

# Mendip





## From the Chair – Tina Bath

I hope you are all as satisfied as I am about the new look Newsletter front cover and I'm just so delighted with the subject chosen for this newsletter, which is one with which the Society now has close links – the Mendip Ploughing Match. There is a report on this years' event on page 6.

It shames me to say that it has been a fairly quiet few months for me in terms of my involvement with the Mendip Society's activities, so my special thanks go to the Committee who have been out representing us at the different events and doing a marvellous job promoting our work which you will read about in this newsletter. I have been busy restoring 3 dew ponds; I will send in some photos for the next edition.

As was reported in the last newsletter we sadly lost a long standing committee member Clive Constance who was the first point of call on our 'Small Grants Scheme', and we also miss Pat Farrant, another long serving committee member who stood down at the last AGM. The present committee is now down to five members plus, of course, Les Davies our President. We have now reached the point when we need to recruit more members to enable the committee to fulfil its function in the successful running of a healthy Society.

Judith Tranter; I don't know where to start really but Judith has, from what I hear and have experienced, held the Society together for many years, her work load is incredible from general secretarial work, putting together the information boards and taking the marquee to events, looking after both nature reserves, putting the newsletter together and generally keeping the wheels in motion. Like all the best things in life there has to come a time when you have to stand back and take stock, Judith is waiting to have a knee replacement and would like help by the passing of her duties into the care of others.

Mike Harvey is already kindly helping with the putting together of the 'Mendip' Newsletter, and the Committee has decided to re-start the programme leaflet which was stopped during the pandemic, for obvious reasons. Geoff Timms has kindly offered to put this together, advertising walks and talks again, but this does of course depend on other members contributing to the planning, provision and execution of those talks and walks and other activities. As a start – if you have any suggestions on specialist interest groups where you have enjoyed their talks do drop us a note.

Also having a library/photographic record of events is so important and something we take for granted that someone else will provide – but please do think about it yourself.

This is a plea for any other members who would like to get involved in helping to promote the work of the Mendip Society (particularly secretarial duties) to do please get in touch. Tina Bath



## From the Secretary. – Judith Tranter

Firstly I have to say that I don't know this person who Tina, in her Chairmans' Chair is talking about. Living round and about on Mendip you get to know an awful lot of people and come across them in many different places, wearing many different hats – the rest follows naturally, especially if you are involved in the same things that they are. It helps if you are curious about everything Mendip, its life and its exciting happenings where-ever and whenever they may be.

But she is right in one thing and that is the time has come when I must step down from at least one, if not more of the busy roles in our Society – firstly please- that of Secretary.

The Secretary often is the first port of call for anyone wanting to contact the society for whatever reason and is the link to everyone else; there are obviously meetings of the Committee to be arranged and followed up, but we don't have a huge number of those and only one AGM a year! He – or she- will also be the contact for the Charity Commission and for the firm providing our charity insurance matters. All manner of other matters, small or large will happen but are learnt about along the way, life is very varied to say the least!

We have several hundred members in our Society – surely there must be someone amongst so many who is willing to take a deep breath and throw their hat into the ring. They will obviously be helped as much as possible for as long as is wanted during the hand-over period, the first step is to ring me for a for a chat and maybe a meeting to find out more about the work of our Society and Secretary, because of course, every organisation does things slightly differently. My contact details are on the back page of this newsletter. That's enough said for now, although I can just slip in here some relevant information for the coming year. .

The AGM 2023 has been booked for Friday 14th April 2-4.30pm at Winscombe St. James' Hall, with a guest speaker.

Earlier in 2023 we have several events planned for members to look forward to including our long awaited famous Mendip Quiz, our equally well known Wassail and for the adventurous two hedging days tuition for 'improvers'.

All details of these events – and much, much more in the following pages.



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COVER PHOTO – 'At the Ploughing Match' by Roger Harvey – this issue 'Front Page Choice' by Mike. Congratulations Roger.



## TO LOOK FORWARD TO – COMING UP VERY SOON OUR



“Something of Everything Quiz”

FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023

@ 7.00PM FOR A 7.30PM PROMPT START

### The Mendip Society Fun Quiz – Prizes for the Best Team

The Wellsway, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, Bristol BS40 6EJ

With a bar and good free parking

PRICE £10 – to include quiz and a cold buffet supper

*Please join us for this fun evening and make up a team of 4-6 people and give yourselves a name.*

*Or come as an individual and join a team on the night – Everyone welcome.*

**Questions will include general knowledge , countryside and some Mendip Trivia**

**As well as some surprise additions! Suitable for all intellects and tastes!**

**HOW TO BOOK:** Booking is by ‘Sign-Up Genius’. Go to this live link

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F4DA4AA2BA6F8C34-something> and record your definite intention to attend – then ‘pay-on-the-door’ on the evening. Make sure you press save and submit right at the bottom of the Sign-up page for your name to be saved.

If you really don't like using the computer at all please contact : -

Peter on 01761 221995 / [membership@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@themendipsociety.org.uk) (between 15<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> December)

Judith on 01275 874284 / [secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk) (between 1<sup>st</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> January 23).

Please let us know **before the 25<sup>th</sup> January** if possible, to help the Wellsway with the catering.

## IT'S WASSAIL TIME AGAIN

Such is the popularity of Wassailing in Somerset now, and the call on the services of Les Davies, our President, as the Master of Ceremonies, that we have to hold our own celebration 2023 on –

**FRIDAY 3RD FEBRUARY 2023 in BURRINGTON ORCHARD at 7PM**

We have booked Burrington Village hall from 6.30pm in which to assemble and choose the Wassail Queen by the finding of a bean hidden in a piece of apple cake, from there to process through the village to the orchard, where we will pick a venerable tree to receive our cider and blessings for the whole orchard.

Happily, we also have the company of our great friends The Barley Rye Choir, who love wassails and their wassailing songs as much as we do. The evil spirits will be dispersed with our fearsome noises and the gun of the ‘spirit frightener’ (with blanks of course, ‘elth’ n safety!).

Then, it's back to the hall for the warming liquors and cake, cheese/biscuits/crusty bread, (and this year we are venturing into the world of mulled cider!); there will be a donations box on the table for the Barley Rye's charity of 2023.



Everyone is invited: once again we would like you to let us know that you are coming , plus any others you are bringing in your vehicle, just so that we know how many bottles we will need to mull. **Exactly as for the quiz above please contact us by phone or email** – no need to catch us in – leave a message with the anticipated number coming.

Thank you.

Now, what to bring: warm clothing (hats are good) and good boots or shoes are a must. For the noise making a tin plate or can and a spoon are ideal. A torch is useful as Burrington is a no-lights village plus the grass could be bumpy underfoot

DO JOIN US FOR US FOR A GREAT TRADITIONAL EVENING EVENT





## GETTING ON WITH IMPORTANT WORK IN TANIA'S WOOD: HEDGE LAYING DAYS

Since 2017, when we first started managing our Ubley Nature Reserve, Tania's Wood, we have 'nibbled away' at improving our boundary hedges – and there are long lengths of them on all sides. Many of them were planted as the 1240 boundaries of the Mediaeval Ubley Deer Park, and they are still those original plantings, plus additions over the intervening nearly 800 years. In January 2023 we are going to tackle one such stretch of hedge, complete with entwined misshapen trees, wandering edges, dead and dying parts, thick undergrowth and other problems besides.

You can imagine this is not really suitable for beginner hedge layers. So our training days this time will be for 'improvers' and we will be offering places initially to our own members who have already done a beginners day with us, and then opening it to any non-members who have some experience under their belts. **Any members who have the basic experience, but haven't been contacted and wish to join us in January please urgently contact us** (details below) to secure a free place, before it is advertised elsewhere, (when it will cost £10 for a day's tuition). It will appear in the Mendip Times on 20<sup>th</sup> December. . There are two dates:



**FRIDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY &  
SUNDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY**

with eight places on each.

We have both our highly qualified tutors on each day giving help and training for the increased level of difficulty. All tools will be provided, although if you have any of your own which you are used to using please bring them. Timings and joining details will be sent at the New Year, and will be similar to previous years.

**To book your place on either of the days please contact Sally on  
07816 266531 or sallydavis99@hotmail.com**

## CATCHING UP WITH SLADER'S LEIGH

The annual cut in the flower meadow was a little later than usual this year; with the unusual weather all the flowers were duped into a prolonged active season. We had one session with our scythers and realized that the prolific tangled vegetation would win the day so we called upon our President to see if he could come to the rescue. You will read in his 'Presidents' View how "Trigger", his new (ish) heavy duty field and scrub mower, broke the back of the cut – and then how we managed to just about tame 'The Beast' to finish off.

And no one is exaggerating when they call it 'the beast' – a runaway with a mind of its own! We did manage to cut the car park field in Tania's Wood as well,

before putting it to bed for the winter in Peter Janes' shed.

Of course, once cut, all the risings- flowers, grass, the bracken, brambles and the rest! has to be raked off and put somewhere, as we are trying not to have bonfires to dispose of it nowadays. So it is rolled and forked into the very edges of the reserve on the west boundary where over the years it rots down – and is fiercely excavated by all manner of creatures having a great time in it.

This year, as well as our volunteer rakers day, we had two visits from a group of Sidcot students, who got stuck in and perfected a 'group roll rake-off' with much laughter and enjoyment, much encouraged by their tutors. – **Judith Tranter**



## Cover Photograph

Our December cover is by Roger Harvey (no relation – as far as I know...) and shows a lovely pair of plough horses at the ploughing match in late September. A lovely late summer's day with great light for photography, though I have to admit, I totally missed this particular opportunity.

Thank you all for sending in some really great photographs for our cover. I'm only sad we cannot feature more than one cover per edition. Mostly people got the idea and the standard submitted was extremely high – not that I was looking for the greatest technical ability so much as an image that captured the feel of our favourite part of the country. I hope you all like my choice this time and please do keep sending in your pictures for future editions.

One small addition to the list of criteria from last time, republished below. Please do not watermark your submissions – if you don't know what I mean by that then don't worry, you will not have done it accidentally. By all means add a copyright to the file digitally, I am adding your names as copyright holders to help me identify the owner anyway, and I promise we will credit the photographer whenever we use a picture. Here again are the main criteria as a reminder.

1. The only prize is the acclaim and kudos of having your photograph featured on the front cover of The Mendip Society Newsletter.
2. The image should be of something connected with the Mendips, or an event run by The Mendip Society.
3. The image should be your original work, permission to use it is implied by submitting it for consideration. We reserve the right to use any image submitted, with credit to the photographer, in any other form associated with The Mendip Society. This may include, but is not limited to;  
Posters, Banners, Leaflets, Website, Social Media etc.
4. The image needs to be in portrait format or large enough to be cropped into a portrait layout. (See 6 below).
5. The image needs to not be too "busy" with plenty of room to place logos and straplines without obscuring important details such as faces etc. Critically nothing of interest should be too near the edges of the page.
6. The image needs to be a digital high resolution one that can fill an A4 page without becoming fuzzy or pixelated\*. Some camera phones will take images suitable for use, most modern digital cameras will certainly be able to do so.



So, if you want to be featured, like Roger, on the next edition then please send your pictures as JPEG or PNG files to: [photos@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:photos@themendipsociety.org.uk) or by using a file transfer service if you prefer with this e-mail as the target. Previously we have used [wetransfer.com](https://www.wetransfer.com), a free service for files up to 2Gb. (Though please don't make your photos this big!) You do not need to open an account with them, just follow the on-screen instructions.

\*For the technically minded, ideally around 2550 X 3580 pixels.



## WE DID INDEED HAVE A BUSY AUTUMN – In September there was:

### The Mendip Ploughing Society – Ploughing match on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> of September.

Instead of being in the gigantic Yeo Valley Farms “100acre” field at Yoxiter, it was held up the road towards Priddy on land adjoining Priddy hill Farm. Not quite so gigantic, but equally inviting to the hundreds of people who turned up throughout the day to enjoy the ‘Must go-to’ Mendip event (according to our President, who is also very much involved, as is our Chairman, in the Ploughing Society- and the matches!).

One must allow a lot more time to get there than is normal for all the little old tractors and cars making their slow ways along every conceivable little road leading to the match. Equally one must be there early ‘on the dot’ to sign in for your place in the hedging, or in our case, the dry-stone walling competitions.

The day was forecast to be a bit ‘iffy’, but was holding up as we erected the Society gazebo with its display boards, squeezed into our allotted space between the hospitality tent and the AONB gazebo; just in time as our first visitors arrived for a chat. It’s odd, but a phenomena well known indeed, that you always see acquaintances, friends and indeed some Society members, at Ploughing matches on Mendip that you never see in between times.

Time whizzed by as Richard Frost and I talked to people, drank coffees from our flasks or bought from the next door tent, took it turns at visiting the walling or hedging sites, or watched the little (and some very big powerful) tractors pulling or pushing the ploughs through the furrows. These furrows have got to be straight mind because that’s one of the things you are judged by. And, of course, one of the biggest attractions as always – the steady, obedient Ploughing horses, harnessed together and working as one. You may have seen a picture of them somewhere already?



Several of our dry stone walling members had entered the beginners class competition and were hard at it getting their section finished by three o’clock for the judging. However, all their endeavors were in vain as the winner of the class was announced as Lauren Holt, until very recently, the AONB Volunteer Co-ordinator and well known to them. But no matter – it’s all experience which stands them in good stead; and congratulations to Lauren.



As the day draws to a close and the little tractors start their slow wend homewards, the sky darkens westwards and little rumbles of thunder are heard. It’s all hands then to taking down the gazebo, and together with the tables and boards and publicity material all bundled into the car, neat packing forgotten. After all,

who wants a soaking gazebo to cope with at the end of the day? Not us -we are just in time.



### AND FINALLY –

Our dry stone walls are one of the iconic characteristics of Mendip. Although they have not been part of our history for as long as, say, the Romans have, they are very much an important part of our heritage and as such, they need to be protected and nurtured – and this means maintenance, which requires a certain skill. This is a skill which is very important to The Mendip Society, as it is to the Mendip Hills AONB.

This is a skill a person does not necessarily learn in school, or indeed have to go to college to acquire – Read more about this further on in this newsletter. – **Judith Tranter**



# MENDIP ROCKS! 2022



Mendip Rocks, runs through the month of October with a wide-range of events based around the geology of The Mendip Hills. The Mendip Society, alongside the Mendip Hills AONB Service and Somerset Earth Science Centre have supported this annual event for many years now and have watched it grow in scope and ambition over time. This year included two family days marking the start and end of the festival, an exclusive night-time guided Wookey Hole trip, plus four quarry tours, three fascinating lectures, four guided walks and an open day at The Earth Science Centre itself.

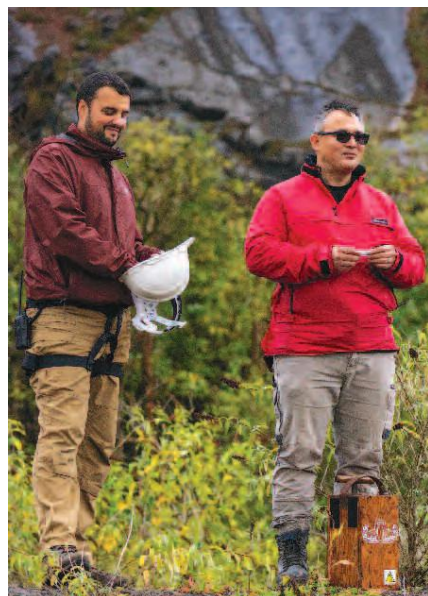
On the first of October I found myself, camera in hand, at a windswept Westbury quarry determined to capture the moment that Alford Technologies, who run an explosives company from the site, blew up a car... (See below).

To say that the weather was unkind to us is an understatement, lashing rain and strong winds combined to offer challenges to the hardy volunteers – including the moment when The Earth Science Centre's gazebo took flight!

Undeterred, the schedule of events went on. Nature and geology walks, radio-controlled vehicles, a dry-stone walling demonstration, even abseiling (once the weather abated a little) and much more besides.



Mid-morning a siren sounded – We quickly made our way back to the viewing platform ready for the big bang. We needn't have rushed however, the professionals at Alford Technologies were just ensuring everyone had plenty of time to get back before Roland Alford, son of the founder, drew ticket to pick the lucky individual who would get to cause the bang via a "proper" old school detonator box with a T handle, exactly as seen causing every cartoon explosion ever!



Winner selected we all jostled for position to see the promised big bang while down in the quarry below, final preparations were made... You could cut the anticipation with a knife – and then... WHUMP!... Up she went. To be honest, less flame and blast than some of us had expected, but a very satisfying amount of flying debris and smoke and no doubt an unforgettable experience for the young chap who had initiated the process via the big T handle.





## THE MENDIP ROCKS FESTIVAL – THE MENDIP WAY “JUBILEE” RELAY WALK – 9th OCTOBER 2022

This event was celebrating the late Queen’s Jubilee together with a national scheme to create a Green Canopy across the whole Country, planting as many trees as possible towards combating global warming.

The lead partner of the walk, the Mendip Hills AONB, planned a complete relay along both the West and East Mendip Ways, involving the four main stakeholders with a special interest and the members who could make this happen: the AONB Rangers / volunteers plus The Rotary, Cheddar Walking and the Mendip Society. The idea was that a group would set out from Weston-s-Mare and another from Frome meeting up at Wells Museum – both would carry a traditional wooden baton so that the hand-over would take place without a hitch !



The Mendip Society representative was myself who chose to join a small group which would set out in the westerly direction from the hand-over at Priddy, which left me with a comfortable walk for the last five or so miles. The hand-over was from a much younger aged group from the AONB who had walked from the start of the relay at Uphill. The day was blessed with good weather so the ground was dry for the entire route.

We met up with the other group coming eastwards from Frome at 4pm on Cathedral Green, Wells, where we were joined by Rose, Sally, and Gill and some much needed refreshments.

Here also were our invited guest speakers, Sue Gearing and Les Davies MBE, both from the Society. Following a congratulatory speech, Les then unveiled a Rotary plaque to celebrate the project. All those who took part had a great sense of achievement and felt that this was a good example of a worthwhile Community project.

**Richard Frost.**



*Photographs courtesy of the AONB Mendip Hills*

## THE MENDIP ROCKS FESTIVAL – HAYDON QUARRY WALK

For quite a few years now, the Society has been one of the sponsors of and contributors to this annual event, held to showcase and make residents and visitors aware of the wealth of unique geological features we have in our hills. This year we had a programme of eleven subjects over the month of October covering indoor and outdoor activities for all ages; and playing to our strengths, the Society hosted a walk around Haydon Colliery, also known as Kilmersdon Colliery.

Led by myself, the walk encompassed the Victorian influence on the local society with its coal mining industry which dominates the town of Radstock; I had a full house of twenty one people which was a good start and we set off with a walk through the churchyard with some interesting names in the graveyard !

Next it was into Waterside Valley with its important wildlife habitat and plant species. Who is aware that this is the site of a “killing ground “ which was a defence feature in WW2 should the Nazis ever have invaded our shores? It is the site of the Green Stop Line which was a defensive feature across this region with tank traps and steep hills and numerous pill boxes, still in evidence.



We then climbed upwards onto the coal waste tip of the colliery and into Haydon itself where we talked about the history of the coalfield and this pit in particular. As we passed close to the actual physical remains of the old pit, we looked at photos showing the working life underground and the involvement of young boys and girls who worked here. We passed through the village with the old miners cottages still in evidence but changed with the demands of modern living and then onto the railway incline, pictured left, much overgrown, where we talked about how the railways had featured in the development of the coalfields.

On the return journey, we visited the Kilmersdon Road Quarry, which is a SSSI and has a unique range of fossils dating back 200 million years when this area was a shallow sea with isolated islands. We finished with a downhill walk to return to the Radstock Mining Museum, which is always an

interesting place to visit with its tea and book shops.

There were lots of questions and much to talk about as we walked and now I have to think about where we go next year! **Richard Frost**



## MENDIP ROCKS FESTIVAL FINALE DAY IN CHEDDAR – by J Tranter Saturday 29th October

The festival launched with 'A Blast from the Past' family fun day at Westbury Quarry, hosted by Alford Technologies. A change of location was required for the festival's finale due to the ash die back situation at Ebbor Gorge. The Riverside Gardens in Cheddar proved to be a suitable alternative due to the high numbers of public visiting the gorge, and cooperation from the Visitor Information Centre and Longleat Estates staff in directing people to the event. Our audience was a mixture of members of the local community and visitors from elsewhere in the country who were on holiday.

It was an early start, getting to Cheddar and unloading our 'event paraphernalia' into the gardens site before the 'half term visiting hoards' started arriving, but we made a cheerful display together with the Mendip Hills AONB, and the Earth Science Centre. It was great seeing so many families who were from Bristol and for whom it was their first visit to the Mendips. Many different nationalities were represented, the most poignant being the lovely people from Ukraine, who were so happy to talk to us.



Above – In the shadow of the Cheddar Cliffs (photo SESC)  
Right – Talking flints at our gazebo.



Our most exciting encounter of the day was with a lady who had seen on our page in the *Mendip Times* that we would be in Cheddar Gorge on this final day and had brought something extraordinary along to show us.

THIS – the most beautiful flint – and I think it must be the largest one I have ever seen. She had simply picked it up from the surface of a field she was walking across many years ago now, and put it away in a box and left it there. Until now.

Of course we know of several 'rock people' who are eager To tell her everything they know about such a beauty.



Right – A poem suitable for the Mendip Rocks Festival  
Written by Merry, the Mendip Elf  
By courtesy of the Mendip Hills AONB

### A Story in Stone

Grey.  
But with all the colours of the heart of the earth.  
Hues of brown, red, green, blue, and yellow,  
weaving the subtle tapestry  
of the story of the land.

A single stone  
Is a mountain in miniature.  
With crags and crevasses  
and veins of crystal  
and the stories of lost places and ancient creatures.

Writing in stone  
not ink,  
the lives in the landscape  
of peoples past.  
Now the arteries of Mendip  
For the adder or the lichen .

Rising, falling, jumbled, ordered.

A single stone  
Is a single letter  
In a love story across the miles and the ages.  
A land of stone  
Alive with memories old and new.



## OUR FIRST LIVE TALK THIS YEAR

On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at the Wells and Mendip Museum, Chris Storie spoke to an enthralled audience of sixty or so 'Mendippers' about

### Cecil Sharp and the Folk Songs of Somerset

This is a report of the talk by Terry Gifford, who first suggested we ask Chris, and his colleague Bernard Coulter, to entertain and inform us. Thank you Terry.

Did you know that Cecil Sharp first stayed at Harptree Court at East Harptree in 1904 to collect folksongs from 65 singers in the Mendip Hills? You probably know some of the 279 songs that Sharp saved from oblivion on the Mendips during his 11 visits to Harptree Court over the following years, although not necessarily in the versions that were actually sung to him. Chris Storie, in his brilliant talk for the Mendip Society on the life of Cecil Sharp, admitted that Sharp bowdlerised what he



had in his notebooks in order to publish *Folksongs for Schools* (1906). Bernard Coulter, who illustrated Chris's talk with well-researched and robust performances, proved this point as he led the 60 strong audience in singing 'Oh No John' to conclude the presentation. Everybody sang the first verse and chorus, dredging the words and tune from somewhere deep in the communal memory, but fell silent as the verses moved above the tying of a garter, although the singing of the chorus remained strong as it finally reversed its meaning. Chris remarked that illiterate farm labourers, washerwomen, bird-starvers, stone breakers, a stripper (of willows), 3 shoemakers and 2 miners on Mendip carried dozens of songs in their heads.

*Left: 'What sixty singing Mendippers looks like from behind'!*  
photo J Tranter

Elsewhere in Somerset Susan Williams of Haselbury Plucknett gave Sharp over 50 songs, while the sisters Lucy White and Louie Hooper of Westport recalled over 100 songs. But the point of 'Oh No John' was that the songs of the illiterate could contain such wit that a song about the tensions of consent could cleverly explore its complications by reversing the meaning of the chorus, and reposition the audience in complicity.

Members of the Society know that the Hunters Lodge near Priddy has long been the cultural centre of the Mendips with its reputation for cider, caving, singing, service and, not least, its distinctive cuisine. Chris confirmed this by revealing that Sharp collected 6 songs from James Bishop, who worked at nearby Rookham Farm, in a singing session at the Hunters in September 1905, including the lovely song 'A Ship in Distress'. Chris showed a photo (one of the many he had found of Sharp's Mendip singers) of Sam Weeks at Eastwater Farm where he worked after being the Hunters' publican and giving 5 new songs to Sharp at the same session there. Sharp noted that Sam was 75 and James Bishop 74 when he wrote down their songs. Chris emphasised that these elderly singers were delighted by Sharp's recording their songs which they believed were about to die with them forever.

William King, who is buried in West Harptree churchyard, sang 12 songs for Sharp at The Castle of Comfort pub aged 78. He worked at Spring Farm, although he was born in Moreton, a hamlet north of Compton Martin. His son, Ernest, gave Sharp the song 'The Crystal Spring'. This pub obviously gave the comfort of songs to those about to be hanged on the skyline beyond it. We have to thank John Voke, baptised and married at Priddy, for singing for Sharp at this pub the famous song 'The Foggy Dew' in 1904.

With his bicycle and his notebook Sharp gave us a hidden legacy of the Mendip Hills that was probably about to be lost. Chris's talk revealed that, although Sharp was not a classically trained musician, he had enough musicality to be able to use the piano at Harptree Court at the end of a day on the bike to turn his notes into notation.

And although he scraped a third class degree at Cambridge, he'd had enough time briefly labouring in Australia to recognise the richness of oral working-class culture hidden in our Mendip Hills to include in his *Folk Songs From Somerset*, published in 5 volumes between 1904 and 1909. This richness was demonstrated by Bernard Coulter's singing the poignant song 'Bruton Town' and the beautiful 'Polly Vaughan' in both its Somerset and its Appalachian versions collected by Sharp on both sides of the Atlantic. Yes, songs from the Hunters Lodge had earlier travelled to the lodges and cabins of the wild Appalachian hills of *Cold Mountain*.



We are hugely indebted to Chris for the detail of his talk and to Bernard for the delight of his singing. Chris acknowledged the work of David Sutcliffe, soon to publish a biography of Sharp, and his website <https://cecilsharpspeople.org.uk>.



Bernard hosts the continued singing of these songs at Theale Village Hall, BS28 4SX on alternate Friday evenings at Mr Punch's Folk Club: <https://punchsfolkclub.yolasite.com>, keeping the tradition alive. Come and listen. Come and sing. Come and be surprised by the Mendip Society Membership Secretary's amazing song about an electrician (hitherto a hole in the canon). Like Cecil Sharp at the Hunters Lodge, you never know what you're going to hear at Theale.

Meanwhile, it'll soon be wassail time!

## SOME MORE THINGS HISTORICAL – Did I Dream It?

Keeping our own local aspects of our daily lives alive for our families and neighbourhoods of the future is surely demonstrated as a most important thing to do, judging by the interest, nay, the joy, shown by the audience at Chris Storie's talk. The following page will also show this to be very true with the Windrose concert at Shipham; that memories do fade and knowledge does disappear from our collective ken.

And unless we are very vigilant about this it will all disappear for ever!

That evening we talked to long time Mendip resident Marigold Elkin about the amazing old, often silent films we had seen and she asked us if we knew the answer to a question which she has been asked many times but can't now answer, about 'The Blue Bowl' Inn at West Harptree.

**“Why this unusual name? Is there or was there a bowl & what kind of bowl, and where is it now?”**

Marigold is sure she can remember, as a youngster with her parents visiting the landlord and seeing a small stand on the wall inside the front entrance door with a bowl displayed on it. But it isn't there now and no-one can tell her anything about it.

She says **“Did I dream that I saw the stand with the bowl in the pub eighty + years ago?”**



Thoroughly intrigued, knowing that the Blue Bowl now stands where Roman travellers- not only soldiers but merchants and the wealthy once passed, I 'Googled' it. The Inn was built exactly where the Roman Road, now beneath the Chew Valley Lake, exited. And very recently a 2000 year old perfect blue glass Roman bowl, quite similar to one found elsewhere in Mendip and housed in a local museum, was discovered in the Netherlands. Marigold says it confirms what she has known all her life.

“I had been told that the bowl I saw was discovered when the pub was being built, I am still sure I had seen it and I can still see it now! My bowl had a slightly green tinge and wasn't fluted but with a slight rim; it had been cleaned but some bits of sand and soil were embedded in scuffs and cracks.

I suspect the family of the 1930's Landlord may know more.

So if anyone reading this has any knowledge of the elusive 'blue bowl', possibly, but not necessarily of Roman origin, which was once, probably, on display in the pub of that name near West Harptree way back when, please get in touch with Marigold Elkin on [marigold.elkin@gmail.com](mailto:marigold.elkin@gmail.com) or with us at **01275 874284**



## MENDIP IS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE – ONCE IT GETS INTO YOU – YOU CAN'T GET IT OUT OF YOU.

So says one person we know who can tell you more about Mendip than you ever thought possible, Les Davies MBE, our President. As part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mendip Hills AONB celebration this year 'Somerset Sounds' went walk about with Les recording his thoughts, and also on a video, those of some of the people they met. They are lovely to watch and hear and can be found on these links; do have a listen and a look- they are completely safe links and are only a few minutes long. Control –click on these:-

<https://www.facebook.com/bbcsomerset/videos/1753336678367924> for the video  
[bbc.in/3uedsF2](https://www.bbc.com/somerset/3uedsF2) for the audio link to Somerset Sounds.



## 50 Years and more of Mendip – Windrose Rural Media

The much-anticipated Windrose film show at Shipham Village Hall on November 19<sup>th</sup> proved to be a popular event, well worth venturing out on a cold night for. Various film clips and treasures from local Mendip history were shown, each one introduced by Windrose's Trevor Bailey. Some came with their own soundtrack, others were accompanied by musicians, Amanda Boyd, Dan Shaw and Abi Shaw.



The show kicked off with a nostalgic run along The Strawberry Line, passing through many familiar local landmarks. This particular run being right at the end of the line's life – though of course, parts of the route still exist to this day.

The audience were then treated to a wide range of subjects captured on film. From early colour film of Cheddar Gorge way back in the 1930's, to a late 70's account of a school camp at Charterhouse Activity Centre narrated by some of the children involved and Axbridge's Silver Jubilee celebrations as recorded by Nick Barrington. In between were such delights as a day trip to Wookey Hole in 1946, apparently coordinated by an eccentric vicar. Snail hunting for the Miner's Arms Restaurant, Our late queen opening Chew Valley reservoir and of course, plenty of vintage agricultural activity featuring threshing machines, hay ricks and pitchforks welded by men and boys of all ages, again, an early piece of colour footage. My personal favourite though could, to be fair, have been filmed anywhere. It just so happened to be the work of a local film maker. It was, simply, from an age when everyone owned and wore a hat, just people being asked to look at the camera and show off their headgear. The amusement, bemusement even on the faces of many of these subjects was a pure joy. To them I suppose, a film camera making moving pictures must have been as novel as virtual reality is to many of us today. What a priceless piece of history, kept safe by Windrose for us all to enjoy.



## Book Corner – By Mike Harvey

This month I can tell you a bit more about **A Mendip Corner. Sketches in Verse** by Rickford author Mike McLennan.

Some people paint, some take photographs, others sing or dance, but we all feel the need to express ourselves and our feelings, about the things that matter to us. In the case of Mike McLennan, writing fills this need, and has done for some time it appears. Since 2007, Mike has been producing pieces about the area he clearly loves and much else besides. The seasons, family events, his cat, and of course, the Mendip landscape nature and lifestyle – walls are a particular favourite it seems. As he told me when handing over a copy of this book for my perusal, he didn't start out to write a book at all, but felt that as the collection grew it was a shame for them to just collect dust on top of the wardrobe. So encouraged by others, several members of the Mendip Society included, he resolved to publish them. This handsome volume is the result.

The cover and illustrations within are by another Rickford resident, Jeff Martin, who obviously shares Mike's passion for the area and has done visually what Mike has done in writing.

Mike has clearly got concerns for the future of this area and has eloquently expressed them in his writings, but it is not all tales of doom and gloom, of a landscape and way of life under threat or the decay of neglect. There is also keen observation of beauty, reflection on life and a real love of Mendip all wrapped up in his words.

This is an intensely personal collection which evokes many thoughts and emotions. As Les Davies puts it in the Foreword, "Food for Thought in your quiet moments of reflection."

All profits made will go the Children's Hospice SW and Holy Trinity church, Burrington, so it's all for a good cause too. A minimum donation of £12.00 per copy is requested (though I'm sure a bigger donation would be welcome) and the book is available from Mike by calling him on 01761 462586 or by e-mail using [mandsmclennan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mandsmclennan@hotmail.co.uk)

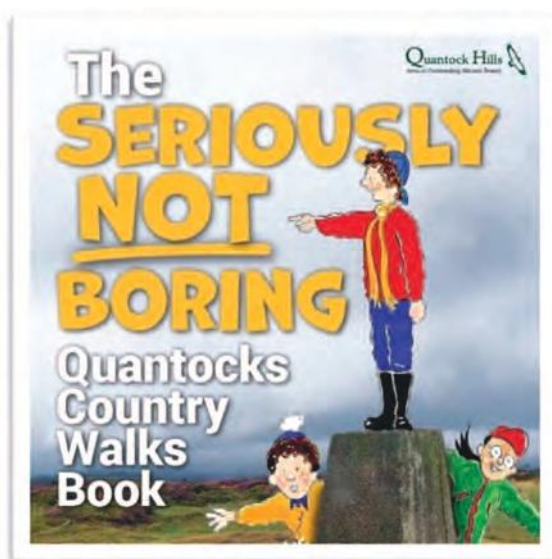
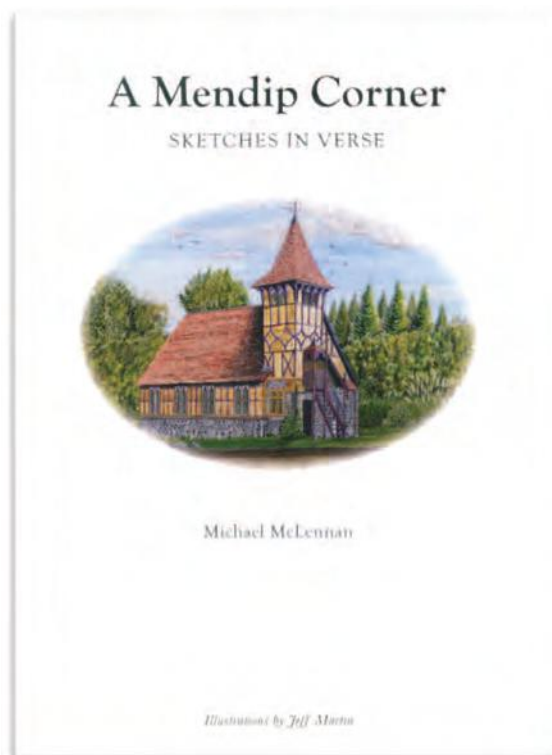
### The Seriously Not Boring Quantock Country Walks Book

This fun new walks book takes us off to the nearby Quantock Hills. Quantock AONB asked Sue Gearing and Les Davies, known for their Mendip walks books, to develop a book of circular routes between 3.7k (2.5 miles) and 8.4k (5.2 miles) long in Quantock Country. Instead of going to the usual 'honeypots' these 12 short circles explore the amazing range of landscape around the fringe – including villages, the fossil coast, steam railway, castles and much more.

It's the latest in Sue and Les' series, The Seriously Not Boring Walks Book, designed to get families out and walking together. This is a high-quality practical walking book, with full colour photos and fun illustrations, ring binding and easy to follow maps – in the same style as the Seriously Not Boring Mendip Hills Walks Book (2010) the first in the series by Sue and Les.

The text is easy to read so that younger people can take the lead and there are plenty of activities included for children and young-at-heart adults.

All of this is being offered at a remarkable price by the Quantock Hills AONB - £5 plus £2 postage. Available from <https://www.quantockhills.com/publications> and from Brendon Books, Taunton.







## A PRESIDENTS' VIEW

Christmas is on the doorstep and no doubt, like me you are wondering how it managed to get here so fast. It does go to show how things can change in a year. No one would have thought Russia would invade the Ukraine, we had no idea energy prices would almost double but we all thought the Queen would live forever!

We have a Winter hardy annual coming up for you in the form of our Wassail. It's being held again at the orchard in Burrington so please come along and wake the trees from their Winter sleep. Accompanied again by the 'Barley Rye' singers, we are hiring the Village Hall for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February. Wassailing normally takes place on or about the 17<sup>th</sup> of January which was old Twelfth Night. These days however life is so busy we are moving into the beginning of February. More details elsewhere in this newsletter.

How is your general knowledge? Can you put together a team of 4-6 people for our Society Quiz night at the Wellsway Pub on the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> January? It won't all be about Mendip, although there is a Mendip trivia section. Plenty of parking, and a bar and buffet available, so please book your tickets. Details again in this edition of the newsletter.

There are lots of volunteer hours being put into our nature reserves at Slader's Leigh and Tania's wood. Both are overseen by Judith and Dave Tranter who give so much of their time to the Society. I hope that some of the mowing on these reserves will be eased with the long term loan of my Allen Scythe. Having said "eased" anyone who has ever operated an Allen Scythe will testify that they are 'ferocious beasts' but their simplicity and ability to cut down weeds and grass is legendary. I was able to help out again this year with my heavy duty field and scrub mower. Aptly named "Trigger" because it travels in a horse box and 'eats' grass, this machine has made life a little easier.

You will all have noticed a change in the newsletter layout. Mike Harvey is asking for front cover photos from members. I can see this becoming a prestigious achievement if you are the one chosen... I've put one in!

We remember absent friends all year round, but particularly at this time of this year – Nigel Taylor, Jean Buckler and Clive Constance who are no longer with us. Many will have lost friends and relations and it's difficult to deal with. Remember the happy days if you can

This month picture isn't very Christmassy, but it fulfils the passion we have for quizzes and games at this time of the year. Yes, it's me in 'pensive or in vacant mood' to steal a few words from the wordsmith himself, Wordsworth and the last verse of his poem 'Daffodils'. (taken from Grib Lane in April)

Captions invited into the next newsletter, with the winner receiving one of my bottles of **Emily Elizabeths' apple juice**. So to start the ball rolling, here's mine: "**I can remember when this was all houses !**"

Happy Christmas to you all. **Les** (ED: Les will decide on the winning caption & is not open to bribery)



## MOODY, MISTY, MENDIP – A DAY WITH LES

On November 4th 2021 Woodlands Primary School from Yate in Bristol came to visit the Mendip Hills as part of their school project. This time year 4 from the same school came back for another visit on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, so popular was the trip out amongst pupils and staff alike the last time.

So it was that 2 classes from the school came out on a coach. The day out was to prove anything but boring and routine! I was contacted by the school to lead as per last year and readily agreed to meet them. First stop was a toilet break after their hour plus trip on the coach. The bus driver arrived at the car park opposite Rock of Ages in a stressed state. Having turned his six wheeled, double decker coach up the narrow road to 'Burrington' village he found this was not the way to go and promptly attempted a reverse which damaged the back end of his vehicle. The turn of phrase "Ripping the backside out of the situation" proved to be correct here!

With the whole bus suitably relieved after their comfort stop we moved to the drop off at Ellick House and then onto the edge of Blackdown. My initial brief to everyone included the fickle nature of Mendip weather and the terrain over which we would be walking. The former would turn out to be very appropriate.

So began the climb to the Trig point. It wasn't long before the 'caravan' of small children with coats held up by the hood on their head and big rucksacks that slipped down to their elbows began to stretch out. I was careful to ensure I carried out my POGU, (Position Of Greatest Use) along the line. Instructions such as



"Wait for me by those rocks ahead" became the best way of steering and it's important to give encouragement to those who are feeling a little weary. I could also judge the state of the group. With the dark rain laden clouds gathering in the West and the sight of rain coming down in sheets through the Wrington Vale we made the trig. It was now thunder and lightening, (Very,very frightening..Galileo, Galileo, Figaro) for those who remember the famous line from the band Queen. The temperature had dropped and the rain, with hail started to make a lunch break questionable. Just enough time to get a few calories into your body and move on!

Building resilience is an important part of life and these children were certainly coming to terms with that. My POGU became even more important now as I checked the group's welfare on the move. Flash backs to my military training on wet and windy Dartmoor came back to me and these youngsters were doing fine! This was defiantly not the time to be waving my arms descriptively at the landscape and talking about what we couldn't see.

As we dropped in altitude the temperature began to rise. It brought home the lesson that Mendip is far from gentle. Here some 20 miles outside of Bristol, weather will catch the unwary and make things uncomfortable or worse. When it was all over the children climbed aboard the coach. Now safe and warm it was almost as if what they had gone through was but a half forgotten dream. They left with follow up work to look at the You-Tube films about Mendip by the Society and encouragement to tell everyone at home their tales of 'daring-do' on the Misty Mountains

I have since been told the children quite enjoyed the experience... How kind is our memory!! – **Les Davies**



What the children would have been able to see on a lovely clear day.

*ED: Something for the children to boast about for a long time! Now, can some reader please enlighten a bemused Editor on Very,very frightening..Galileo, Galileo, Figaro?*



## SOCIETY ROUNDUP

On December 1st 1972 the area we now know as 'Mendip Hills' was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. The Mendip Society is very proud of the fact that we were acutely instrumental in the long battle of finally 'getting this done'. The whole story makes interesting reading and can be seen on this website as a pdf.

<https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/>.

Since then there have been many changes to all AONBs not least the latest being the issues raised in the UK Government's recent 'Landscapes Review'. On November 26<sup>th</sup> just before their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary the Mendip Hills AONB held their Annual Forum to discuss the response to these issues, at the Yeo Valley HQ, Blagdon, hosted by BBC ecologist Mike Dilger, entitled 'Seeing the Mendip Hills through New Eyes'.

We heard speakers on the topics of sustainable farming, disabled access, nature connectedness and more, from diverse groups including the Sustainable Food Trust and the Disabled Ramblers Association, and the Community Farm near Chew Magna. There was even a piece from a dog walker and her lovely, well behaved therapy dog.

At half time we were all treated to a hot drink and some scrumptious cake; as there was to be a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday very soon there had to be a special birthday cake! It was there- to admire but not to cut!! But – I can now reveal (with a Strictly Drum beat please!) When, where and who did the cutting – and some of the eating too!



On Thursday December 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 a group of the AONB Team Officers left their office together. This post appeared on their Face Book page .

***Today the team took a walk up to Beacon Batch, the highest point on the Mendip Hills. We installed a plaque on the trig point there to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the designation of the Mendip Hills as an AONB. What a glorious morning it was!***

(But not a cake in sight!)



You will have read about the walling class at the Mendip Ploughing Match on page 6?

Well, some of the wallers there are both Mendip AONB and Mendip Society volunteer wallers, who have been working on rebuilding a dry stone boundary wall of Cooks Field Nature Reserve, a SSSI belonging to the Somerset Wildlife Trust, accessed from the Deer Leap carpark. It is a very long wall, in poor repair and they have been working weekly for over a year now. In the beginning it was just the small group of about six who had done a Society week-end's tuition course led by our Chairman, Tina Bath, a few years ago.

Gradually the number has increased until there are

between 12 and anything up to 15 enthusiasts, come rain or shine, at work every week, supported with tools and other necessities by the AONB team.

The skills they learnt in the beginning from Tina have been passed from volunteer to volunteer, (added to by an occasional session with a professional from The Walling Association). This is what is keeping the traditional skills of our countryside alive – and conserving our heritage.

AND THE CAKE? Oh, that was cut and shared by the hungry wallers on that same day – 1<sup>st</sup> December to celebrate, finally, the finishing of the wall.

Photo of the cake by John Steers; Trig group by the AONB – **Judith Tranter**

