

# Mendip



## From the Chair

I was heartened by the increased attendance at our AGM meeting in April at Draycott Village Hall, it was lovely to see some new faces amongst us, for those who missed it we had a fascinating illustrated talk on the history and use of Drones which including some projects where they have been used on our spectacular Mendip Hills. We are lucky to have several spacious Village Halls that we can use, and it is helpful to everyone when we can car share whenever possible.



At the AGM we said our thanks and appreciation to Judith Tranter our Secretary and driving force behind the Society for many years as she stands down.

We welcomed Mike Harvey who has taken over the Newsletter editor, and also introduced Kate Avery, Kate gave us some background information about herself and previous roles and networking, Kate has agreed to join us to help take the Mendip Society forward. A sub-group of the committee met to have a brainstorming session on ways to attract new and young people to become involved and care for the Mendip Hills.

Whilst we kindly now have in place people to take the minutes, a newsletter editor, and an administrator we are STILL LOOKING for someone to take on the General Secretarial Business, if you, or you know of anyone willing to take this on please get in touch, entitlement to refunded expenses, and a small honorarium.

Several ideas from the brainstorming meeting are in the infant stage, and I look forward to sharing these with you over the next Newsletter editions and through the Website.

Until then enjoy the summer, when it eventually arrives!

Tina Bath



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### Cover Photo. - by Peter Janes.

The pond just across from Stockhill at Priddy Mineries. Peter's second lovely cover photo. Thanks Peter, but come on everyone else.

## And from the Editor

As those of you who were at the AGM will know, I am now officially on the management committee of our society. It was an honour to be asked, to get voted on - and my pleasure to accept... I only hope you know what you are letting yourselves in for!



My principal in life has always been not to stand back and complain that "they" should do this or that, or grumble that "someone" should do something about "it". In my book, if you want things to happen, then roll up your sleeves and get stuck in, lead by example and wherever possible, cajole others into doing the same. Being a creator rather than a consumer pays back in spades.

My first contribution to the management of the society is all about member involvement. On page 3 (opposite) you will find details of an online members survey, designed to find out what skills and talents we have amongst the membership and what sort of society members want to have. It really is your chance to make a difference to the future of YOUR society. In other words, don't just grumble and wait for things to happen - get proactive and MAKE things happen! - We've even got a free draw arranged for participants with a lovely prize involved.

With that in mind, please do keep sending in your cover pictures and reports, it really is appreciated. Use the QR code (right) to read about what is needed, or e-mail me at: [themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com](mailto:themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com)

Cheers, Mike.

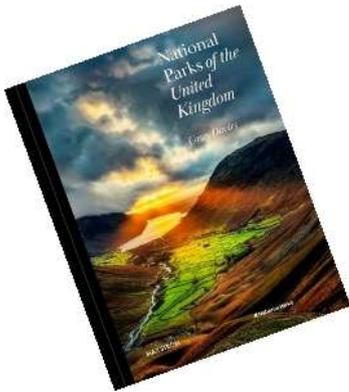


## The future of The Mendip society - Have your say..

**Attendees** at the AGM earlier this year, will no doubt recall Kate Avery being introduced to the room. For the rest of you, see below.

Kate has been asked by Tina Bath and Les Davies, to cast her experienced eye over our society and make suggestions for improvements to our offering, both to current and potential new members.

Kate and I, (plus the entire committee), are in agreement that our declining membership is a potential problem for the health of the society, as is the ever dwindling number of members willing and able to organise events and activities. The consequence of which is that less is going on to engage current and potential new members - a vicious downward spiral that we intend to do all we can to break out of.



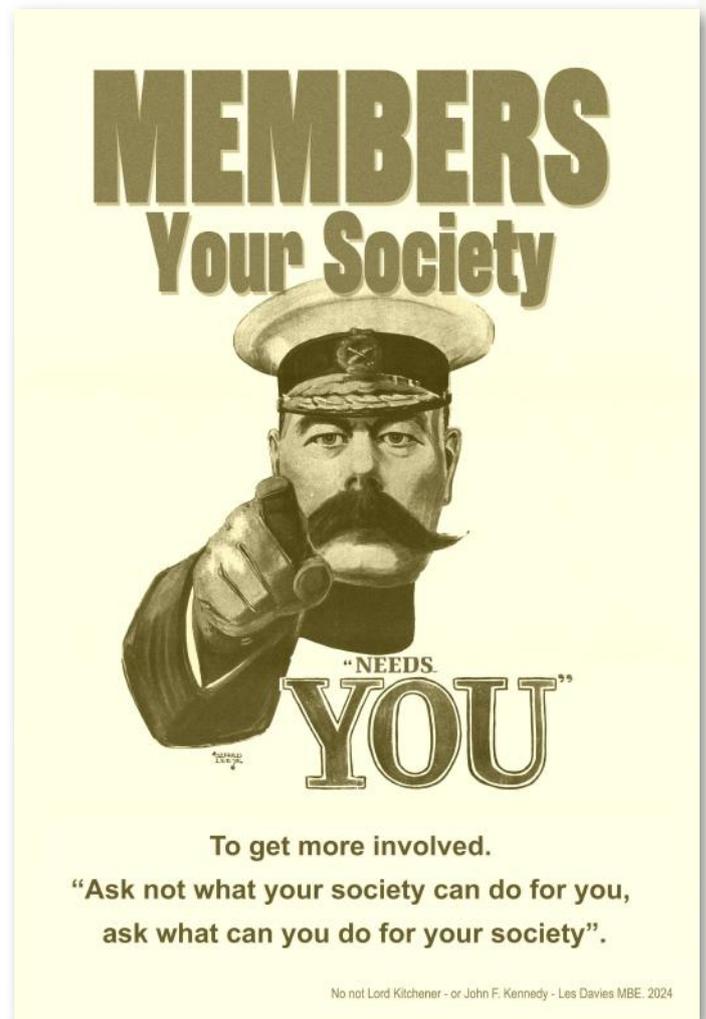
As a first step we want **YOU**, the membership, to have your say, and to encourage you to take part we have a copy of the newly published book, **National Parks of the United Kingdom** (RRP £40) as a prize for one lucky participant, to be drawn before the publication of the next newsletter.

To take part in the survey, either type this address into your web browser:

[https://bit.ly/M\\_S\\_2024](https://bit.ly/M_S_2024)

Or, if you have a camera on your phone or tablet, scan the QR code to the right to be taken straight to the survey form.

These links will also soon appear on the society's website and in an e-mail to all, so there's really no excuse not to get involved.



No not Lord Kitchener - or John F. Kennedy - Les Davies MBE. 2024

### Hello, I'm Kate

It was a pleasure to meet some of the members of the Mendip Society when I attended the AGM at Draycott Village Hall in April. I learned that Society has undertaken some great work, continues to conserve and manage two nature reserves and offer talks and a guided walks for its membership. Most importantly though, it struck me that being part of a Society is a gathering of people and minds. Much can be achieved by being part of a collective.

An initial survey to find out what you want as members and what skills and/or time you can offer to help the Society is the initial starting point. It is important to try to capture this as we consider what can be offered by the Society, what is important to members to continue to do and what new things or ways of working could be important going forward. The most important thing to recognise for each member is that you all have an interest for being a member of the Society and we want to find that out.



## News, notices and more...

**Luke Knight**, as some of you may know, presents programmes on BBC Radio Somerset. Recently I was asked to take him and his cameraman/producer Will to see the remains of our decoy city on Blackdown,



*Luke doing a piece to camera outside the West bunker.  
Photo: Mike Harvey.*

including a trip inside one of the control bunkers. This is all a part of Luke's "Secret Somerset" series where he visits and reports on some little-known features of the county. Obviously I was pleased to do so and took the opportunity to tell his audience a bit more about what went on here during WW2. You can hear it for yourself by searching for "Secret Somerset Burning City" on Google, or by typing [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0j55nxq](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0j55nxq) into your browser and see more of the filming and stills on the BBC Somerset website.

### Young Photographers Competition



**Photographs...** We all take 100's these days, young and old we grab our cameras, smart phones and tablets whenever something interesting happens and record it in digital form.

In our next newsletter we want to launch a competition specifically aimed at the younger photographer. Many of us have children or grandchildren who snap away all day long and post their creations on social media, or simply store their visual memories away in their pockets.

Our plan is to encourage these young artists to share their work for us all to enjoy - and to reward them with a small prize for their trouble. Full details will be in the next newsletter, but we can announce that our judge will be the RSPCA's award-winning professional photographer Emma Jacobs. Who organises the RSPCA's own competition and is especially keen to encourage the under 18's to get into photography.

The subject will be "Mendip Nature" - A pretty broad field in order to attract as many entries as possible. So watch this space - and encourage the next generation to have a go and possibly to get rewarded for their efforts.

### Can you help Henry Buckton?

We have received a request from Henry Buckton, who is writing a book about Somerset's industrial past and which will have a chapter on lead mining around East Harptree. He thought Mendip Society members might be able to help him with pictures of Smitham chimney before, during and after restoration (which the Mendip Society was involved with).



If you have anything he could use to illustrate his book and would be happy to lend him the photograph, he would acknowledge you as the copyright holder, and you would probably get a copy of the book, as well.

If you can help him in this please call Judith on **01275 874284** or e-mail at: [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com)

### Batch farm Dew Pond 2



You may well recall the story of a dew pond being restored at Batch Farm by member Roger White with expert help from our chair Tina Bath and support from both the FiPL fund and The Mendip Society.

As these pictures show, there is more to be done.



Roger has discovered another overgrown pond on his land and Tina is once again helping to restore it to its former glory.

Roger, an ex teacher, regularly hosts groups from

Weston College to both work on the site and learn skills relating to land management, teamwork etc. so we are pleased to help and support this venture.



## Mendip trees for Mendip woodlands.

**The Westbury Community Tree Group** recently published its annual report for 2023-24. It is now a significant operation supplying native trees that have been grown from locally collected seed or cuttings and are therefore well adapted to the local conditions. In 2022/23 some 800 trees were supplied to a range of landowners, mostly on Mendip within 10 miles of Westbury. In 2023/24 the nursery supplied over three times that number and the output in the coming planting season will be around 3,000.

In addition to growing trees the group has helped local organisations source material from other organisations like the Woodland Trust and taken part in their planting. Over 1,500 for example have been planted along the new Strawberry Line path between Westbury and Easton. Local organisations, such as the Mendip National Landscape Young Rangers have participated in the work, learning about the 28 different varieties of native tree that are grown in the nursery as well as collecting and processing seed.

Members of the Mendip Society will be pleased to note that among the trees propagated have been several small leaved limes. Although a distinctive component of Mendip Woodland, lime fails to set viable seed except in the very hottest of summers. It can however be successfully grown from cuttings, and several were taken from the splendid old pollards at Slader's Leigh. The picture shows one of them growing away strongly in its new home.

For information about the tree group and nursery please contact:  
**Buffyfletcher@hotmail.com**



*New trees from our small leaved limes  
Photo: Mick Fletcher*

## Slader's Leigh Open Day - A personal view

**We** had a beautiful day for the open day, sunny, not too hot, and recent rain had encouraged a proliferation of orchids and other flowers throughout the reserve.

The gazebo was erected, and a range of activities set up. Story tellers from the Mendip Storytelling Circle, even Peter Janes on his bagpipes... and to top it all, the dedication of our new seat, by our president Les Davies MBE to four stalwarts of the society.

Sadly however, apart from the organisers and those with a direct connection to members commemorated on the new seat, we attracted only a few members of the wider society, or general public.

I can't be the only one who feels it is a great shame when so many people put in time and effort to organise things, only to spend the day waiting for punters that fail to materialise. It is of course important to understand the sort of events our membership wants, a part of the reason why our members survey is so important. Beyond that, a wider reach for publicity, and greater involvement from our membership as a whole is, I believe, crucial to the long-term health and success of our society.



*A Yellow Iris and a  
Common Spotted  
Orchid, both taken on  
the open day at  
Slader's Leigh  
Photos: Mike Harvey.*



*Peter Janes - a man of many talents!  
Photo: Mike Harvey.*

*Nb. Please note that this is my personal view and not necessarily that of the committee or wider membership. Ed.*

## A walk in May and our quiz night - Richard Frost.

**Thanks** to Richard Ivens for leading us around the East Harptree Combe walk in May. It was a sunny day ideal for this and Richard chose to do it in reverse for a welcome change. Nine of us plus Peters dog enjoyed it despite almost getting lost at various points, which just goes to prove that even the most experienced of us can nearly get it wrong sometimes.

This walk had great views and Richard was concerned that he might lose someone, and nearly did when Denise and myself stopped in Harptree to chat to a "local". Knowing he was heading for the Line of Works meant we caught him up and so endured a muddy path back to Smitham Chimney with its famous lead mining history.



*A pause for a photo on the East Harptree walk.  
Photo: Richard Frost.*

**Taking** over the role of Quizmaster from Les Davies is not an easy task and with a new venue to cope with I had to ask "What could go wrong?"

On this occasion, we were offered the Mendip Activity Centre in Sandford with its attraction of a bar and food with our own area! Best of all, it was free to us! So all good so far.

Enough of us managed to make up four teams which contained a various knowledge and experience to cover the subjects of 1. Mendip 2. Sport 3. Food & Drink 4. General Knowledge. Plus a list of Rhyming phrases.

It got off to a disastrous start when on my arrival, I discovered that I had left the prizes behind! Attempting to rectify it, only compounded the problem! Never mind, I ploughed on.

As the various questions were issued, you could almost hear the collective minds hard at work and trying to delve back into recent history in an effort to win the coveted prizes on offer.

As the evening progressed it all became much more enjoyable watching the contestants wrestling with accuracy and decisive answers in their own way.

Cutting to the chase, the following teams finished in order :-

- 1) The Harptrees - ( Peter Janes)
- 2) The Half Wits - ( Jasmin Stephens)
- 3) The Wallers - ( Judith Tranter)
- 4) Mendipity - ( The Gearings )

So a few days late, the top two teams were presented with their bottles of wine. Better late than nothing eh?

All in all, a nice night out with some red faces but everyone having a fun time.

If we do this again next year, we could do with a few more contestants, so start reading those history books now!

Richard Frost.



*Quiz night at Mendip Activity Centre.  
Photo: Judith Tranter.*

## A Visit to Ebbor Gorge Beef Farm on Wednesday 5th June – Beth Yates.

**Ebbor Gorge Beef Farm** lies above Ebbor Gorge near Deer Leap and has far reaching views across the Somerset Levels. The farm, run by Neil and Lottie has a “Pasture for Life” certification which means the native Ruby Red cattle are 100% grass fed. In addition any meat sold is from cattle that have been born and lived all their lives on the farm. No synthetic chemicals such as fertilisers or insecticides are used and the soil is not disturbed by ploughing. This encourages wild flowers and therefore insects. Neil and Lottie have also planted a large number of trees and shrubs creating droves that provide food and shelter for the cattle and the many species of wildlife, and the cattle are regularly moved to allow rotation of grazing.



*Grazing regimes on Ebbor Gorge farm.*  
Photo: Marion Wilkinson.

It was a bright sunny day when The Mendip Society visited although there was a cool breeze. We were taken for a tour of the farm to see the cattle and calves and met the gentle bull Diddy Boy. We also saw a hibernaculum constructed mainly of stones that offers shelter to amphibians and reptiles and a large bee box that has attracted a colony of wild bees.



*Diddy Boy guardian of the herd of Ruby Reds .*  
Photo: Marion Wilkinson.



*The restored dew pond at Ebbor gorge farm.*  
Photo: Marion Wilkinson.

The farm is also lucky enough to have an iconic Mendip feature - a traditional dew pond used for watering livestock before mains water came to Mendip. It has been painstakingly restored over several years by the Society's Chairman, Tina Bath

During our visit we were accompanied by Fred the farm dog who was very happy to have a group of people willing to throw his stick but was less happy when he got a shock from an electric fence!

Eventually, we wandered back to the farm for tea and homemade cake. Thank you to Neil and Lottie for a very interesting and informative afternoon and to Sally for organising the visit.



*All rounded off with tea and home-made cakes!.*  
Photo: Steve Bradshaw.

*Postscript to this report. For interest.*

*On the Countryfile Programme of 9th June I was struck by the relevance and similarities of what was seen at Ebbor Gorge Farm and the visit by Adam to a farmer in the Yorkshire Dales who has restructured his livestock business to better look after the land while improving the economics of his farm. Both farms are on the same typical limestone uplands we have in the Mendip Hills*

Judith T

## The far end of Mendip.

If I asked you where the farthest West point of Mendip was, I suspect many would say Uphill or Brean Down. Both have a good claim, Uphill as the Western end of the National Landscape (AONB) boundary and Brean Down as the point at which the hills finally dip into the murky waters of the Bristol Channel. However, if one stands on Brean Down and looks out to sea, I would suggest that a further “end point” becomes apparent.



*Steep Holm Island through the haze*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

Steep Holm Island seems to me to be an obvious extension of a line drawn through Crook Peak, Uphill Church and Brean Down itself. Steep Holm is also primarily limestone just like much of Mendip, and so, to my layman's eye, this is the real Western end of our beloved hills. All of which, is just my way of justifying sharing some pictures of my recent visit and hopefully encouraging some of you to go and see this fascinating place for yourselves.



*The R.I.B.s arriving - Weston water looking blue for once!*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

In truth, getting to Steep Holm is not easy. The Bristol Channel tides and the lack of a harbour on the island means that sea and wind conditions need to be ideal. Nevertheless, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, and after a couple of false starts, we finally got the right conditions to make the five-mile trip across from Knightstone harbour to the Eastern end of the island.

Bay Island Voyages ([www.bayislandvoyages.co.uk](http://www.bayislandvoyages.co.uk)), a Cardiff based company, run several trips a year, conditions allowing, and provided two, well equipped RIB (Rigid inflatable) type boats to transport us.

In around 15 minutes we were across the millpond like stretch of water and on a pebble beach at the bottom of an imposing rocky ascent and being greeted by Mark, one of the wardens, who strongly suggested that we should all pick up a stick on the path up to the top and hold it up like an umbrella. The reason?... It's breeding season for the gulls, and they quite naturally want to defend their nests, which they do by dive-bombing the unwary visitor. If one holds up a big stick, they aim for that rather than your head! Good advice it turned out – though it couldn't prevent them bombing us with their natural and somewhat messy deposits!



*Carrying a stick prevents the gulls actually hitting you!*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

From the beach we ascended a steep zig-zag path that had the remains of rails showing here and there. These, we discovered are WW1 German rails, acquired by the British then reused at the start of WW2 to winch heavy equipment to the island's plateau. Pausing several times to “admire the view” (that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!).



*A recently restored winch*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

We eventually emerged near one of the six gun batteries, originally built to keep the threat of Napoleonic invasion at bay, but updated several times, most recently to defend the approach to the Bristol Channel ports in WW2. In practice, none of the islands guns ever fired a shot in anger, but because it was so difficult to move heavy equipment to and from a small island, much of the obsolete equipment was never removed,

## Words and pictures - Mike Harvey.

making Steep Holm a time capsule covering over 150 years of military use, plus a history going back far further in time, mostly now abandoned, often overgrown, but never actually taken away.



*Gulls nests litter the path, complete with eggs and hatchlings.*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

A little further on, being very careful not to step on the many nests along the path and one comes to the barracks. Built in 1867 to house soldiers stationed on the island, but now put to good use as a café, museum and warden's quarters. There we were able to get a welcome hot drink before exploring the island properly. The whole island is only around a half mile long by a quarter mile wide and visitors are there for around 12 hours between high tides, so there is ample time to wander into every nook and cranny while still finding time to sit and admire the views and abundant wildlife.



*...And the sky is literally full of gulls!*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

We chose to spend the last couple of hours back on the beach where our boat home was due to collect us, especially as the bay was home to a pair of Oystercatchers and a family of Shelducks, plus several Seals who seemed as curious about us as we were about them!



*Oystercatchers on Tower Rock.*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

The Kenneth Alsop Trust, who own and manage the island, have produced a guidebook, which is full of far more detail than I am able to cover here. They also run a website. [www.steeptholm.online](http://www.steeptholm.online), which is full of interesting information and pictures.



*A passing Shelduck - Weston super Mare in the distance.*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

So, my assertion, is that you cannot claim to have been to the farthest West point of Mendip if you have not visited Steep Holm. It's not a trip you can undertake spontaneously, but it does reward those willing to make the effort with a fascinating and unique day out.



*...And two curious seals, I'm not sure who was looking at who here.*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

## A round-up of our AGM - and a personal message from Judith.

**Our AGM this year** was a well-attended event. Saturday morning, proved to be a popular choice for attendance as did the venue, Draycott Village Hall.

As usual, our president, Les Davies MBE opened proceedings, welcoming everyone and praising the good turnout. His well-practiced voice carried well around the room without amplification, though some other voices carried less well. We did discover later in the morning that the venue had a very efficient PA system, and it was also suggested that a hearing loop system would be a useful thing for those members (like me) whose hearing is not all they might wish. Agreement was reached that we should investigate this for next year.

We then proceeded with the necessary business of agreeing the previous year's minutes and reading out various reports, followed by an introduction to Kate Avery (see pages 3 and 19) who has been asked to put her skills to use in assisting the committee, no doubt we will all become familiar with her in the near future.

As is customary and sadly a regular requirement, we then held a minute's silence to remember members no longer with us before raising the mood with a presentation to our outgoing secretary, Judith Tranter. Judith has requested a bit of space to express her thanks in writing, which follows this report.

Election of officers was next, all bar secretary willing to stand again. At this point Les and Judith nominated me as a new committee member, I was honoured to accept and be voted on by those present.

A little AOB followed, but generally the official business was at an end. It was agreed to hold next year's AGM at the same venue and to stick with a Saturday morning. 12th of April at 10:30 to be exact.

Following a break for tea, coffee and biscuits, the stage was taken by our guest speaker. Jamie Foster of Geckoella. Jamie was in fact standing in at the last minute for principal geologist Andy King, but showed himself to be adept at presenting as he delivered a fascinating talk on the use of drone technology in geology and habitat monitoring, both on Mendip and further afield, plus a potted history of the development and uses for UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles). This concluded with a Q and A session, and thanks to Jamie on our behalf by Les Davies who then concluded proceedings for another year.

It was great to see so many people making the effort to attend, I look forward to this level of involvement in all our events moving forward.



*A drone's view of Brean Down*  
Photo: Geckoella

### To all members of the Society

I have asked your new Editor for space for just a few lines to record my surprise and a 'heartfelt 'Thank you' for the lovely bouquet and the gift card presented to me at the AGM in April, on my stepping down from the post of Secretary.

The gift card allowed me to go and take my pick in garden centres around the area. How did the chairman and Committee know that I like doing such a thing?

I have to say it was most opportune, and please don't think it a strange choice when I tell you that I immediately got a large selection of tomato plants and all the 'where-withalls' to get them growing nicely straight away as I hadn't got around to doing it as I usually did, and such is the flexibility of the gift card I will be there again after the summer for some new fruit bushes for our little patch of garden.

So you see - It couldn't have been a better choice for me, and I thank you all for the lovely surprise it was.

Judith Tranter.



*Judith receiving her bouquet and our thanks from chair Tina Bath.*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

## Dorothy Sage - a tribute from a friend.



**All** too often we find a need to include obituaries in our pages, but this is a little different. As you will have read elsewhere in this newsletter, Dorothy Sage is one of the members commemorated on the new seat in Slader's Leigh. Judith Tranter, ensured that her friend, Janet Cuff received a copy of The Mendip Times that featured the new seat. This inspired Janet to write a short tribute to her friend, which we include here.

*"Dorothy Sage was born and lived in Bristol until she retired from working as a telephonist at the Imperial Tobacco Company, which is where I first met and worked with her on the switchboard in 1954. At that time she was a keen member of the Holiday Fellowship and enjoyed many walking and bird watching holidays with them.*

*Dorothy was the most selfless person I have ever known and her life was not always easy. Her father died when she was young and her mother's sister Eliza, Li for short, moved in to help raise the fatherless children creating a very strong bond with Dorothy as she grew up. When Auntie Li retired Dorothy provided her with a home and for a time they lived an uneventful and happy life together. Unfortunately, a collision with a hit and run driver left Auntie Li with considerable brain damage and everything changed for Dorothy. There was no way she would contemplate Auntie Li going into care considering all she owed her from those childhood days. Dorothy lovingly cared for her, often 24hrs at a stretch, for years until she died.*

*It was then that Dorothy chose to move from Bristol to Winscombe which she always said was the best decision she ever made. She quickly became an active member of the community but for her the real icing on the cake as a result of the move was joining the Mendip Society. This offered her so many opportunities to explore the countryside on her doorstep and although she enjoyed various walking holidays abroad nothing gave her greater happiness than walking the Mendips with her friends for as long as her health allowed.*

*I realise this potted history of Dorothy's life is not largely relevant to the inscription on the seat and no-one reading her name will know anything of her life, but I am pleased to relate it knowing you will then understand a little more of the woman behind the name, a wonderful lady and my dearest friend. The outline of Crook Peak which is such a landmark when driving to Bristol will forever bring memories of Dorothy to my mind. Our long lasting friendship until her recent death will always be treasured, life was the richer for knowing her."*

Janet Cuff



*Crook Peak - an evocative symbol of Mendip.*

*Photo: Mike Harvey.*

## Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

**Tuesday July 23rd. Our Annual visit to Gully Cave Dig.** Danielle Schreve will be in Ebbor Gorge with her students for their annual two weeks at the cave site. This is a joint visit with the Westbury Society as there is a big interest in and demand to see the promising process of the dig. Every year so far we have been there when a find or discovery has been made – just what will we witness this year as they get nearer to the floor of the cave?

Meet at 10am in the Ebbor Gorge car park. Duration around two hours. Limited to 12 places. **Booking essential.**

**NGR: ST 520 484. What three words ref: ///postings.intend.atomic**

**Please be aware** that the route to Gully Cave includes steep, rough steps, and we cannot offer a vehicular alternative.

To book please contact: [westburysociety@gmail.com](mailto:westburysociety@gmail.com) Any other queries call: **01275 874284**

**Saturday August 10th. Extra Strawberry Line Section.** An easy going new section of this walk with great views of the Hills and Levels. 3.5 miles / about 2hrs. Meet at 10.30am at the Square / Old school in Westbury Sub Mendip. BA5 1HD. **NGR: ST 500 488. What three words ref: ///staining.lifted.debater**

Contact Richard Frost on: **07745 834513**. No booking required. £2 for non members\*.

**Saturday 7th September Wrington Hill and Woods.** Approx 3 miles with moderate ascent and excellent views.

Meet at 10.30 am at Mother Hen Cafe, Broad Street, Wrington, BS40 5LE.

**NGR: ST. 471 624. What three words ref: ///sprouted.roughest.saucepan**

Contact: Richard Frost on: **01275 472797**. No booking required, £2 for non members\*.

**Saturday September 14th. Bio-Char making day in Tania's Wood.** We have arranged the hire of a specialized kiln and its owner for an experimental day to make bio-char out of the mountains of brash in the wood, Places are limited to fifteen, meet at 9.30am to start at 10am. £10 for non-members\*.

Contact Judith on: **01275 874284** or [Judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:Judith.tranter1@btinternet.com) to enquire or reserve a place.

**Saturday September 14th. Somerset V Hitler: A WW2 walk on Blackdown.** A moderate level walk of around six miles in total (three+ hours duration). with some uphill sections and potentially rough, wet ground to cover. Suitable clothing and footwear essential – Starting from The Charterhouse Centre (Car park) At 2pm. Ending as last year, at St Hugh's Church where teas and a welcome toilet facility will be available. (Small donation appreciated)

**NGR: ST 501 557. What three words ref: ///gong.shaky.facelift. Booking essential.** £2 for non-members\*.

Contact Mike Harvey on: **07811 478748** or [themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com](mailto:themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com)

**Tuesday 1st October Radstock Coalfield Walk.** This is part of the Mendip Rocks Festival and is a short 2 hour walk around some nearby ex collieries talking about Mining, railways, Victorian life etc. Meet at 2pm. outside the Radstock Mining Museum, by The Wheel. Waterloo Rd, Radstock, BA3 3EP.

**NGR: ST. 551690 What three words ref: ///damage.recitals.zeal**

Contact Richard Frost **01275 472797** or **07745 834513**. **NB. Booking and payment for this walk is via:** [www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk/news/mendiprocks](http://www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk/news/mendiprocks) or [www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks](http://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks)

**Wednesday October 2nd. A visit to Thatcher's Cider:** Starting at 2pm. Cost £15.00 per person. Please note that this trip requires a minimum number of participants in order to go ahead, so booking - at least 10 days beforehand is essential or it will not happen.

Contact: Sally Davis on: **07816 266531** or at [sallydavis99@hotmail.com](mailto:sallydavis99@hotmail.com) for further details and to reserve a place.

**Monday October 21st. An illustrated talk by John Price – entitled “The Fugitive King and The Monarch's Way”.** Starting at 2pm. Venue - Mendip Lodge Activity Centre, Lyncombe Drive, Churchill, BS25 5PQ.

**What three words ref: ///junior.vent.lyricist** £3 for non members\*. Food and refreshments available. No need to book, but please advise Richard if you are coming, to assist seating etc.

Contact: Richard Frost - **01275 472797** or **07745 834513**

**And finally...** Last year Nathan Orr, Nature Recovery Ranger, on the MHNL Team, took us out fungi spotting on Mendip. He has agreed to do another walk for us in early November, details will be on the website soon.

\***NB.** Unless otherwise stated, all events are free to members. Joining the society at this time of year is especially good value as your membership will run through until the end of 2025. This effectively offers new members an additional six months of membership free!

Please note that The Mendip Society often organises other walks and events between newsletters that cannot, for obvious reasons, be included here. For the latest information and to be made aware of any late changes please visit [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)

## Hibernaculum Building

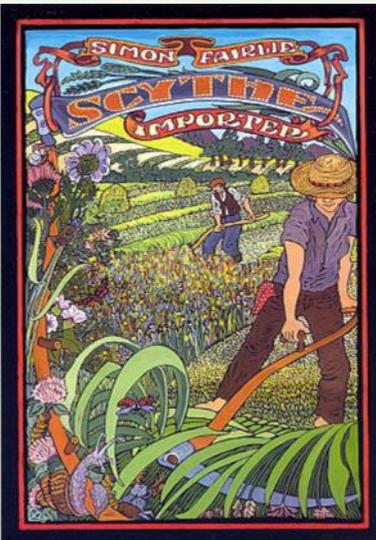
**The adder**, the uk's only venomous snake, is one of the Mendip Hills National Landscapes (MHNL) teams Champion species and a really special reptile. Over the last 30 years adder populations have decreased by over 95%, with habitat loss and the intensification of agricultural processes being the main impacts. We are lucky enough to still have a population of adders on Mendip and it was great to hear that Dave Tranter had found one at Sladers Leigh recently and so the MHNL will be coming to the site to help build an adder hibernaculum. This stone and wood structure will become part of the network of hibernaculum that have been created across Mendip by the MHNL team and will help to provide really important additional habitat for the adder and other animals.

Nathan, the Nature Recovery Ranger from MHNL will be joining volunteers from Mendip Society in building this wildlife structure in September, date TBC, we hope to see you there!



*MHNL volunteers building Hibernaculum at Westbury Beacon  
Photo: Nathan Orr*

## Scything Taster Session



**Summer** is halfway over already and soon we will have to be thinking about the coming of Autumn and about cutting the meadow once again. We wait all winter long it seems for the blooming loveliness of the flowers – then they are over and gone again in a flash. Many years ago we had a weekend of very exciting training in the use of Austrian scythes by the world scything champion of that year no less- a bare footed North American Indian, over here for the Great Green Gathering week up at Fernhill Farm, together with Simon Fairlie (the only importer to the UK of Austrian Scythes at that time). See the website [www.thescytheshop.co.uk](http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk)

What we learnt over those two days we improved on over the following years, until we could cut the entire meadow perfectly in one day. But slowly, for various reasons, our scything volunteers have dwindled until nowadays we need the help of at least one Allen Scything machine to get the cut home and dried.

This year we thought that once again we would run a small scything taster session on our cutting day for anyone

interested in trying their hand at this traditional country skill – but beware – you may get as hooked as our instructor, Nick Raymond, undoubtedly is.

It is difficult to be precise this far ahead on dates for the cutting because of the weather, but we would like to hold the work day on either **Wednesday 11th or 18th September**, preferably the former. If you think you might be interested in joining us in an hour or two's session please ring Judith on **01275 874284** to find out more about it all. All tools provided.



## Slader's Leigh

As always, the timing and amount of the growth of the meadow vegetation is governed by the weather and this Spring has apparently been the wettest on record. After a cold slow start, the rain suited the garlic which spread profusely out of its usual hidden lane boundary area into the main meadow. It also suited the meadow sweet which tended to swamp the cowslips, primroses and wildflowers; the orchids also struggled to appear above its vigour. This was a little disappointing as they were almost too late for our specially arranged open day on the 19th of May.



*How to build a dry stone wall*  
Photo: Nathan Orr.

This was to hold the dedication of the new bench, replacing the old one which had finally collapsed with aging and weather conditions. As before it was designed and made especially for us by Somerset Wood Recycling and purchased with donations in memory of Paul Harley, by his wife Ann, and Dorothy Sage, by her nephew Michael and great friend, Janet Sage. We also added the two names that were on the original seat, that of Pat and David Addison; the latter was the first Manager of the meadow, bought in 1986, and from whom I took over in the early 2000's

Because the family of David, nor either Michael or Janet could be with us for the occasion, a video was taken of the short dedication of the seat by Ann Harley, aided by our President Les Davies. Mike Harvey, recorder of the video, has put it onto a dedicated U-tube channel and this is the link, which will open this directly so that everyone can feel they were present too.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IjXZ-Vd\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IjXZ-Vd_Y)

It was a lovely day, the sun shone on us and the meadow looked beautiful.

We were joined by Mendip Hills National Landscape with their large activity truck, with its small dry-stone wall building model, and manned by Nathan Orr. John Dickson's pond creatures were a big attraction as was the badge maker, operated by Alex Ballard and making its first appearance since before the pandemic. I'd like to



*Our new bench, dedicated to four "Valued members"*  
Photo: Mike Harvey.

register here my gratitude to Alex and those others who helped on this day, without whom nothing could have taken place – Tina, Peter, Richard and Mike of the Committee, Nick Raymond and Sally Davis, David Tranter and of course Les Davies, our President. The afternoon was drawn to a close with the visit of two members of The Mendip Story Telling Circle, Janet North and Martin Horler, with listeners gathered around –and on, the new bench.



*Tataki izomé also known as 'Japanese flower pounding'*,  
Photo: Judith Tranter.

## Spring in Tania's Wood - Words and pictures, Judith Tranter

As reported in the Spring Newsletter our earlier two days of advanced hedge laying had generated a huge amount of brash, which we had intended to use on a bio-char experimental day. However, the wettest spring weather on record caused us to cancel this day, when the necessary kiln became embroiled in mud in another wood somewhere else. The brash piles then had to be combined into larger piles as the pathways were cleared for the use of the forest School – and other visitors.



One lovely bonus of all this clearing work was the increase and spread of the rather low levels of spring flowers of previous years –the Primroses, Foxgloves, cranesbill, violets, Herb Robert, Ground /Elder and Cuckoo Flowers, all appearing

The bio-char day has now been re-scheduled for Saturday 14th September. We will limit the number we can cope with to 15 people for this first experiment. To book please ring 01275 874284.

Members are, as usual, free and there is our normal £10 charge for the day for non members with our usual suggestion that it is quite a good deal for you if you join the Society on the day (membership lasts until December 2025). All details will be sent the week before. Look up 'bio-char' on the internet so you know what to expect by way of a result.

[www.carbongold.com/what-id-biochar](http://www.carbongold.com/what-id-biochar)

We also decided this Spring that clearing such a fast growing, prolific healthy wood with volunteers using only hand tools is no longer enough – we needed more to keep pace with it and keep the paths open for such as the children from the Forest School. So our Chairman Tina, arranged a training day with Coram Construction Training in the use of strimmers and brushcutters and on a lovely day at the end of May four of our volunteers, (who had expressed the desire to learn – we didn't co-erce them!) donned the appropriate equipment and set to on our wayward scrub, brambles and nettle beds and all.



For their hard work and diligence they received a certificate of competence and are now able to speed up our work days' output considerably; with many thanks and congratulations to, Julian Butter, Richard Ellis, David Tucker and Beth Yates. Here is Beth's Certificate – maybe in the next newsletter we will be seeing them in action.

The eight seater picnic table, put together by Peter and David has been well used over the last six months by the children on Forest School days but being out in all weathers it had gathered a variety of colours and hues of different 'substances' shall we say and therefore needed a complete wash and brush up and a final coat of protection.

A bit labourious but very necessary to be able to be used for the rest of the year.

Judith Tranter

## Blagdon School says thank you - Nicky Orr



*A well protected "rural retreat".  
Photo: Blagdon School / Nicky Orr*



*Collecting useful natural material.  
Photo: Blagdon School / Nicky Orr*

**Years 1 and 2** from Blagdon Primary School have been visiting Tania's wood this year for their Forest School sessions. They have loved being in the beautiful woodland, exploring the space and learning to identify trees, flowers and minibeasts. They have used the natural loose parts around them for so many imaginative things. They made journey sticks where their walk was remembered in the natural things found and attached to their stick. They used sticks, cones and leaves to make the letters of their name. Dens were made for small woodland animal toys and one big enough for the children to get in. We have had all sorts of weather from sunshine to torrential rain, thankfully we have the lovely shelter built last year by local parents so we could continue when it was particularly bad. The children had the opportunity to use a saw, hand drill and hammers during the sessions creating things to take home and keep as mementos.

Blagdon school and Nicky Orr, the Forest School leader, would like to thank the Mendip Society for letting us visit Tania's wood and also thank their volunteers for maintaining the space so it is accessible to the school children.

## Mendip Rocks 2024 - coming soon.



**1st to 31st October 2024**

Mendip Rocks is an annual festival that hosts a series of geological events during October to celebrate the fascinating 450-million-year history of the Mendip Hills. The festival involves the local community in experiencing our beautiful landscape and understanding the story of the Mendips.

Whatever your level of interest, there are inspiring events for all, including:

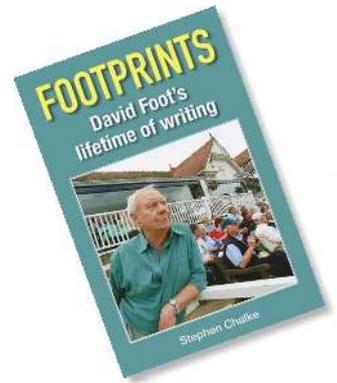
- Building stones of Wells and Frome Walks
- Quarry minibus tours - to operational Mendip quarries
- Guided walks to Mendip geological sites led by specialists
- Geological lecture day hosted at SESC Sat 12th October
- Family events and workshops held on Saturday & Sunday at SESC and Cheddar

Full programme available soon, please visit: [www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events](http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events) to find out more.

## Book Corner

### Footprints David Foot's lifetime of writing.

As I am prone to do, I have stretched the limits a little to include this book. David Foot was originally from East Coker then lived and worked mainly in Bristol. He was however Somerset born and bred and a well-known writer for several local papers over several decades. Not to mention a regular contributor to national press, an author of many notable sporting biographies and much more besides. **Footprints**, is a collection of short articles written by him and collated by Stephen Chalke, his friend and publisher with help from David's son Mark and a huge library of notes, jottings and cuttings collected by the man himself over a lifetime of writing.

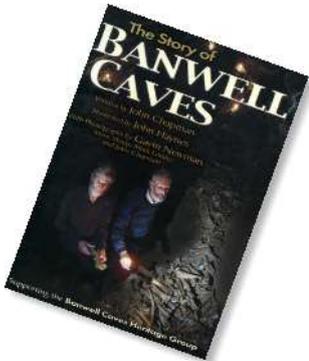


Stephen Chalke has written a bit of background to each chapter, to offer context and help us to understand how and why he has chosen to lay out the book in the way he has, but the bulk of the text comes from David's pen and covers his entire writing career, from the age of ten, right up to his third letter of resignation to the Guardian sports editor who was unwilling to part with his services! Along the way covering national service, many memorable meetings with sporting heroes and showbiz personalities and including some personal reflections never originally written to be shared, but offering great insight into a very humble, caring, insightful human being.

Principally, David Foot was a sports reporter, with a keen interest in cricket - especially Somerset and Gloucestershire, but he was also a theatre critic, jarring journalist and social commentator - the story of the lady who looked after the ladies toilet on the Bristol downs, and the working girls who frequented them, being one example of his breadth of interests! He also rubbed shoulders with a wide range of celebrities from the worlds of sport and show business - all of whom he wrote about in his rich, warm style.

If you are of a certain age, and especially if you have an interest in local cricket or other sports, then you will almost certainly have read some of David Foot's work in the past. However, even if you have no interest in sport whatsoever, the easy flowing style of his writing. The reminiscences of his career and life in post war Somerset and Bristol, indeed simply the obvious love of words and language that is exhibited throughout, make this book a joy to read.

### The Story of Banwell Caves.



Our last edition carried an obituary to John Chapman, a society member, but also a man with a wide and diverse range of other interests. Amongst these was the Banwell Bone Caves, and while inserting Judith's obituary of John into the newsletter, I was reminded that I had a copy of a book on the subject, written by John, with a supporting cast of illustrators and photographers all contributing.

John himself, first visited the cave in 1950, but remained fascinated by it for the rest of his life and published this book, in conjunction with the Banwell Caves Heritage Group in 2013.

the book itself blends the history of the caves with details of the conservation and restoration work that has gone on, the work of current and past owners, plus various cavers and of course, John himself.

Beyond the story of the caves themselves, the book also gives details of a range of follies and small summerhouses within the estate, plus a history of various owners, from George Law, the then Bishop of Bath and Wells, who "re-discovered" the cave full of bones in the early 19th century\*- and believed that he had found evidence of Noah's Flood, to John Haynes, the current owner, who also contributed his illustrations to the book.

The caves themselves are only occasionally open to the public. Mendip Rocks has organised such a visit in the past, and I see no reason why the society might not do something similar if the interest is there. Until then, do try to find a copy of this fascinating book if you have any interest in local history and Victorian follies.

Owner John Haynes, used to offer them by mail order, I'm not sure if that is still the case or what the current price might be, but an enquiry to him at: The Caves, Banwell BS29 6NA could well reward you with your own copy.

*\*Local miners had actually broken through into the cave in 1757 and local people had carried out various excavations and explorations over time, so effectively, Bishop Law re-opened the caves rather than discovering them.*

## Mendip NL proposes traffic-free days at Cheddar.

**Earlier this year**, Distinctive Communications Ltd. Working on behalf of the Mendip Hills National Landscape team conducted a consultation on the proposed Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) for Cheddar Gorge.



*Cheddar Gorge from above.  
Image: Mendip NL.*

The aim of the ETRO is to temporarily close the gorge to motor traffic once a month over an 18-month period, in order to enhance the visitor experience for pedestrians, cyclists, and other visitors. The consultation received a significant response, with over 1,700 completed surveys from a wide range of interested parties, including visitors, residents, council residents, workers, and local business owners. The majority of respondents agreed that Cheddar Gorge should be more accessible to non-vehicular visitors. Sunday was the preferred day for closure, and all-day

closures were favoured. The proposed closure location received majority support, although there were some disagreements and uncertainties. The feedback will inform the next steps in the process, and continued dialogue with the community will be crucial.

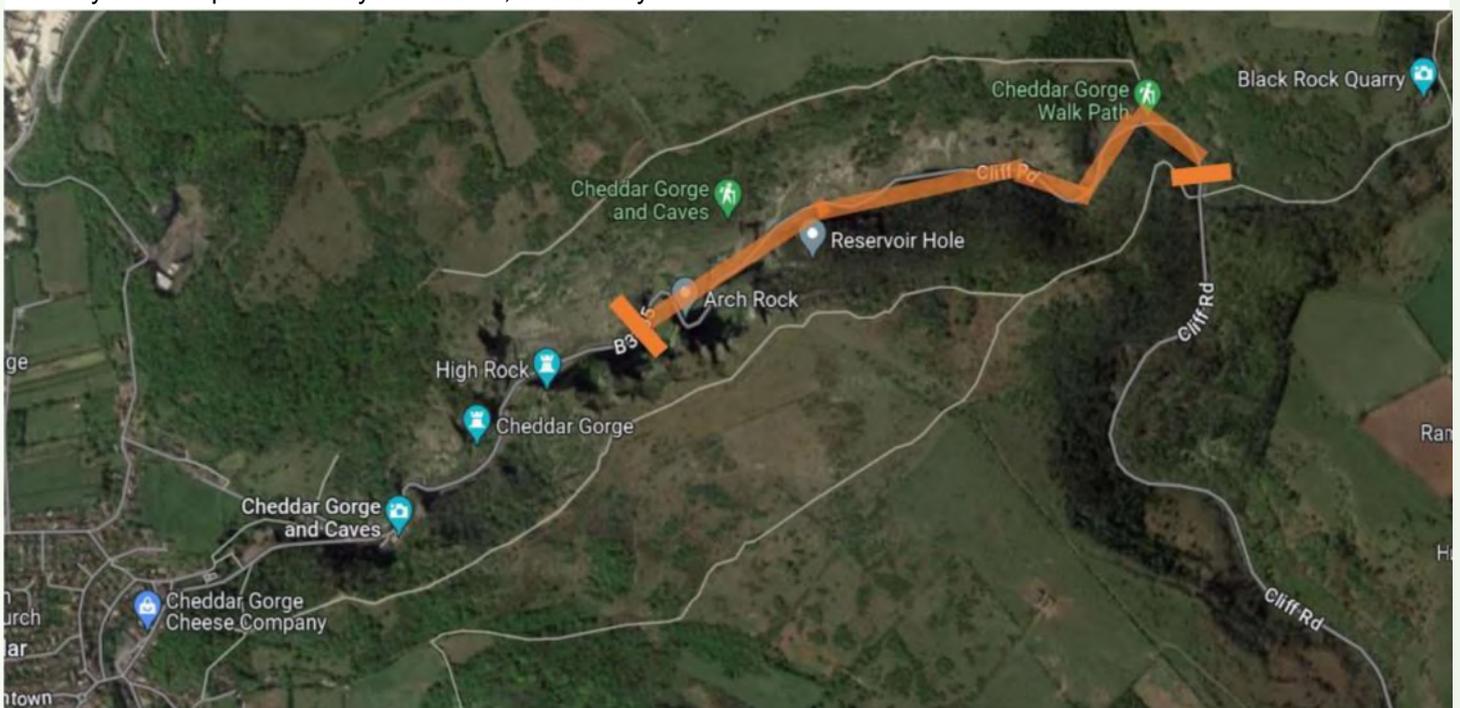
Overall, the consultation demonstrated strong support for making Cheddar Gorge more accessible and highlighted various concerns and opportunities that need to be addressed for a successful implementation of the temporary closures.

The key findings seem to be:

1. Over 80% of respondents agree that Cheddar Gorge should be more accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-vehicular visitors.
2. Almost three-quarters of respondents prefer Sunday as the day for closures, while Saturday was favoured by over 40%. Around 17% were against any form of closure.
3. Over 62% of respondents would like closures to be all day, around a quarter preferring just a lunchtime or PM closure.
4. Over a third would like the closures to be weekly, with some (around one in five) wanting them to be more than once a week.

You can read more about the scheme and comment on the proposal here:

[www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk/news/cheddar-gorge-etro/](http://www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk/news/cheddar-gorge-etro/)



*The proposal is to close the area lined in orange to all motorised traffic on specific days.  
Image: Copyright Google Maps*

## Who's - who in your society



**I'm Les Davies, Society President.** For 18 years I was the Mendip Warden with what was then the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). I'm from a farming family in North Somerset with my Grandfather coming from Mendip. I've spent my life connected with the land, working with apple trees and orchards. I'm also a published writer with a regular column in the Mendip Times magazine as well as several walking books co-written with local walking journalist Sue Gearing. I have a passion for the working countryside and its history that I'm able to convey through countryside education at all levels.



**Tina Bath, Chair.** I was born and brought up in Ubley, and now live in Priddy with my 2 young adult offspring. 95% of my relatives are farmers, so you could say that is where I inherited my love of the Land. In my early twenties I became self-employed, dry-stone walling and hedge laying during the winter. I served 15 years on Priddy Parish Council, and was also on Priddy School PTA. I have been on the National Hedge Laying Society Committee for 12 years, I'm a Mendip Ploughing Society Committee Member, sit on the Somerset Hedge Group Committee and am Chair of the Wrington & Burrington Hedging Society, and this is my second year as Chair of The Mendip Society.



**I'm Marilyn Cattell, currently the Mendip Society Treasurer**

I joined the Society's walking group in 2008 when I retired and moved to Cheddar. I was persuaded to be treasurer in 2009 and remained as such until 2020 when I took a 2-year break although I still helped the then treasurer Clive Constance in preparation of the accounts.

My hobbies are Ballroom and Latin Dancing, embroidery and walking. I am also Chairman of the Avon Amateur Dancers Club and a Trustee of Wells Museum.



**I'm Richard Frost, the society's Walks & Talks coordinator,** and have been a member since 2001. I love geography and geology and like to know that there are people out there who want to protect the area and environment. It was just a matter of time before I became a Committee member, culminating in my time as Chair, a great experience. My hobbies are walking, geography and travel. I also lead battlefield tours and have a love of all things "railway". My greatest interest is riding my motorcycle, which I have done since 1961. Now at the age of 80, I am looking forward to a ride to Nordkapp, the highest road in Scandinavia.



**Peter Janes – Membership Secretary and Webmaster.**

I joined the Mendip Society in 1992 shortly after moving to the area. I started leading walks and later became the walks coordinator until taking over as Membership Secretary in 2016 (hence I am the one who pesters you about annual renewals). I also look after the website.

Outside the Society I take part in the local folk music scene (and have played bagpipes at various Mendip Society events). My wife, Mary, and I live in West Harptree along with two energetic dogs.



**My name is Judith Tranter,** I joined the Society in the first month of this new century, after being involved in our village orchard planting and taken along to a Society meeting by my village neighbours; (truly the best way to win new members)

I recently retired as the Society Secretary, but am still a Society Trustee and involved in the management of our two Nature Reserves. Being a volunteer for our work days, learning the country skills necessary and promoting the work of the society at our events has enabled me to find out what life and work in the Mendip Hills is all about, meeting the nicest, most amazing people along the way.



**Kate Avery - co-opted on to the committee.** Growing up in rural Lancashire, I developed an early love for nature and the countryside that has never left me. I could walk down our farm track hearing the cries of curlews and generally appreciate the flora and fauna that abounded in the area. This love for nature meant I naturally turned my working life in the direction of conservation where I largely focused on public engagement, community involvement and administrative roles. I have worked for a variety of organisations including the Mendip Hills AONB and understand the importance of giving people the opportunity to actively engage with the landscape they live in or nearby.



And finally. **I'm Mike Harvey, Newsletter editor,** and new committee member. I've been in the society since 2014, but only became really active since I retired from full-time work. Born and raised on Weston super Mare, but spent most of my working life in Bristol as an industrial model maker / prototype builder. This gave me a pretty good grounding in design and graphics, plus my main hobby is photography, so I felt I could offer something to the newsletter, which I now have sole responsibility for editing. My hope is that I can increase member participation in the society while also attracting a range of new members to carry on the good work well into the future.

## A Presidents' View.



**At** the time of writing , the longest day arrives with a week . By the time you read this it will have passed and the days will begin to shorten. Could anyone enlighten me as to when spring occurred as I must have been out to lunch when it happened.

I was delighted to see the turnout for this years AGM and thank you to all those who came. A great presentation showing how the world is changing with the use of drones. Maybe its time the Society had one to add to Mike Harvey's box of tricks. Certainly the newsletter provides an excellent shop window for this Society and I'm still trying to get a front cover photo published . Yet again I've played it crafty and put my photo in with this post. The quality of photos Mike is getting for this prestigious profile is very high

The AGM was also an emotional moment when Judith Tranter stood down from the role of secretary and from the management committee. Judith has been the life blood of this Society and lets not forget Dave Tranter who is always there in support. Both will carry on with the Nature Reserves, an area were they feel at home. I am a great believer in 'Tribal Elders' for it is here where the wealth of knowledge and experience is stored. It is a living reference library that is there when needed .

You have also met Kate and its thanks to Tina we have her. Kate worked with us both in the Warden days. She brings with her an infectious enthusiasm and a will to get things done. You will no doubt be hearing more from her and Mike about ideas for the future.

I'm not going to say anything more as the pages of this newsletter are filled with information and event ,both passed and for the future. I there for leave you with my offering of a sunset at St Hughs Charterhouse. The message is, its going to be a lovely day tomorrow.



With my kindest regard and best wishes to you all.

Les

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

For the secretary, e-mail: [secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk)

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For newsletter content and pictures, e-mail: [themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com](mailto:themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com)