knowledge needed to carry through the tasks they do so well. These members are the Society's biggest asset and we must be mindful of this and be ready to give them our support when it's needed. As it happens, it is my intention to remain on the Committee, even if it's to keep an eye on them !!

It would have been nice to have finished on a high note, but with the intervention of Covid-19, which played havoc with most of our plans last year, the result is an ending on a slightly deflated note. However, let me say that just as soon as our activities return to normal, then we should be in a position to dust off those planned items and resume our role in our beloved Mendip Hills, working alongside the many Groups and fine bodies with whom it is a joy to function, and achieve our joint goals. The end of the present lockdown is in sight and if, before the next newsletter comes out we are able to run walks, and even a visit or event or two, then it will all be put on the website and our Face Book page – so please keep a weather eye open and visit both regularly.

From the Editor

Well, here we are again, locked down, cut off, maybe a bit fed-up – but just look around – spring **is** on the way, the snowdrops and primroses are out in our reserves, the birds are rushing about in our gardens with wisps in their beaks and the days are getting lighter and longer. And as Albus Dumbledore said

“But you know, happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”

(Go on, admit you have read at least one Harry Potter book, if only to see what all the fuss is about!)

Of course, we have been seriously curtailed in our activities – the talks, walks and visits, (they will be back in the course of the summer we hope) but this does mean that there is room in this spring newsletter for some more meaty articles to interest and maybe inspire you towards a new hobby or skill. There have been Zoom talks available every day, usually freely, on every subject under the sun. Gaining swiftly in popularity has been the world of Fungi – and we have our very own guide into that world – Volunteer AONB Ranger Nathan Orr, husband of our Forest School Leader, see his article on page 6. With amazing species in mind, John Chapman has given us a closer look at the Ichthyosaur; don't know what they are? Find out on page 17

If you have always loved the written word, with a bit of research thrown in, how about writing or editing a new book? Following in the footsteps of Sue Gearing and President Les Davies with Mendipity, is Richard Dyson in Keynsham on page 7. Of course, walking is not new to the society, I hope that everyone who could venture out daily has enjoyed the freedom our lovely surroundings can bring, how about finding out how you could help to make sure that all our Rights of Way are safeguarded for the enjoyment of everyone in the future, page 14. And then, Wassailing is not new to the society either. This last Twelfth Night we couldn't gather in an orchard and entreat the trees to be fruitful, with lots of noise, fun and song, but one member didn't let this beat her and joined a wassail virtually, join Sally Davis and the 'Kernow Wassel' on page 19. And I know that many members really enjoy taking photographs of our special Mendips area and its wildlife but how many took steps to see it close-up, and then ensured others could see it too? See page 20 to find out how you can share your efforts with other members.

During the continuing lockdowns places such as the Wells & Mendip Museum have been really hard hit to keep the lights on and everything safe inside, so following on from our first donation the society made a second towards the maintenance of the irreplaceable artefacts they hold on behalf of us all. So Curator David Walker has written us an article on 'Cycling on Mendip' but not as we know it now-a-days, on page 18.

Through everything else the Government has been keen to introduce this year, we have had the relentless pushing through of increasing numbers of planning applications which threaten to obliterate the open, green areas surrounding us onto Mendip, areas which should be remaining just that, open and green.

Our planning scrutinizers have been diligently putting our views forcefully forward but sometimes they feel they are banging their heads against a brick wall, Mike Rolfe on page 5 sounds as if he is re-living our local history sometimes!

This thought inspired me to spend some of winters wet days continuing my trawl through the society's box of precious previous newsletters, where, you may remember in November's 'Mendip', Smitham Chimney details were discovered. This in turn sparked an idea for a new series of 'Historical Snippets' which we hope may jog some memories and unearth our very valuable historical material, such as photos or documents, see page 4

Well, I hope all this leaves room for the most important event in this issue – our AGM.

You will appreciate that things are having to be done a little differently this year but luckily you have already for the last couple of years been in the way of receiving, reading and inwardly digesting, we hope, everything you need to know for an AGM, in the centre pages of our newsletter. This year is the same – and essential.

We are required by the Charities Commission to hold an AGM to vote on management matters, certain reports and any proposals put forward for adoption. All members can take part and have one vote on each item. The only difference this year is that you will not be there in person but your votes will count when sent in by email or post by the date of the meeting – FRIDAY 26TH MARCH 2021. So pages 8 to 13 are most important to read.. See you all there!

THE UP-SIDE OF THE LOCK-DOWN TIMES

One of the most interesting effects of the series of lockdowns we have had to cope with has been the huge increase in spare time – and the opportunity to see, hear and take part in all the fascinating 'meetings' on a myriad of subjects, courtesy of digital platforms such as Zoom and Teams. We dabbled at the beginning with our talk on the flight of Charles 2nd along the Monarch's Way, now we are able to offer two more talks for members, by two of our own members, as we still can't mingle freely in a hall as we used to do.

Firstly – On **TUESDAY 30TH MARCH**, 20.00-21.30 given by Professor Danielle Schreve, who is well known to us through her work at Gully Cave in Ebbor Gorge

Stones and Bones: the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (and Somerset!)

Who were the earliest settlers in Britain? Palaeontologist and archaeologist Professor Danielle Schreve (Royal Holloway University of London) will tell the story of the ancient human occupation of Britain over 800,000 years, highlighting key sites in Somerset with evidence for stone tools and fossils, to reveal how our ancestors coped with the ever-changing climates and landscapes of the Ice Ages.



The link to this talk is below but it would be most helpful to us if we know how many to expect to attend, therefore it would be appreciated if you could drop a short e-mail, or make a quick phone call sometime beforehand to let me know you plan to attend. (Editor details on back page.)

Danielle uses 'Teams' platform, it is exactly the same as Zoom – you don't need to have the programme installed, it gives you the option of a click to link directly to the web, after you have clicked on the

Meeting link: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MzcwMjQ5NjEtYjIhNy00OTEwLWFINzMtOWMwM2MwMTIhZGNj%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%222efd699a-1922-4e69-b601-108008d28a2e%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22426246ad-def5-4728-ad49-ae8f3dcff78%22%7d%22%7d

Secondly – on **MONDAY 12TH APRIL** at 8pm

Volunteering on Skomer – by Roger Moses The Bird Islands of Pembrokeshire

Roger will talk about his experience volunteering on Skomer, one of the Bird Islands of Pembrokeshire, covering the duties of a Volunteer Warden on this windswept square mile isolated in the Irish Sea, at various times of the year. He will describe its amazing abundant wildlife, plus that of the other islands, and the seas around them. They are readily accessible to the public, and are one of the wildlife spectacles of the Earth.

Roger will use Zoom, for which we will have purchased a licence to allow a longer time and a bigger audience. We can't give the meeting link until early April **so we ask you to book with the Secretary** sometime beforehand (address/tel. on the back page) and we will send the link the day or so before the talk which serves as a reminder too. (Roger's photos are on the front cover – with many more beautiful pictures in his talk!)

If we do not have your e-mail address, please consider informing Peter Janes (Mem. Sec.) of it so that you can easily receive the useful clickable link to join a talk – better than typing it out. [prj1099@gmail.com]

HISTORICAL SOCIETY SNIPPETS – from past Newsletters

January 1971 Newsletter 10

Area 2—Axe:

Tree Planting at Lower Farm, Charterhouse

On Sunday, 9th November a group of members pegged out and dug out sites for about 60 trees and on the following Sunday, seedlings of oak, ash and sycamore were planted. [I think it is worth recording the names of these pioneers: Miss N. Webber, Mr. and Mrs. Tovey, Mr. Wills, Mrs. N. Litten, Dr. and Mrs. Armitage, Mr. Ware, Mrs. Young (who first mooted the idea), Mrs. Clark, Mr. W. Litten and Mr. Franey—*Ed.*]. The main planting will be done in the spring, but it was felt that as the trees were available and the weather was good, this would be a useful experiment. There may well be losses from rabbits and squirrels, or bad weather. When the main planting begins, it is hoped that many more members will come and help—they will be very welcome. The Earl of Waldegrave has promised us 400 trees from his estates and as noted elsewhere, we have had a donation towards costs of others.



Mr. F. S. Ware (centre) starts the planting of the young trees at Charterhouse on Sunday, watched by other members of the Mendip Society, Mr. W. Litten, Mrs. N. Litten, Mrs. R. Young, and the secretary, Miss N. D. Webber.

In 1970 the idea for a tree planting project was suggested by Mrs Kathleen Young, on land available at Lower Farm, Charterhouse. Later a report of the planting meetings, and a picture appeared in a local paper in a column called 'The Jack Blandiver Column' of some of the dedicated tree enthusiasts. In the centre is Mr F Ware who planted the first tree; from the left are Wallace Litten, Mrs Norah Litten, Kathleen Young, and the Society Secretary, Miss N.D.Webber.

And another highly 'relevant today' snippet from Mike Rolfe to ponder – PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In 1971, R.W. Brunskill wrote and published his 'Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture' which was expanded in 1978. The definition of Vernacular Architecture being that characterised by reliance on needs, construction materials and traditions specific to its particular locality. It is a type of architecture which is indigenous to a specific time and place and not replicated from elsewhere.

In April 1974, an article was published in the Mendip Newsletter entitled 'Planning'. The opening paragraph read;

"... The Society continues to express its concern to the Local Planning Authority on all applications the Planning Committee feel may be detrimental. This involved development within villages, where our particular concern is architectural style and increased density of building and also development outside villages ..."

Since the said publications, the Mendip Society, together with local Town and Parish Councils, has endeavoured to persuade the relevant planning authorities to adopt these principles, largely without success. Our towns and villages have been expanded with little or no regard for vernacular architecture. The developments, which have expanded the boundaries of our local settlements, are primarily based on urban 'architecture'. Local materials have been ignored in favour of cheaper alternative. E.g. Reconstructed stone in lieu of natural stone.

In its recent White Paper 'Planning for the Future' published in August 2020, the Government states that it requires the Nation to build beautiful homes. In the foreword, the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government states;

".... This Government doesn't want to just build houses. We want a society that has re-established powerful links between identity and place, between our unmatched architectural heritage and the future, between community and purpose. Our reformed system places a higher regard on quality, design and local vernacular than ever before, and draws inspiration from the idea of design codes and pattern books that built Bath, Belgravia and Bournville..."

Most importantly, The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP, Prime Minister has stated, on several occasions in public speeches and to Parliament, that there are plenty of brown field sites throughout the country to meet all housing needs and that there is therefore no need to destroy any of our precious countryside.

Notwithstanding all the advice and Government statements, planning applications to build thousands of urban style housing estates, mostly in the countryside on green field sites located outside development boundaries, are continuing to be submitted and approved. The mistakes of the last 60 years are being constantly replicated.

On 2nd February 2021, The Final Report – “The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review”, was published. The Report contains a foreword by Sir David Attenborough. Essentially, the Report recommends the need for a transformational change in our approach to conservation of the natural world. It emphasises that nature is an asset which must not be compromised in the pursuit of economic prosperity. It is thought that the Report will form the basis of future Government policy. **Our message to all those concerned at the number of our green fields, woods and moorlands disappearing under these developments.**

In these circumstances, The Mendip Society, likeminded bodies and all who care about the preservation of our countryside, architectural heritage and indeed our planet earth, must remain actively vigilant. Submit objections to your local planning authority, explaining clearly why you do not agree with damaging planning applications. Describe the damage large, poorly designed developments cause to the Mendip Hills AONB, our countryside and the character of our towns and villages. Highlight how the infrastructure is insufficiently robust to cope with large increases in population and traffic. In particular draw attention to the already inadequate road system and the damage caused by the large numbers of additional vehicles generated by these developments, adversely affect climate change by destroying the natural environment and causing excessive light and noise pollution.

It is worth remembering that it adds weight to a planning objection if it is cross referenced to a relevant policy in the Authority's Local Plan and/or the local settlement's Neighbourhood Plan or Village Design Statement. These documents can generally be found 'on line'. The Mendip Society can help you should you have difficulty locating them.

The Government and Local Authorities must take heed of sound advice given by the likes of Sir Partha Dasgupta and Sir David Attenborough. Furthermore, if we don't make our views known at grass roots level, nothing will change and there will be severe negative consequences for future generations. – **Michael Rolfe, Sedgemoor Planning Scrutiniser**

ED: Did you see the ‘Ode to the loss of agricultural land’ by Mike McLennan, in the February issue of the Mendip Times? Mike and Editor Steve Eggington have given me permission to quote his poem, which will definitely appeal to Mike Rolfe- and to all who are passionate about conserving the countryside – so here are just the middle six verses of ‘Pastures of the Vale’.

‘Pastures of the Vale’

***“Well, my dear, I heard it said
That where we walk today,
These lovely fields of sweet, green grass
Will soon be swept away”***

***“Whatever do you mean, my dear,
‘Will soon be swept away?’
We’ve grazed upon these fields for years
And this is where we’ll stay!”***

***“I’m sure you’ve got it wrong, my dear
It will never come to pass,
They’d never rob us of our land
With its sweet, lush meadow grass.”***

***“Perhaps they’ll plough the land my dear
Then sow it in the spring
And the grass will grow again and then
We’ll hear the skylarks sing.”***

***My dear, why would they sweep away
Such a peaceful, tranquil place?”
“Because, my dear, we’ve what they want
And what they want is space.”***

***“Space, my dear, to build their homes,
Desecrate our land,
Where we walk now, across these fields,
New houses soon will stand.”***

Mike McLennan

But it's not only houses – now it's a gas fired electricity generating facility too!

This is a perfect highlighting example of Mike Rolfe's article above; the photo is of green fields – looking west to Cross village and The Mendip Hills AONB. BUT they are also the site of the proposed industrial complex to build a gas fired electricity generating facility. It has now been taken to appeal after being refused planning permission last year. Any sane, right thinking person would **say** it is completely 'out of the question, but there will only be a chance of its being stopped if **everyone registers** their objections. The deadline was March 10th, too late for us in this newsletter this time – but there will be others, you can be sure. Watch this space.

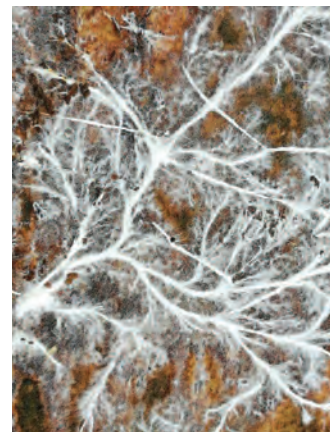


THE FUNGI – Mycelium Meanders with Nathan Orr

Welcome to this short article about a kingdom of life that is now increasingly recognised as of critical importance to our planet, The Fungi. I have been a Fungi photographer and enthusiast for five or six years and the more I learn about them the more interested I become. I would like to thank the Mendip Society for giving me this opportunity to share my enthusiasm and perhaps snare a few of the members into becoming fungi hunters!

What are Fungi? Most of us would immediately answer that fungi are mushrooms but this is only a small part of the whole organism. Many fungi do not produce the archetypal mushroom, some are microscopic, some entirely subterranean and some are huge, a fungi is thought to be the largest living organism on the planet!

Fungi have been on our planet a long time, recent fossil discoveries have shown that Fungi are possibly 1 billion years old, they are an immensely diverse group so defining them by characteristics is tricky but for most of us the important aspects are that they obtain nutrients by absorbing organic matter like animals (not photosynthesis as plants do), they use chitin for structure like insects (not lignin as in plants) and they can reproduce sexually or asexually. Most of the mushrooms that we recognise as fungi have grown from the main body of the fungi which is a (potentially) vast web of tiny filaments that are called mycelium or hyphae. (Right.) In a single gram of rich ancient woodland soil there could be as much as 100m of mycelium, which is boggling to comprehend if you try to think how much must be in the soils of some of our ancient woods here on the Mendips! This network of threads does the job of searching out food resources and water in the soil where the fungi use an extensive array of tools to break down and absorb the nutrients.



There are three main jobs that fungi perform in our environment. The first type are the ones that breakdown dead organic material, the rotter's or Saprotrophs. These are the fungi you find attached to dead wood, leaf material, on bones or horns.

These fungi are important in returning the nutrients stored in these materials back into the nutrient cycle, they also reduce the waste material from building up and smothering the land.



(Left The Stinkhorn – a Saprotroph.)

The Second type of Fungi are the Mycorrhizal fungi (I wish there was a better word than that mouthful!), which work in conjunction with the roots of plants delivering the nutrients and water they gather to the plant in exchange for the carbohydrates that the plants make through photosynthesis. Over 90% of plants rely on the relationship with fungi in their roots to provide the nutrients and water they need. Some of our most iconic mushrooms are mycorrhizal fungi. (Fly Agaric – Photo Cover page.)

The third group is the much-maligned parasites, killers of trees, plants and even spiders and insects! Although some decry the parasites, just like so much in the cycles of nature, the parasites perform an important role. Not all parasitic fungi kill plants, some will, but the fungi is usually taking advantage of an already weakened plant as most healthy plants resist

parasitic fungi, we must remember that the relationships between plant and fungi have been inextricably linked for hundreds of millions of years. Honey Fungus is one type of fungi that is found here on the Mendips, as is my own personal favourite



parasitic fungi, Cordyceps militaris or Scarlet Caterpillar Club which infects and consumes insect larvae hidden in the soil, which you can reveal with a little careful excavation. (Left – Cordyceps.)

If you want to start finding fungi the thing to do is slow down and look, check log piles and stumps for the rotters, look in unploughable grass land meadows on the Mendips where the grass is cropped short for waxcaps, giant puffballs and others, look in the mossy places in your own garden for Cordyceps. For the mycorrhizal fungi there are 4 main tree species to look for Birch, Beech, Pine and Oak as these have lots of complex relationships with fungi. Fungi is all around us if you stop to look and if you don't mind getting muddy knees! Remember it is not an issue to pick a mushroom to help with identification but my general rule is to take only pictures and leave only footprints, Happy Fungi Hunting everyone!

All pictures are taken by Nathan Orr on the Mendip Hills. Follow Nathan Orr on Facebook or @nate_orr_what on Instagram.

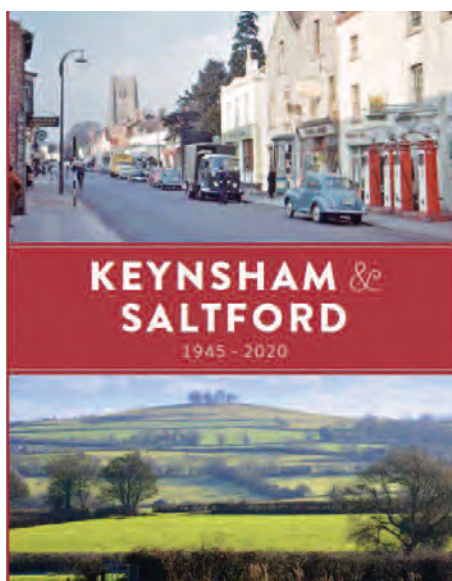
See three films made by Nathan on Fungi foraging on You Tube – <https://youtu.be/wG0zQKyGJmE>

LOCKED DOWN IN KEYNSHAM by Richard Dyson

Starting in 2015, I led a group of our local history society members researching and compiling a recent history of Keynsham and Saltford. This was finally published in September 2020, leading one of the team to comment "It's just a pity that it took a global pandemic to get you to finish it!" There was probably more than a grain of truth in this, as I worked on filling the gaps and editing solidly from November 2019 through to June 2020. Had it not been for the first lock-down from March to June it would definitely have been a battle to hit the deadline.

Of course, we don't know how many more lock-downs we might have to endure, so if you're thinking of writing or editing a history book, here are a few tips:

- If you employ a dog/book designer, as we did, don't bark/dabble in detailed layout yourself. And agree the font size at the beginning.
- Try and avoid dealing with celebrities, unless you know them personally. They never respond to emails, their PA's are charming but never get the answers you need. If your timetable allows, it's better to wait until they are dead, then you can find facts that won't be contradicted and you don't have to worry about the law of libel.
- Getting the right photograph is much harder than you expect. It will be in front of you on the internet but can you find out who took it, how to get a better quality copy to suit the publisher and then get permission to use it? Rarely. Taking the pictures yourself is the best solution but until we crack time travel this isn't always an option.
- Organizations will give you only limited help. Understandably, most operate in the present – but historians have to probe the past. It's best to avoid dealing with schools altogether – the staff are always concentrating on next week's Ofsted inspection.



The next volume in the series is planned for publication in 2025 so don't wait for that; if you're interested in the area, better to buy a copy of the fruits of our recent labour.

Keynsham & Saltford 1945 – 2020.

It's in full colour, with 176 pages, over 200 illustrations, and records events over the period, with separate sections on local personalities and particular themes such as the Changing High Street, sports clubs and local schools.

Priced at £15.00 if collected from Keynsham, or £18.50 including P&P, the book is available from Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society via the details on their website at www.keysalthist.org.uk, by emailing books@keysalthist.org.uk or telephone 0117 9864453.



Mr Bob Trott – Keynsham's last blacksmith retired in 1966

MENDIPITY – Do any of you know where this? Have you ever walked under him?



He is one of several statues at Camerton Court near Timsbury which we walk through on the circle in Mendipity which Les Davies and I devised. It's an interesting walk through the old coalfield and one that may not be familiar to many of you.

Mendipity has sold extremely well since its publication in October, 2020 and stocks are getting very low. However, there are still copies at local shops in the villages around Mendip. If you have trouble getting one, just contact me at gearings@btinternet.com and I will send you a copy for £11.49 which includes p and p. Or there are still bumper packs left – **Mendipity** and our last book **Miles More Mendip** which was published four years ago. This will cost £16.95 with postage. Our thanks again to The Mendip Society for helping to sponsor the book. – **Sue Gearing**

A.G.M. MARCH 26TH 2021 to be held as a postal meeting

AGENDA – Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on March 29th 2020. As this scheduled meeting had to be cancelled because of the first Covid-19 lockdown there are no minutes to read and no matters arising. All the reports etc were originally published in the March 2020 newsletter.
2. The Chairman's' report and the Annual report have been combined as subject matter will be identical and sparse. Adoption of report – proposed by C Constance and seconded by N Taylor.
3. Summary Report of the accounts for 2020. As the accounts have not yet been audited because of the 'shielding situation' of the auditor there will not be an adoption proposal and vote. Copies will be available to members on request later in the year when they have been audited.
4. Other Relevant Reports –Membership, Rights of Way, and Webmaster, plus the reports for the two Society Reserves .
5. Election of Officers – the President takes the Chair, (so to speak)
 - a) Nomination and election of Prime Officers –
 - 1) The Chairperson
 - b) Other members of the Management Committee, including any new nominations
6. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor.
The date of the Annual General Meeting 2022
7. TEA AND CAKE postponed until happier times.

VOTING PROCEDURES

Every member has one vote for each item which requires voting upon. These will be marked **VOTE**.

All those for whom we have an e-mail address, will receive an e-mail with a voting form in the body of it, which requires a YES or NO or ABSTAIN ANSWER for each item listed. It can then simply be sent back by choosing the 'reply to' option. This will be sent soon after it is estimated you will have received your copy of the newsletter (hopefully by the end of the second week of March). The posting date to be on the envelope for sending your votes back must be the date of the AGM itself i.e. Friday 26th March.

For those for whom we do not hold an e-mail address, you will find the same form printed at the end of the AGM section of this newsletter. You are requested to fill it in, cut it out and post it back to the Secretary, the address is on the back page of the newsletter. If you don't want to cut your newsletter up, you can always transcribe it onto a piece of paper, or photocopy it, and fill it in, and post it to arrive by the date of the AGM , Friday 26th March

Your vote will be very much appreciated by whatever means, thank you. – J Tranter, Secretary

WELCOME BY THE PRESIDENT MR. LES DAVIES MBE

Hello everyone,

I would normally be welcoming you in person at the Society's Annual General Meeting,(AGM) but different times need a different approach, so I do it by letter this time.

Everyone is having the opportunity to vote by post or email: not everyone has access to the internet , nor do they want it. The voting procedure is detailed at the end of the agenda, it allows us all to take part in forming the Society's structure for the coming year.

As you are aware our current Chairman Richard Frost is standing down. Up to the nomination closing date we have had only one nomination and that is for Tina Bath. For those who may not know Tina, let me give you some background.

A local farmers daughter, she spent a long time as a Warden working with me in the days of the Mendip Wardens. Well known for her practical skills and abilities, she epitomises the modern approach to the countryside with a wealth of experience behind her. Many of you will have met her during those practical hedge laying and wall building sessions. She has served on Priddy Parish Council as well as being the first woman Chairperson in the Mendip Ploughing Society.

Our AGM is usually a social event as well, but obviously not this year. Perhaps next year will be different for all the good reasons! Please help us keep going by casting your postal or e-mail votes.

My kindest regards to you all, Les

REPORTS FOR THE MEETING ON 26TH MARCH 2021

Combined – Report from the Chairman and the Annual Report –

The year 2020 started well with our planned Wassail of Burrington Orchard being enjoyed by a good spirited crowd; all the local wassails must have been very powerful because the year has seen a bumper crop of apples everywhere. In January and February we hosted two well attended talks at the Wells Museum, 'The world of Rock Climbing Photography', by Ian Smith and Martin Grass of Mendip Cave Rescue on 'Caving and Cave Rescue'

Also in February we completed two hedge laying tuition days and managed to squeeze in two work days in Tania's Wood in March, with the AONB volunteers. Also planned in March were the AONB Partnership AGM meeting and our own society AGM when just a few days before, the dates, at the very end of the month everything ground to a halt. Covid-19 pandemic took over our lives.

It was a time of great uncertainty as nothing was clear as to what could or could not go ahead, things were planned only to be cancelled and re-planned, and then cancelled again. The last talk of the season on April 30th was to have been about walking the whole of the long distance footpath, the Monarch's Way in sections from Worcester to Shoreham, Sussex. John Price and friends had got as far as the Mendips in tracing the escape route of Charles 2nd when all jaunts like this were stopped. But John, not willing to disappoint us offered to give us our first Zoom talk instead of in the hall at Winscombe. It was actually his first ever Zoom talk but we were delighted with it and it went off very well. Members may well be suffering from a surfeit of zoom talks before this pandemic has run its course!

Even after the first lockdown was lifted, the visits and guided walks were not able to go ahead and so no walks or talks programme was arranged for the rest of the year as it was obvious that people were not going to be able to meet and mingle for a long time ahead.

The annual summer dig at Gully Cave by Prof. Danielle Schreve and her team from the Royal Holloway, University of London, was also a cancellation victim as was the MendipRocks Festival way into the autumn, both events which the society sponsor; we were also on track to sponsor one of the 'walling competition classes' of the Mendip Ploughing Society, but that had to be put on hold, until their next autumn ploughing match can be held. (2021?).

Another project which was in the advanced planning stage was the StarFish City recovery, in partnership with other organisations, this is put on hold for the future.

Into the early summer months eased restrictions allowed the President, together with Graham Keating of 'Wavelength Consultancy', to film a series of six video films introducing different aspects of the Mendip Hills, which were well received on our own You Tube channel. This was then opened to members, and they and their friends and family were invited to make their own short videos showing their own favourite parts and activities of the area. The response has been rather sketchy, in more normal times we hope to be able to boost this publicity aspect for the society. Our website also welcomes videos and photographs of members activities; just log in and go the 'links' section and feel free to make a comment. (A comment from Richard Frost – this is just a cheap 'plug' for my own offering which I hope will give you an idea of what a bike ride up Burrington Combe really is!) Through the summer months we were able to continue work days in both reserves with very small groups and careful work practices; Slader's Leigh had two maintenance days when we replaced gate posts and re-made flights of steps, and in August, with a hired Allen Scythe the grass was cut in one day. Several days later we had a hard but careful AONB work day when everything was raked and cleared away, a very good job done. But come October we were again restricted to a small group of six persons, and then finally locked down again.

In the last few months of 2020 the consequences of the chalara virus in ash trees (ash die back) all over the whole of the Mendip Area has become apparent and hundreds of huge, mature trees have been felled because they have become a danger to the public. There are a few casualties in Slader's Leigh we have dealt with, but there are actually very few ash trees in Tania's Wood, on the whole we have been lucky – so far. This makes it all the more necessary for the society to continue to be part of the partnership of conservation groups dedicated to re-planting other trees in the vast tracts of cleared land on Mendip, as well as playing our part in the Government's policy of increasing the area of wooded and re-wilded land to combat global warming.

At the re-arranged AGM of the AONB Partnership, of which the society is a member, it was great to see that the annual Award to the AONB Volunteer of the Year was, in this most challenging year for the Mendips, awarded to every volunteer collectively. We in the Society only have to look around us to see the valuable work that they do every day on behalf of the entire Community, and we are only too pleased to support and help wherever we can; it is worth recording that it has been awarded every year since its inception to a volunteer who is also a member of the Mendip Society.

Even with the most forceful responses and efforts of our Planning Officers, the increasing rate of housing development continues to blight our Hills. So we urge everyone not 'to leave it up to them', but to look at your Local Authority planning web page and submit your objections to all those developments you consider to be a potential blot on our landscape. Don't forget that once a green agricultural or common land area has been built on, the damage is done forever and cannot be undone. – **Richard Frost & Judith Tranter.**

Report proposed for adoption by Clive Constance, seconded by Nigel Taylor VOTE NEEDED

Financial Report for the year ending December 31st 2020 (overview)

A brief overview of the Income and Expenditure Account and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31st December 2020. The Mendip Society had a Deficit of £1,714.08 (in 2019 a surplus of £49,291.53 after a one off bequest) after payments from the heritage fund totalling £2,700 (in 2019 £3,579.99)

Without the above mentioned legacy the income of the society was slightly lower than in 2019 this was due to several Walks, Talks and Events in 2020 having to be cancelled. The outgoings for 2020 were higher than in 2019 despite the reduction in activities, this was because the society had a series of films made about the Mendips (which are now available on you tube, there is also a link to the films on the society's website).

The number of Small Grants made, and the total amount awarded, were also lower than in 2019, due to lack of requests.

The Society's Accounts show it to be in a good position to restart its activities when the current lockdown ends and its usual range of Walks, Talks and Events can be resumed.

The Treasurer reported that our auditor, David Woodliffe is retiring this year from extra-mural auditing and therefore is appealing to our membership, for anyone with profession skills to contact her with a view to assisting us next year with the auditing of our accounts. We thank David very much for this work during the years he has been our accounts auditor. (See also notes at the end of the AGM pages.)

Marilyn Cattell – Treasurer

Membership figures for 2020

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Single 60+	204	205	189	210	222	216	205
Joint / family	122	117	112	117	114	107	103
Single under 60	38	41	47	45	31	25	20
Life members	18	17	16	16	16	16	16
Small business	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Large business	0	0	1	2	2	2	2
Total	384	382	366	390	385	366	346

In view of the limitations that the corona virus restrictions have placed on our activities since last March we have waived the subscription for existing members this year. The Committee would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone (about half our members) who have nevertheless voluntarily donated their subscriptions.

The table shows memberships in February over recent years. It may be seen that our membership has continued to decline. To reverse this and allow the Society to thrive we need new members. Please encourage your friends and family to join.

Peter Janes- Membership Secretary

The Mendip Society Website: www.themendipsociety.co.uk

During the past year John Moore stepped down as Webmaster; the Committee would like to express their appreciation for his work in setting it up and managing it for several years. The Membership Secretary is now running the website. Contributions, **either news or photos for the gallery, are welcome** and should be sent to membershipsecretary@themendipsociety.org.uk.

Thanks are due to our two stalwart photographers, Judith Tranter and Mary Heffernan, for their photos of our nature reserves and Mendip through the seasons.

It would be valuable to have another member as reserve Webmaster so if you would like to help in this regard, please contact Peter Janes at membershipsecretary@themendipsociety.org.uk.

Peter Janes

The Mendip Society Nature Reserves

Both the society's reserves at Tania's Wood and Slader's Leigh have contributed positively to the community during a difficult year.

Slader's Leigh Meadow has been offering a relatively mud free passage on our eco matting strip down through the meadow for walkers and cyclists, during yet another winter of wind and rain, especially during the time when the Strawberry Line has been closed for work on the landslip at Sandford. Luckily, a gap in the lockdown rules allowed a group of regular volunteers to cut and clear the meadow in the autumn; now that Sue Gearing and Les Davies's most recent walking guide, 'Mendipity' includes passage through the reserve to see the late spring flowers and the orchids, the meadow needs to look its best.

Regrettably, in common with many places on Mendip, there have been incidents of vandalism and disgusting littering during recent months by a small minority of mindless louts determined to spoil other people's pleasure and destroy anything which is cared for and valued by others. Enough said!

The ancient small leaved limes at the top of the meadow are doing well as is the new hedging planted nearby. The old oaks of the same age, in the boundary of Yadley Lane, with their bare 'antlers' pointing skywards are looking quite vulnerable and may need a little safety trimming before long, but it all shows that nature and life goes on despite human disasters. Our thanks to local Winscombe people who keep an eye open for us during the times when we can't, and especially to Nick and Malcolm, amongst others, who visit regularly during work and exercise routines.



Tania's Wood, Ubley, unlike Slader's Leigh, receives far fewer visitors but has seen far more activity during the last year. Following a detailed survey to take stock of what has been achieved in the last four years, a work plan for the summer into winter season was devised. We usually run two hedge laying courses along with a coppicing weekend for beginners interested in countryside skills; these were impossible to plan for this year so small numbers of volunteers have been working, observant of official Covid-19 advice, almost weekly to keep on top of the vast amount summer growth, and in preparation for the new trees Spring planting (Jan–March 2021). Hedging whips were ordered back in the summer from The Conservation Volunteers (I Dig Trees), and other trees were due to become available from The Woodland Trust and the AONB planting schemes to contribute towards the Mendip Hills Grand Planting 'The Right Tree in the Right Place' project. The pandemic has put a great many plans on hold, but so has the huge work load of many landowners through the ash tree devastation. New planting will probably now be for the autumn of the year 2021.

Several rows of overgrown hazels have been coppiced, the branches used for fence posts, and cut into hedging stakes. We have even tried splitting the right size branches for the making of hurdles and gates, something we will continue learning how to do next year. Ditch and bank and scrub clearance of an area at the lower end of the wood revealed a hitherto concealed five barred gate which had a new post and hinges installed to make it functional and provides a new entrance to the reserve for us.

Unfortunately, the Blagdon Forest School have not been able to visit at all during the year, but their camp fire and work areas together with the 'adventure trails' have been maintained ready for their return next year. The Deer Bank has also been kept clear of invasive bramble and encroaching blackthorn from the boundary hedges, in the long process of returning it to its original appearance.

This outdoor work is much appreciated by the volunteers and no-one would deny that it is 'exercise', indeed, of sometimes the most strenuous kind contributing much towards general well being and resilience. Volunteering for a charity in their normal programme of works has been allowable in small groups of up to six, especially in the open air, under the Government guidelines for 2020.



Hazels before coppicing and after- the stools (fore-ground, right) are covered in the brash from the smaller branches to stop the deer eating the new young branches which shoot in the spring. Maybe the best part of the day –a chance to ‘chew the fat’ over a lovely fire of the cleared brash.

David Tranter

Rights of Way Officers Report

Due to Corvid, not a lot has happened on the rights of way front over the past year. We have only been consulted on two proposed Orders for the Modification of the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way: 1) Doultling and Cranmore Parish. Minor diversion of footpath SM 7/21 at Waterlip. No objection raised. 2) Meare Parish. In 2015, a proposal to divert footpath WS 6/18, currently running diagonally across Meare sports field and pitches was considered acceptable. An amended proposal has been received moving the path diversion to the opposite side of the site. No objection raised.

Update on previously reported Orders

- 1) The diversion of footpath AX 29/78 at Roman Road, Sandford, on hold for the past three years still awaits confirmation of land ownership by Thatchers, who don't seem to be in any hurry to resolve the situation. The existing line of path remains available for use, as does the new line, albeit unofficially.
- 2) The addition of a bridleway at Mendip Lodge, Burrington to the Definitive Map is still awaiting resolution.
- 3) The previously approved diversion of AX 3/1 and AX 3/21 at Rhodyate Farm, Banwell has now been completed. This proposal results in the diversion of the line of the Butcombe Trail away from the main farm complex. Those of you having the Trail book will need to look out for, and follow, the new waymarks from the eastern end of the complex.

Dave and Margaret Parker. Rights of Way Officers

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: The President takes the Chair (metaphorically speaking) for the election of the officers of the Society.

- 1 The post of Chairperson of The Mendip Society and of the Management committee.
There has been one nomination received – that of Tina Bath, proposed by Malcolm Parsons and seconded by David Tranter. She is willing to stand. **VOTE NEEDED**
- 2 Re-election of the Management committee. These serving members of the Management Committee: Peter Janes, Marilyn Cattell (Treasurer), Pat Farrant, Mike Rolfe, Clive Constance, Judith Tranter (Secretary) and Richard Frost are willing to stand again.
Proposed 'election en bloc' by Roger Moses, seconded by Dr. John Steers – **VOTE NEEDED**

A.O.B. from the Committee or the floor –

Because of the situation in 2020 and again in 2021, Annual General Meetings have been disrupted entirely. This year the society has attempted to comply with the Charity Commission rules in the best way possible acceptable to the Commission, although not complying with the rules of its own Constitution. In order to be prepared for circumstances of any kind in the future the Management Committee puts forward an amendment to the Constitution for approval.

Proposed by Judith Tranter, seconded by Peter Janes. – **VOTE NEEDED**

An Annual General Meeting of the Society shall be held in the month of March on a date to be fixed by the Committee. According to the circumstances prevailing at the time, this may be in any one of the following formats:

- 1) A meeting of members in person in a suitable location
- 2) A virtual meeting of members facilitated by a suitable digital platform
- 3) A limited meeting of officers designated by the committee, in person, via telephone link, or via a digital platform, with involvement of society members through supplying all necessary reports and information in advance, and with the facility for members to vote by either email or post.

Date and venue of the AGM 2022 to be arranged.

There being no further business, refreshments or a speaker, the meeting adjourned.

Additional Information

- 1 Re. the accounts for 2020 – Because our auditor is strictly shielding during the virus restrictions, our accounts will be audited when it is safe to do so, a bit later in the year; therefore they cannot be adopted just yet. Once the audit is completed and sent to the Charity Commission, members will be able to request a copy from the Treasurer if they so wish.
- 2 This voting slip will be sent out to those on our email database in mid March; a paper form is enclosed in your newsletter for those who will be posting it back. Please put a cross **X** in the appropriate places. If there isn't one in your newsletter to use please cut out the one printed below – or copy it onto plain paper and post it to the Secretary at the Clevedon address at the bottom of the back page.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 ADOPTION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT (normally 'a show of hands') all those in favour 2 ELECTION OF TINA BATH AS SOCIETY CHAIR YES..... NO ABSTAIN 3 RE-ELECTION OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 'EN-BLOC' YES..... NO ABSTAIN 4 AMENDMENT TO THE CONTITUTION YES..... NO ABSTAIN <p>YOUR NAME AS A MEMBER(s) sign.....PRINT.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">sign.....PRINT.....</p> <p>two members of one household can use the same form – please use different colour inks to fill in and sign.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">VOLUNTEERING SPOT</h3> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>
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Now a message from the Committee

You will realise from the list of members standing for election to the Committee (previous page) 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 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 write a bit in the volunteering box in the form and we will contact you for a chat, we are waiting to welcome you on board.

Geoff Timms sent us this little ditty to illustrate what we feel like sometimes when snowed under!!



Whose Job is it? This is a little story about four people named **Everybody**, **Somebody**, **Anybody**, and **Nobody**.



There was an important job to be done and **Everybody** was sure that **Somebody** would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but **Nobody** did it.

Somebody got angry about that because it was **Everybody's** job.

Everybody thought that **Anybody** could do it, but **Nobody** realized that **Everybody** wouldn't do it.

It ended up that **Everybody** blamed **Somebody** when **Nobody** did what **Anybody** could have done.

2026 AN IMPORTANT DEADLINE for CLAIMING LOST PATHS by Lesley Stather

A lost path is a path that the public had access to without let or hindrance at sometime in the past and did not get recorded when the definitive map was created. A more legal term for the path is a “public right of way”

To understand this better we need to look at the origin of public rights of way and the Definitive Map. The term highway in this article refers to roads, byways, bridle ways and footpaths.

Rights of way have been put on maps ever since maps started being created. The purpose of a map was often to show who owns what and where highways were, over which people could pass. In the days before the motor vehicle this would be on foot, on horseback or by carriage. Prior to 1932, there was no rule as to whether the public had any right to pass along a highway. Some highways were defined in Inclosure Acts, created in the 1800's, that specified who owned the land, where the highways were, and who could use them. However, large parts of the country were not subject to Inclosure. The 1932 act introduced the rule that members of the public could claim a highway as a public right of way if they could prove 20 years' use, without interruption or challenge. Before this there was no simple rule for the time over which a route had to be used before it could be regarded as public. The 1932 act also encouraged local authorities to carry out their own survey of public highways and to record them on maps, and to check every map and statement deposited by landowners to see if existing public highways were being challenged.

After the war the Hobhouse report recommended, and it was decided, to record all public rights of way on a Definitive Map. Until then, although routes were shown on the Ordnance Survey maps, there was a disclaimer. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 required local authorities to prepare official maps of public paths. This was done by asking the parish councils and landowners to put forward their thoughts on which routes were public; the work was done by local people, the Ramblers Association and Boy Scouts groups. This was a 3 stage process: 'draft', 'provisional' and 'definitive' and suffered from at least two defects:

- 1) Where the head of the parish council was a major landowner, not all routes made it onto the map; in some cases this may have been the result of honest oversight but there is little room for doubt that in many other cases it was the result of council's conflicting interests as landowners.
- 2) Many people didn't think they were being asked to put routes such as drove roads and unsurfaced green lanes onto a 'footpath map' as they believed they were already public roads or bridleways.

The 1981 Act allowed individuals, corporate bodies, and parish councils etc., to submit applications to modify the Definitive Map using a Definitive Map Modification Order application (DMMO). Changes to the Definitive Map were to be by continuous review – one path or a batch of paths at a time.

The 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act included the 'right to roam' and also set a cut off date after which:

No more DMMO applications can be made for certain routes, i.e. footpaths and bridleways that existed on 1st. January 1949 and still existed on 1st January 2026 and are not recorded on the definitive map.

Lose the vehicular rights on routes shown as footpaths or bridleways.

The cut of date could be extended to 2031 (repealing the cut off date would require primary legislation).

All unrecorded or under-recorded rights would be extinguished by operation of law (with certain exceptions)

Not a single “green dotted line” on the local Ordnance Survey would exist today, if it weren't for the care and attention shown by people of past generations, submitting those routes for registration. However the care and attention was not always what it should have been and mistakes were made.

So to summarise; a lost path is a highway that was not recorded or whose rights were under recorded when the Definitive Map was created. It's now up to us to show an even greater level of dedication and put right the mistakes that were made by our ancestors.

Judge John Maynard Byles, in 1860 stated “once a highway, always a highway”, however this will stop on the 1st of January 2026. So we have until then to find evidence to show, on a balance of probabilities, that a highway once existed. This will require searching archives in Taunton and Kew for numerous historical documents such as:-

Old Maps, Parish, Estate and Boundary Records; Inclosure Awards; Tithe Records; 1910 Finance Act Records; Turnpike, Canal and Railway records; River and Drainage Authority records; Sales Documents and Handover Maps; Quarter Session Records

These documents are then presented, as evidence, in a Definitive Map Modification Order to the local highway authority, in our case, Somerset County Council.

The 'Finding The Lost Paths' part of the Ramblers, **“Don't Lose Your Way”** project took place in 2020 with 3,500 volunteers involved. They compared two historic maps from about 1900 with the most recent Ordnance Survey Map. Volunteers looked for footpaths, bridleways and roads shown on historical maps but which appear to not be recorded on current OS maps. They looked at every square on the OS map in England and Wales and then each path found was validated by a different volunteer.



Lost Paths Identified on 1888 to 1913 OS Map



Lost Paths Drawn Onto Current OS Map

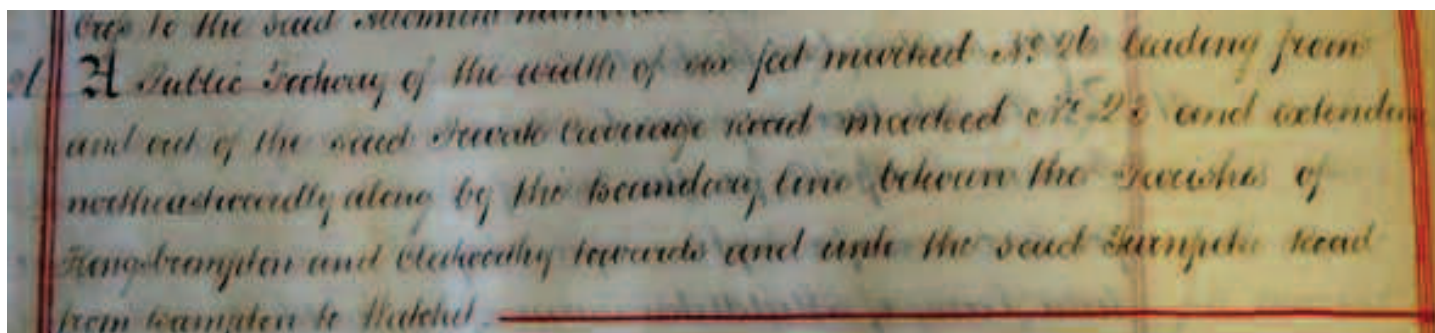
1,406 miles of lost paths were found in Somerset. We will focus on those that will bring the most benefit to rights of way network and exclude those which have been extinguished/diverted and which are not claimable – either because of significant development or because we can't find enough evidence to support a good quality application.

Kate Ashbrook, President of The Ramblers said "Landowners today claim that they suffer hardship when path-users find evidence of a right of way over their land. But if they and their predecessors had followed the provisions of the 1932 Act and subsequent legislation and deposited maps and statements of routes which they believed to be highways, there would be little opportunity now for surprises. They have only themselves to blame for failing to do this."

Although we have until 1st January 2026 to submit DMMO applications to get these paths added to the definitive map, it will be many years before these applications are reviewed and a judgement made. Somerset County Council has a backlog of nearly 400 applications and this list is growing much faster than their ability to process them. At the current rate it will be well over 20 years before they even look at them. Our forbears created the Definitive Map for our benefit; we have a duty to ensure it is correct for the benefit of future generations.

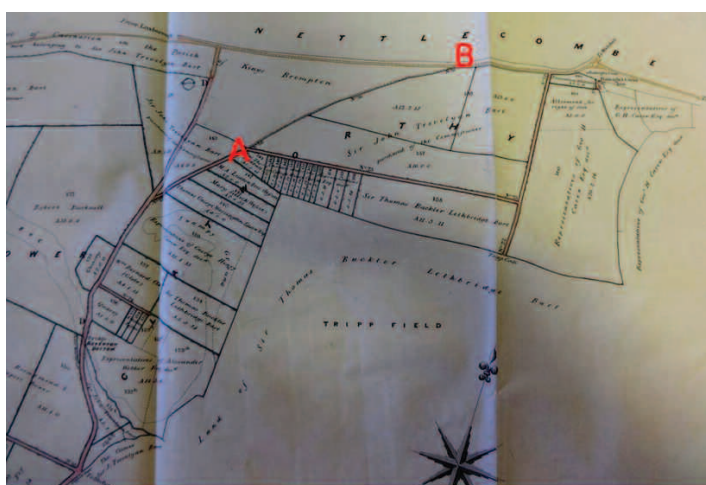
In order to claim each lost path, evidence has to be found regarding its historic background. This involves searching Inclosure Awards, Estate Maps, Tithe Maps, List of Streets records, council records, Inland Revenue records, sale records etc. These records are held in publicly accessible archives, such as the Somerset Heritage Centre and the Kew National Archive.

We only need to get enough evidence to support the paths historic existence in order to support a DMMO application. Once submitted a DMMO can be added to, in order to support its status. The following is an example of the evidence for a footpath from an Inclusion Award (source: Somerset Heritage Centre)

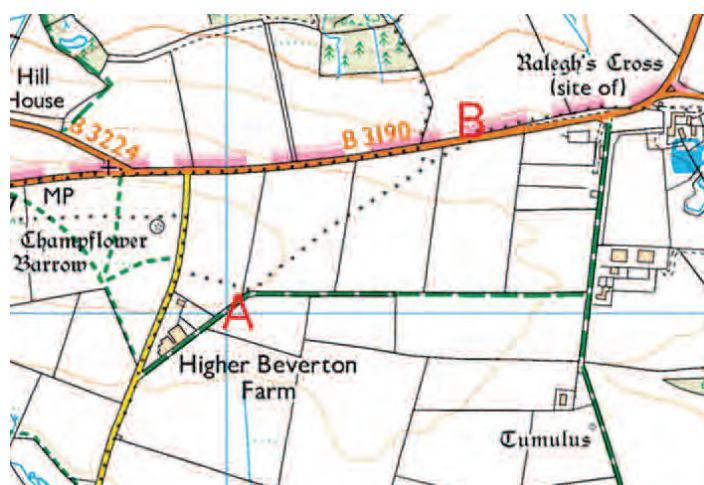


Extract from the Inclosure Award showing entries for awarded route 26

Transcript: 'A public footway of the width of six feet numbered 26 leading from and out of the said Private Carriage Road marked No 23 and extending northeastwardly along by the boundary line between the parishes of Kingsbrompton and Clatworthy towards and unto the said Turnpike Road from Brampton to Watchet'



Extract of the award map showing route 26



Possible Route 26 on Current OS Map

The County of Somerset has 1,406 miles of lost paths. The task in researching all of these paths to find the viable paths to claim is significant. The Ramblers Association need all the help we can get.

If you are interested in helping recovering lost paths for future generations by either carrying out research or collecting evidence of usage over a 20 year period then please contact Les Stather at les@mendipramblers.co.uk

The Society was contacted by Valley Arts recently because they are determined to be doing some events this year in some shape or other. Their audiences come from all over the Mendip area and are of all ages, so they hoped that some of our members would help them with their planning for the future programme, and put our future lives back on track.



Local charity 'Valley Arts launches – THE VOICE OF THE VALLEY'

Set up in 2015 to make the Performing Arts more accessible across the Chew Valley, Valley Arts is this month launching a region-wide survey to find out which events and activities you would like to see in your community. Plus there is a chance to win some great prizes from local businesses!

The survey, which is available online and in paper format, seeks to discover what our community needs after such a challenging year. Be it an outdoor gig, a theatre performance, some creative writing or a salsa workshop, your views will help shape the future Valley Arts programme.

To have your say, go to www.valleyartscentre.co.uk and fill in 'The Voice of the Valley' survey, or contact info@valleyartscentre.co.uk and a member of the team will send a paper copy.

BANWELL, ICHTHYOSAURS AND AN AIR RAID by John Chapman

ED: If you want to know exactly what Ichthyosaurs were before you read John's piece, read the section at the end of the article first. If not, read on.



Bristol Museum was a victim of the air raid on the city in 1940. Amongst the items lost were two fossil ichthyosaurs. They had been discovered in the 19th century and both were important fossils that had been described in scientific papers. One was the type specimen for *Ichthyosaurus latimanus* Owen and the other *Ichthyosaurus intermedius* Conybear, the first to show the outline of an ichthyosaurs tail. Fortunately a number of plaster casts had been made of them in the 19th century and distributed to other collections. Unfortunately although the casts had labels saying the ichthyosaurs were found in Somerset the exact location was not recorded.

I had an enquiry from Dr. M. A. Taylor asking about the existence of lias quarries in the vicinity of Banwell. It would seem that although the records of the Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Arts (now the Bristol City Museum) stated that both ichthyosaurs came from quarries at Banwell the area is not well known as a source for lias rock or its fossils so the connection with Banwell was thought to be a mistake. In fact Richard Lydekker (1849-1915) an English naturalist writing in 1889 allocated one of the ichthyosaurs to Lyme Regis and the other to Saltford. Saltford and Street are the places in Somerset where many fossils from the lias are found. Maybe Lydekker was thinking there was some confusion with the Quaternary bones in Banwell Bone Cave.

I was able to confirm there were small lias quarries for building stone that yielded fossils in the fields just north of the road (A371) not far from Banwell Caves. They are shown on the O.S. Six inch to the mile map for 1842-1952. Somerset Sheet XVII N.W. at Knightcott in the parish of Banwell. Frances Knight writing in 'Seaboard of Mendip' in 1902 states that Banwell Tower was built '....of Knightcott lias' and William Beard of Banwell Caves records paying 'Issac and Samuel Horle 2/6d for bringing up to the Bishops Cottage the head of a *Plageosaurus* from the Quarry' on 11th February 1832. Again on 9th March 1833 paid 'to Samuel Horle and John Harris for the Head of an *Ichthyosaurus*'. (Beard's *Plageosaurus* was probably meant to be *Plesiosaurus*).

Dr. Taylor has kindly sent me a copy of the report on the investigation of the origin of these two ichthyosaurs published in 'Geoscience in South-West England'. The plaster copies of these ichthyosaurs had ended up in a number of places. One in the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia, U.S.A. and another having passed through a Cheltenham junk shop. There was also confusion because the famous palaeontologist Richard Owen (1804-1892) in his Report on British Fossil Reptiles to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1839 got muddled up and ascribed bits of one ichthyosaurs anatomy to the other one.

After a lot of sifting through the evidence from a mass of documents written about these two ichthyosaurs and tracing the whereabouts of the plaster casts it has been established that the fossils did come from the lias quarries at Knightcott, Banwell.

A full report on the investigation that solved the mystery of the ichthyosaurs lost in an air raid can be found in: Taylor, M.A. and Clark, R.D. 2016. *Ichthyosaurs from the Lower Lias (Lower Jurassic) of Banwell, Somerset. Geoscience in South-West England*, 14,59-7.

It looks to me that with the rate of building that is developing along the wide valley between Bleadon and Worlebury Hills and the possibility of a Banwell bypass this is a place to watch for lias rock and more fossils of the remote past. **Mendip Society keep a watch – John Chapman**

Ichthyosaurs were reptiles that had returned to the water very much as dolphins and whales are mammals that now live in the sea. They lived from 250 million to about 100 million years ago at the same time as dinosaurs. Many types existed ranging in size from less than a metre to 15 metres; At 85 feet long, an ichthyosaur found in the U.K. may be the largest that ever lived.



Ichthyosaurs—literally 'fish lizards', with leathery skin, slender jaws, and bodies built for speed, the reptiles were the dolphin of the Mesozoic era. They also have the largest eyes of all vertebrates, and some

later species had the highest number of fingers: nine to 10 in one hand. Today, the creatures are understood as evolutionary trendsetters.

CYCLING ON MENDIP by David Walker, Curator, Wells & Mendip Museum

Nowadays many people cycle on Mendip for sport or exercise, but cycling has also appealed as a practical way of getting about in support of some other activity.

The folk song revivalist Cecil Sharp cycled extensively across Mendip collecting folk songs in the first years of the 20th century. He visited Mendip on eleven occasions staying as a guest at Harptree Court, cycling as far as Shipham. Some 20% of Sharp's Somerset archive is from Mendip, 279 songs and tunes. Henry Kettlewell, the son of the owners of Harptree Court recalls

"I can still clearly see in my mind's eye Cecil Sharp coming in after a long day's cycling over the Mendips with his notebook full of his curious musical short-hand notes and sitting down to the cottage Broadwood piano in the hall, piecing together and harmonising the airs he had collected."

The early cavers used bicycles to explore the area. The pioneer caver and cave-photographer Harry Savory, staying at Green Ore on 5th April 1912, recorded a visit to Ebbor Gorge in his diary.

"I cycled to Wookey Hole from the crossroads meeting Wheeler walking on the Wells to Wookey road. Balch soon overtook us on his bike and we left our bikes at Adlam's after getting some provender in the village. We walked N. of [Tower] rock a little way and soon came to Outlook cave, a small place where already much work had been done."



Balch and Wheeler at Outlook Cave

Bicycles have also been put to all kinds of unusual and inventive uses, as here during the Second World War, as described by Howard Kenney when he was a schoolboy and Wells Museum Curator Herbert Balch was in his 70s. The usual Saturday afternoon digging at Badger Hole had been cancelled and a cycle ride suggested instead.

"...within a few minutes we were pushing our bikes up the steep hill out of Wells. Across my handlebars were two empty sacks which he had placed there without any explanation of their purpose... halfway to the Hunter's Lodge [we] stopped at a copse... to fill one of the sacks with ripe red berries from Mountain Ash trees. Off we went again with the sack over my handlebars, with no explanation of what was to become of the berries. Turning toward Rookham at the Hunter's Lodge we stopped again at the top of Rookham Hill and spent some time filling up the other sack with gleanings of oats from a field just harvested. This too was placed on my handlebars... On the way down H.E.B. explained that he would make a jelly of his berries and a bran of the oats and the two mixed together would make excellent food for his hens."

From these past and present examples I can see a great future for cycling on Mendip! – **David Walker**

References:

Cecil Sharp: [https://cecilsharpspeople.org.uk/mendips-\(harptree-and-priddy\).html](https://cecilsharpspeople.org.uk/mendips-(harptree-and-priddy).html); Harry Savory: A Man Deep in Mendip, John Savory, 1989; Derricks: In a Good Light, Photographs by the Reverend John Derrick, 2006; Herbert Balch: Pioneer Under the Mendips, W.I. Stanton, 1969

ED: Lucky man, David has great access to all sorts of references and treasures, Their library has a collection of over 5000 books and pamphlets, over 1000 maps and an archive of donated personal collections, available to search on-line. <https://www.wellsmuseum.org.uk/the-library>. At Christmas, four lucky members won themselves a years' admission ticket to the Museum.

Cycling was, and still is, a great holiday activity. The Derrick family from Cheltenham would holiday at East Brent before the First World War, bringing their bicycles with them by train. They would cycle up to forty miles a day, on one occasion cycling to Wookey Hole and Burrington Combe before returning



Cyclists in Wells before the First World War

AROUND AND ABOUT -/- PLUS – SOCIETY AND MEMBERS' NEWS



FROM THE HILLS

*From Jim Hardcastle
Manager of the
Mendip Hills Unit*

Helping Nature across the Mendip Hills

THANK YOU AONB

It can't have escaped anybody's notice that it has become necessary to cut down and remove ash trees which are infected with Chalara if they pose a danger to the public – in their hundreds!

Many of the contractors are letting the public take the wood – for a donation, and then they are passing it on to bodies like the AONB for distribution to other groups with the proviso that it must only be spent on planting new trees in mitigation for those lost to ash-die-back.

We have been lucky to receive enough money to buy 150 two year old holly trees/bushes in pots to plant up a hedge in Tania's Wood which we particularly want to be stock proof – cows won't push through holly hedges – too prickly; an added bonus is in its berries – food for many creatures in winter. Holly is slow growing so we will have to be patient, but it has to be started sometime in order to grow big and thick eventually!



The President's Bit

Dear all,

Here we are entering the second year of the Corona virus pandemic.

A year ago none of us would have thought about this happening. Not even in our most frightening of dreams would we have imagined the impact it would have on everyone Worldwide.

So here we are one year on and we have survived. There is a brighter future ahead and a return to normality in some shape or form. As for the Society, it too has kept going. There will not have been the normal walks and talks programme we would have enjoyed but that will I'm confident return in the near future.

Now we have the vaccine. This country has been at the very forefront of new technology and there is now running a vaccination programme that is the envy of many other countries. Things happen for reason that may not always be clear at the time. Perhaps the reason for this pandemic will become clear later. That is however of little comfort to those who have lost loved ones through it.

I feel that the work of the Society will become even more important as we gradually come out of Covid-19 grip. People will want to get out and about. Perhaps they will be fuelled with a desire to find out more about their local surroundings, first discovered during the 'lock-down walks'.

Thank you to all for keeping the hope alive and thank you most of all to our outgoing Chairman for bringing all back together... Richard, your work is not yet over but we hope you can enjoy Society life a little more now!

My kindest regards to you all. – Les



A'wassailing we will go – In Kernow (Cornwall)

Well, we couldn't here this year unfortunately, being unable to mix with others, but some people didn't let that stop them. Society member Sally Davies for one (see her 'scaring away evil spirits' on our front cover). She says:

"I love the Wassail, so when I had the chance to join in a virtual 'Wassel', which is the Cornish ceremony, I jumped at it. I'm Cornish through and through and my family go back many generations. I joined the newly formed Kernow Bedroom Choir in the first lockdown to sing some traditional Cornish folk songs, nowadays we can essentially have a pub sing along without the pub! I don't know any of them and we've never met but the idea was once the lock-down ended we would get together in Cornwall and sing in person. Maybe one day..... This year, we joined forces with another group who have revived the traditional Wassel ceremony and perform it in Cornish, with a song written especially for it. I don't speak Cornish so learning to sing it was interesting too and it was great to have lots of different people from all over the place joining in";

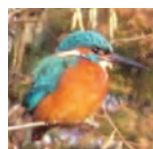
you can join in too <http://cornishnationalmusicarchive.co.uk/content/wassel-kernow-a-cornish-wassail/>

SOCIETY ROUNDUP

MEMBERS DURING LOCKDOWN

The front cover of this newsletter is a new 'PICDIPITY' – (with apologies to Sue and Les!).

Some members and families have been very busy with new interests, showing creativity and enjoyment but also it can be a way of coping with the strains of the last year.



The kingfisher was captured by Denise Poole over the pond in her back garden (what a pond – lucky lady). She and Richard were so excited by the wildlife which was using their garden that they put up a small motion camera, which then captured their foxy visitors.

Don't forget – we have our own You Tube channel on which you can post your own videos taken on your phone or camera by sending them to Graham Keating to format and upload via the free transfer website 'We Transfer.com'. If you want the 'how to directions' again, contact the Editor or

graham@wavelengthconsultancy.co.uk



You can of course join the ranks of potentially renowned artists; this lovely Cockerel, painted in acrylics is the work of Tom Schreve, young son of Professor Danielle Schreve.

She will be giving a talk for us on March 30th on 'Stones and Bones' – details on page 3.



VISIT YEO VALLEY IN 2021
OUR GATES ARE OPENING BACK UP SOON*

VARIETY OF DATES FROM APRIL - OCTOBER & BEYOND
FARM, GARDEN AND COOKERY DEMO EVENTS

GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE, USE YOUR YEOKENS OR BUY YOURSELF A DAY OUT

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND OUR OTHER VISITOR EXPERIENCES VISIT
YEOVALLEY.CO.UK

QUESTIONS? CONTACT US AT EVENTS@YEOVALLEY.CO.UK OR CALL 01761 258158

* FINGERS CROSSED!

**Do you ever and even worse,
increasingly, like me think all
days are the same now – and
even what day is it today?**

What Day is it?

Today it is a Sunday,
Bless this for a caper,
I only know it's Sunday
As I bought the Sunday paper

Tomorrow it is Monday
The working week will start,
It always follows Sunday,
The horse goes 'fore the cart.

I'm starting to confuse days,
They mostly seem the same,
I think the next are Tuesdays,
They're somewhere in the frame.

And then we come to
Wednesdays,
The middle of the week,
I was lucky to remember that,
The words play hide and seek.

It's a memory blurs day,
I should know them all,
I'll guess it's a Thursday,
I'm not doing well at all.

The next day it's Poet's day,
That's my day, a Friday,
I know coz I heard someone say,
Piss off early, tomorrows
Saturday.

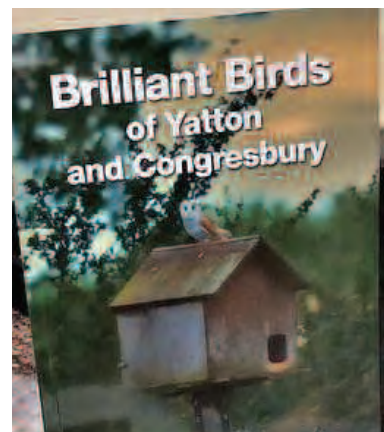
Finally it's Saturday,
Of all the week the latter day,
Relax before the next week starts,
Like curate's eggs, they're good in
parts. **Alan Litten**

ED: if you think you recognise the name, Alan's parents kept the P.O in Shipham for many years and his Father and Aunt are in the tree planting picture on page 4.

This newsletter has been helpfully
printed by Ian Taylor of W-s-M
T. 01934 635916 M. 07760 378789
www.taylorthorneprint.co.uk

And still with the birds:

'YACWAG's bird man, Trevor Riddle, has written a lovely little guide to the birds of Yatton and Congresbury and where to go to see them. Any profit will go to YACWAG's funds. The books are available in Yatton Post Office and Yatton News or can be hand delivered or posted to you as required. A snip at £5.'



If you would like a copy but are not local, email
higgy50@hotmail.co.uk and
he'll arrange for a copy to be sent out to you. Postage £1.50.

Gerry Cottle



We were very sad to hear that Gerry Cottle, owner of Wookey Hole Caves had died of Covid-19 aged 75, in Bath hospital on 13th January. He was our guest speaker at the 2019 AGM held in the Wookey Hole Community Centre, courtesy of the Wookey Hole Caves and we were most mightily entertained by the most expert showman ever.

THE MENDIP SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 262867 www.themendipsociety.org.uk

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