

Mendip

the
mendip
society

Caring for the Mendip Hills

for the last 50 years

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 151 • December 2017



The Society has bought a new banner, called a 'flag', which waves in the wind and draws attention to us. Where-ever you see this – that's where we are. Here we're outside the Wells & Mendip Museum at the launch of the Mendip ROCKtober Festival.

A TALE OF TWO QUARRIES – WALK

Postponed **from Sat 21st Oct** because of stormy weather. Part of Mendip ROCKS, our aim was to see just what happens to two large and abandoned quarries when their life is over. A large group had a tour around Stokes Quarry in lovely autumn weather complete with rain storm and double rainbow. Once a source of top quality limestone, it now looks set to be developed with quality holiday homes.



Fairy Cave Quarry, on the other hand is now the site of a wildlife area with nesting falcons and other birds plus rare plant life, and is also much used for caving and climbing.

Walks like this give the public a chance to see at first hand some of the lesser known features of The Mendips and help to make such events as The Rocktober Festival the success it is and I am proud that the Society played a valuable part.

Richard Frost

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ADVANCE NOTICE – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND SOCIAL EVENING

The 2018 AGM will be held at the Draycott Memorial Hall, Draycott Rd BS27 3UE on Friday 23rd March 2018 at 6.30pm. To be followed by refreshments and our speaker, the Editor of The Mendip Times, Mr. Steve Eggington



SATURDAY 6TH JANUARY 2018 – THE SOCIETY WASSAIL AT THE VILLAGE OF WORTH

Based at the **Pheasant Inn, Worth, Wookey**, this year's Wassail will be organised by member Terry Gifford. **Les Davies** is Master of Ceremonies again and **Barley Rye Choir**, will sing Somerset Wassail songs in all the right places. Also invited along is **Somerset Morris**, who will be dancing as we gather – so come prepared for an evening of joining in! As Worth is a small village and parking limited, this years Wassail will be for **members and family only** and **car sharing is encouraged**. The address is the Pheasant Inn, Wells Rd, Wookey, BA5 1LQ.

Starting at **6.00 pm** in the pub car park this event is **free** but Barley Rye and Somerset Morris will have a collection towards the charity of their choice. Mulled cider and apple cake will be available **for a donation**. We will be eating at the Pheasant afterwards – if you would like to join us please send a deposit of £10 plus an email address for a menu to Terry Gifford, Ben Knowle Farmhouse, Castle Lane, Wookey, BA5 1NL.

There's limited seating, so do book now!

Warm clothing, good shoes/boots for grass and a torch for light are all advisable.

For information contact **Terry on 01749 679128**.

UP-COMING TALKS PROGRAMME TO ENJOY

THURSDAY 11th JANUARY 2018

TALK "THE DORSET & SOMERSET AIR AMBULANCE"

by Debbie Birtwhistle at Winscombe 2.30pm

The story of how this once little known service has now become a major player in our local Emergency Service. If you use our Hills, then you will need to know how the existence of this vital specialist ambulance service can help you in an emergency. Since their launch in March 2008 they have flown nearly 12,000 missions, helping to save lives – one day – it could be yours.

Venue – St. James' church Hall, Woodborough Rd, Winscombe at 2.30pm. Members £2;

Visitors £3.50.incl. refreshments. For details contact Richard on 01275 472797



FRIDAY 19th JANUARY 2018

TALK "THE ISLAND OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY"

by DAVE WALLACE at Winscombe 2.30pm



Sit in the warmth and comfort of St. James's Hall to find out the little known facts of this small island in the Bristol Channel, isolated by brisk tidal currents. Owned and managed by the Kenneth Allsop Memorial trust, it lies nearly six miles offshore from Weston-super-Mare.. Despite and indeed because of its isolation, Steep Holm is a rewarding place to visit, with visitors welcome on scheduled trips.

The occupation of Steep Holm stretches back into antiquity, and Dave Wallace is just the person to tell us its story, having been involved with the Trust for very many years.

Venue – St.James's Church Hall, Woodborough Rd, Winscombe, BA25 1AQ. Members £2, and Non members £3.50p plus free refreshments, at 2.30pm. For details contact Richard on 01275 472797

ED – I remember my first trip with the Society many years ago was to Steep Holm – an interesting place to visit & an exciting journey there and back! Would there be any interest for another visit next summer?

THURSDAY 25TH JANUARY 2018

TALK "NOT JUST ORWELL" by Delores Long

At the Wells & Mendip Museum at 2.30pm



Monument to the Spanish Civil War

With Spain very much in the news, this interesting talk -which has its roots in the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade -will be very pertinent and will unravel the history of the times for us.

The Spanish 'very international' Civil War, widely known in Spain simply as The Civil War or The War, took place from 17th July 1936 – 1st April 1939, and began when Spain was declared a Republic – for the second time.

Venue – the Wells and Mendip Museum, Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE. At 2.30pm. Members £2 and non members £3.50p plus free refreshments.

Contact Richard Frost 01275 472797.

FRIDAY 16TH FEBRUARY 2018**TALK “STARFISH AND SUBTERFUGE “ by Mike Chipperfield at
The Wells and Mendip Museum 2.30pm**

During the Second World War sites called ‘Special Fire’, or SF sites were created in a nationwide top secret project in our defence system. However, one early site on the Mendip Hills was given the name “Starfish”, which then became the code used for all of the decoy cities. They were controlled from nearby bunkers and the one on the Mendips is still there today. (right). Mike Chipperfield is an ex- Mendip Ranger who knows more than most about the history of this part in the long story of our Mendip Hills.

Venue – the Wells and Mendip Museum, Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE. At 2.30pm. Members £2 and non members £3.50p plus free refreshments.

Contact Richard Frost 01275 472797.

**THURSDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2018****TALK “THE ART OF STORY TELLING”
in WILDLIFE TELEVISION
By Lizzie Bewick at Winscombe 2.30pm**

Don't miss this one! Come and listen to Lizzie Bewick telling, and showing us how telling a good story is the only way to make a successful film. Lizzie produced many of the 76 episodes of the ever popular BBC Natural History programmes which have become legend in broadcasting, The Big Cat Diaries. This is a very important skill to have in the modern world where ‘media’ seems to be everything.

Venue – St.James's Church Hall, Woodborough Rd, Winscombe, BA25 1AQ.

Members £2.and Non members £3.50p plus free refreshments, at 2.30pm.

For details contact Richard on 01275 472797

**THURSDAY 8TH MARCH 2018****TALK “THE FUTURE OF THE A.O.N.B.”
by Jim Hardcastle at Winscombe 2.30pm**

During the past two years The Mendip Society has worked very closely with the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Team led by Jim Hardcastle. Jim was an instructor on that team some years ago, but after several years experience in media work, has returned as its Manager. Who better to know about, and pass on to us, the careful planning which has gone into the future of the A.O.N.B. which ensures the quality of life for all those who live and work on and visit these Hills?

Venue – St.James's Church Hall, Woodborough Rd, Winscombe, BA25 1AQ.

Members £2.and Non members £3.50p plus free refreshments, at 2.30pm.

For details contact Richard on 01275 472797

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WE HAVE –

PERAMBULATED WITH THE PRESIDENT



After his talk of the same name last April Les showed a large group of members – and non-members too- around the area he had described, with such colour and feeling, that of the Tickenham Ridge, rising steeply from the Yeo Moor and Nailsea.

A lovely day, full of nostalgia, in an area not well known to most of us.

In the October copy of the Mendip Times, Sue Gearing's walk follows the President's Walk route, with a few additions so if you want to try it out for yourself it's all there ready and waiting to be done!

*The Perambulation group –
Valley View*

ENJOYED A SUMMER SOCIAL EVENING with Cathy Benjamin, Barley Rye Choir



On a lovely summer evening in the last week of August we drove up on to the Mendips to the Charterhouse Centre for a wonderful gathering of music, food and friendship. Barley Rye choir from Nailsea sees itself as a 'friend of the Mendip Society' so I was delighted when we received the invitation to join in with the society's annual social gathering and to share a meal and some of our summer songs with everyone.

For me the evening had four parts. The first was sitting outside on tables and chairs in the light of the setting summer sun. We ate from the delicious spread of food that miraculously

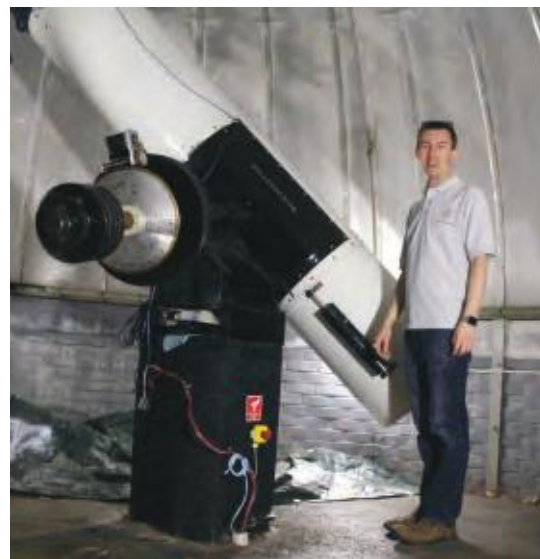


appears when everyone contributes and sang our first set of songs which aim to reflect the turning seasons of the year. Further musical entertainment was provided by Peter Janes on his Northumberland pipes. What a treat!

Being rather high up in the hills, the evening began to get cooler encouraging us to move inside into a somewhat cosier atmosphere. Here we finished our food and continued the entertainment, firstly with Jane Neve's lovely singing and guitar playing and finally Barley Rye's second set of songs.

The main gathering of the evening was drawing to a close and some people started to head home. However for a sizeable group of curious stalwarts there was an opportunity to crawl (literally) into the observatory to see what was visible in the night sky. We were ably led in this endeavour by astronomer, Mark Woodland. He explained how the observatory worked and gave each of us an opportunity to look through the telescope. I must admit to not seeing much; however the whole experience was such fun – in particular when we discovered the strange acoustics within the circular space – a little like the whispering gallery in St Paul's cathedral.

The final part of the evening was with a much smaller group. A few members of the choir are avid campers and had asked the centre in advance if we might stay the night under the stars up on the Mendips. So, as the last car lights were disappearing over the horizon, a few of us squeezed into one of the camper vans for a final chat and sing-song before falling into bed ready to wake on top of the Mendips the next morning.



TASTED WINE AT FENNY CASTLE VINEYARD

On 3rd September fifteen or so members assembled on a rather drab and cool Sunday at Terry Gifford's house for the short walk to Fenny Castle Vineyard at Panniers Farm in Worth near Wells.

We were met by the owners, James and Gill Cumming, for the steep (and slippery) ascent to the top of the vineyard on the slopes of Ben Knowle Hill. The site faces south and is sheltered from the South West weather by Hembury Hill. The view is spectacular over the Levels to the Polden Hills and beyond. The geology here is unusual with tea green marl overlaying red marl. A layer of Celestine – the mineral strontium sulphate sometimes used to produce the blue colours in fireworks – but here perhaps adding to the distinctive 'terroir', divides these mud and siltstones.

James pointed out how the land is divided into two parcels with Ortega vines grown on the gently sloping land at the lower end of the site and while Pinot Noir is grown on the very much steeper ground above. A smaller, detached plot was first planted with Bacchus vines in 2011 with the main vineyard following in 2012 after the soil was enriched with 200 tons of cow manure and the installation of 500 posts. The Ortega is a German grape variety producing white wine while Pinot Noir produces both red and sparkling wine. The complexities of pruning were explained: Ortega is cane pruned as 'double guyot' with two canes originating from the trunk while the Pinot Noir is grown on a higher yielding system – spur pruned on Lyre trellising.

With rain threatening we retreated to the winery where we enthusiastically sampled the 2015 vintage – a Pinot Noir Rosé from 2013, the award-winning aromatic Barrel Fermented Ortega and Classic Ortega. Also on offer were Tor Cider



Company traditional ciders – single orchard blends that are made from hand-picked Somerset cider apple varieties from small orchards.

All in all an instructive and enjoyable couple of hours despite the weather with John Steers.

Ed – Although I could make a guess at the definition of the word 'terroir', I thought I would insert it here, as a service to the reader – "the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as the soil, topography, and climate." Why use many when one word will do!

‘Planning Matters’

You probably know that the society has volunteers who scrutinise the planning applications which they consider would have an adverse effect on the Mendip area if they were granted. This primarily means detrimental effects on the Mendip Hills AONB, both looking “out from and in to”, across the boundaries of the designated areas. Here we have two articles on a nationwide, escalating situation, affecting nearly all the 46 AONBs, which is clearly manifesting itself in our area.

Understanding a situation and a process vital to our way of life here in the Mendips. By AONB Planning Liaison Officer Cindy Carter

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of the UK’s most cherished and outstanding landscapes. With 46 AONBs covering just under one fifth of the UK, they offer a wealth of opportunities for both people and wildlife to benefit from our countryside. As vibrant, living landscapes they underpin the economy and health and well-being of our society.

AONBs were originally established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, with legislation reformulated in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) of 2000. Designated in 1972, the Mendip Hills AONB covers 198 square kilometres from Bleadon in the west to Chewton Mendip in the east.

AONBs benefit from important protections set out in law and policy. Section 85 of the CRoW Act (2000) contains a general duty on all relevant authorities to ‘have regard to the purpose of conserving or enhancing the natural beauty’ of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas and this includes planning matters. Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the ‘duty of regard’.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the principal document setting out the Government’s national policies on land use planning, and also contain policies specific to protected landscapes (including AONBs). Under paragraph 115, the NPPF sets out that ‘great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.’ Paragraph 116 sets out that ‘Planning permission should be refused for major

developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest.’

The Mendip Hills AONB crosses five local authority areas: Somerset County Council, Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils and the Unitary Authorities of North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset. These Councils make decisions on matters within their relevant areas, including planning applications for development, and adopt policies within their Development Plans including as relates to the protection and conservation of the Mendip Hills AONB. The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership further produces the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan (updated every five years) as required by the CRoW Act (2000) on behalf of these joint local authorities. Within the Management Plan, paragraph 1.4 sets out a Statement of Significance on the special qualities that create the Mendip Hills AONB sense of place and identity.

When considering planning applications for development within the Mendip Hills AONB, the relevant Local Planning Authority will consult on and consider a range of material planning considerations (this includes relevant legislation, national and local planning policy, adopted Neighbourhood Plans, Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan etc.) pertaining to the development proposal. The Mendip Hills AONB Unit provides comments on some planning consultations where proposals are likely to have an adverse effect on the characteristics that make the AONB special and landscape character, where our unique cross border position means that we see issues that straddle district boundaries, and where we can provide advice to help inform decision making.

“Our Countryside is Under Attack” by Michael Rolfe, our Sedgemoor District scrutiniser

Our Central Government is placing a huge amount of pressure on Local Authorities to build houses across England. Its main aims are:

- *Measures to reduce the obstacles to house building and help local authorities, developers and SME builders build the homes Britain needs*

- *sensible measures to improve affordability and protections for renters and home purchasers*
- *“ambitious proposals” to help ‘fix’ the housing market so that more ordinary working people from across the country can have the security of a decent place to live”*

With regard to 'the Green Belt' the Government has stated that;

- *it is committed to the green belt – that only in exceptional circumstances may councils alter green belt boundaries after consulting local people and submitting the revised Local Plan for examination, and set out for the first time all the actions local authorities must take before considering the green belt.*

Development Objectives

The above objectives have been/are being interpreted by Local Authorities which have either produced or are in the process of producing 'Local Plans' for the development of their respective areas over the next 20 – 25 years.

What does this all mean for those who reside or visit the western end of The Mendip Hills AONB? How many houses are actually planned for the area?

It is difficult to identify exactly how many houses are planned because dictates from Government have a habit of changing and Plans are not always clear. It is however clear that locally much of the housing will be outside current development boundaries in 'Green Belt' within and/or immediately adjacent to The Mendip Hills, AONB. For example;

Axbridge: 70 houses minimum. Likely to be at least double.

Cheddar: 650 houses minimum. Could rise to over 800.

Banwell Garden Village: 1900 houses

Langford and Churchill Garden Village: 2675 houses

The plans envisage that people will live and work in the area, so that commuter travel will be kept to a minimum. Cynics would question this theory and expect most of the new inhabitants to travel to work each day in Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, Bridgwater, and Taunton or further afield. To minimise commuter travel, the aim would seem to be to develop local business which is likely to mean construction of commercial business parks.

Impacts

- There will be significant adverse visual impacts on The Mendip Hills AONB, looking outwards and inwards.
- The infrastructure will be placed under inordinate pressure. For example;
 - 1 The road system will require a major upgrade. Developments have already begun in Cheddar but there is currently no sign of the road system being upgraded and no plan in place.
 - 2 New schools will be required.
 - 3 The presently overworked doctor's surgeries will need massive expansion.

All of which, means even more development.

Is Development Really Necessary

Is there really is a need to build hundreds of thousands of houses across the UK? Is there no other option but to make substantial inroads into our beautiful countryside?

At the moment we are trusting the 'competent authorities' analysis that development of countryside is unavoidable and essential.

Let us hope that they are right. It would be unforgivable if the Government's perceived urgent need for housing is incorrect and that our countryside is being unnecessarily destroyed.

Those who are concerned about the Government's policy to build houses in the countryside outside current development boundaries should read the recently issued "Independent Report on Housing in England's AONB's".

<http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Independent-Research-into-Housing-in-AONBs-Media-Release-November-2017.pdf>

ED – Michael is passionate about monitoring the way Local Authorities are now conducting their planning procedures, wanting all our members to be aware of the direction in which these L.A.s are taking us.

He would like everyone to have a look at this report and advises:

"You have to dig a bit further once you've opened the link, but eventually you will get there; all 62 pages!. The 'Executive Summary' at the front is worth reading as it gives an accurate and concise flavour of the content. This document should be referred to in responding to planning applications that affect The Mendip Hills AONB".

Now – the Good News

Katie Lewis from West Harptree has volunteered to be the planning scrutiniser for North Somerset. We are very grateful for her offer and will now be able to better fulfil our role as a 'watchdog' for the Mendip Hills area.

Will you join her and offer to help in one of the other areas where we really do need help? Talk to Richard or any other member of the Committee, about the help that you could give in a planning capacity, but also in any of the other areas which are so important in the running of our Society – programme visits, walks, newsletter, the Nature Reserves and the talks programme. Something for all.



The Case for High-Density Compact Cities

by Lincoln Garland CEnv MCIEEM; Associate Director, Biodiversity by Design

In the August newsletter we printed the first part of Lincoln's article about the importance of planning for an increasing population. Please read it again in conjunction with this second part.

Brownfield or greenfield development?

In 2000, the UK Government introduced the 'brownfield first' policy as a strategic tool for controlling urban sprawl, as well as for promoting urban regeneration. In addition to prioritising brownfield over greenfield development, the policy also encouraged higher density housing on brownfield sites. Consequently, the mean number of new houses per hectare has risen most sharply on brownfield sites, increasing 75% from 28 to 49 between 2000 and 2009.

While previously established housing density targets have not been taken forward in the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), concentrating new development on brownfield sites wherever suitable has remained a priority for Government (HM Treasury 2015). For various reasons, including perceived viability issues, developers generally also still favour higher density development on brownfield land.

While 'brownfield first' is broadly supported from an ecological perspective (CPRE and Natural England 2006), some environmental groups have questioned the policy, highlighting the notable ecological value of some brownfield sites compared with many ecologically impoverished greenfield alternatives (Buglife 2009). Others highlight that most of the countryside has not, contrary to popular rumour, been paved over with concrete, and so can accommodate many more homes. Unfortunately, however, the proponents of greenfield development frequently neglect to fully consider the wider sustainability concerns which are discussed here. The environmental balance between greenfield and brownfield development must not come down to a simplistic comparison between their respective ecological characteristics, or be decided on the basis of unqualified urban-rural ratio statistics. Much bigger environmental considerations are at play. With regard to the carbon footprint of the alternative urban development models, it is particularly important that ecologists remind themselves that climate change is the biggest threat to UK and global biodiversity.

In 2004, the Barker review concluded that the UK needed to construct 250,000 homes annually for 25 years to deal with the nation's housing crisis. As the area of suitable available brownfield land is insufficient to accommodate these numbers, it is recognised that further greenfield development will also be needed.

The Government's proposal to concentrate new development around commuter hubs with good public transport links is therefore welcomed.

Density done well' philosophy

If the more sustainable trend towards compact city living is to continue, new residential areas will need to meet a wide variety of household aspirations – applying Jane Jacobs' (1961) 'density done well' philosophy. These aspirations include creating a sense of 'place'; provision of good quality public services, e.g. efficient public transport; walkable neighbourhoods; high-quality architectural design (avoiding volume-built 'featureless boxes' and including water/energy efficient technologies); and providing attractive, high-quality green spaces.

Maximising opportunities for biodiversity in high-density cities

Given the need to provide attractive, high-quality green space, the role of the ecologist in urban design is more vital than ever in ensuring that the increasingly densely populated urban realm does not become ecologically impoverished and devoid of associated ecosystem services. To this end, it is imperative that ecologists become smarter at integrating biodiversity within high-density development. This becomes increasingly challenging where seemingly opposing types of green infrastructure are competing for space. For example, should limited green space be provided for children's play or for wildlife?



Photo 1 Multifunctional, biodiverse, sustainable drainage at the award-winning London Olympic Athletes' Village, Stratford; design by Vogt, Arup and Biodiversity by Design.

In response to these challenges ecologists should:

Work effectively with architects and landscape architects to maximise opportunities for biodiversity in small green spaces, including those intended to have relatively formal appearance, e.g. courtyards, squares, the streetscape and pocket parks, where ecologists have typically been excluded from the design process. To achieve this partnership, ecologists must champion multifunctional green infrastructure, and develop a better appreciation of the wildlife value of non-native planting, plant sourcing, seasonal appearance, maintenance requirements, design of nature-inspired play features, etc. Even within seemingly formal green space settings, it may be possible to incorporate native Section 41 Habitats of Principal Importance

- Promote living architecture, the opportunities for which are increasing due to the shift towards building more flats. Living (green) roofs and façades provide multiple ecosystem services and have high value as invertebrate habitat, thereby helping to compensate for brownfield losses. (illustrated by those shown in part one, as in the Bristol Harbourside and the London Olympics athletes village developments.).

Maximise the ecological value of areas considered sub-optimal for development, e.g. promote river restoration along flood-prone canalised river corridors

- Contribute to the design of truly multifunctional SuDS, (Sustainable Drainage System) maximising their value with respect to biodiversity, amenity and landscape, in keeping with the new SuDS Manual
- Better integrate newly created green space with existing green infrastructure networks, thereby creating a more permeable landscape for wildlife and enhancing ecological carrying capacity
- Define measurable targets for high-density, ecologically rich urban environments.
- Ensure long-term, ecologically informed management of green infrastructure.

While urban green spaces must be designed to 'work harder' to achieve multiple functions for both people and wildlife, it will become more challenging to adequately compensate for ecological losses entirely on-site as cities become increasingly dense. In an urban context, however, net change in ecosystem service provision may be a more useful criterion of success. Further, biodiversity offsetting can provide a mechanism for compensating for residual impacts, although where applied it should be implemented as close as possible to the habitats and human populations most affected by relevant developments.

Conclusions

There has been recent talk of revitalising Ruskin and Howard's dream of garden city living, in opposition to the trend towards urban densification.

If garden city living were to become widely implemented, however, and fails to achieve sufficient density and economies of scale to support good infrastructure, accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot, then the dream of garden living could turn into an '*ecological nightmare*'.

Greener, sustainable city living that reduces CO2 emissions, and benefits biodiversity and the environment more generally, will only be achieved by minimising urban sprawl and championing more-compact urban living. High-density urban environments must also be attractively designed to include high-quality, biodiverse green space. Ecologists must contribute to these design goals, seeking new and innovative ways to integrate biodiversity within the limited spaces of an increasingly compact urban realm.



The regeneration of the **Greenwich Peninsula** is a long-term project to turn the heavily contaminated post-industrial site into a new London district providing some 15,000 new homes, the now celebrated O2 Arena, and extensive office space. Combining high density housing for people with high levels of biodiversity, this site is now

considered to be a European exemplar of ecourbanism. A project created & ecologically led by Biodiversity By Design.

About the Author

Dr Lincoln Garland has been working in environmental consultancy, academic research and for wildlife NGOs for nearly 25 years. He has a particular interest in eco-masterplanning, and urban ecology and design.

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Burrington Commons for the Future - Les Davies MBE

On the morning of Sunday 17th September a group of people assembled at the top car park in Burrington Coombe with the intention of finding out a little more about the past, present and future of Burrington Commons.

Arranged by myself as part of the programme of lectures and field trips for the West of England and South Wales Group of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), 17 people attended. All such RGS events are open to non members and on many occasions, such as this field trip, there is no charge.



Introduction by Les at the start of the walk

It is interesting to look back at the history of the Commons system. Ask the ordinary person on the street about 'the Common' and you will get a whole range of answers. Many think that they are owned by the Queen, others think we all own them and others will say that nobody owns them at all. In truth the Common is the most tightly controlled land in the realm!

With its roots in the Manorial System of Medieval England the Common was the 'Waste Land', unsuitable for crop production. It was given over for the subjects of the Manor to graze livestock; catch fish; turn out pigs to forage for beech mast and acorns; cut wood for building and fuel or to dig peat for burning. In short it was part of their survival, but only those with rights allocated to their property could exercise them on their Common. There was also a serious set of bye-laws that controlled what could be done by whom and when. Someone may own the land, but it was not theirs to do as they wished with all the time!

Today Burrington Commons comprise of Black Down, Burrington Ham and Havyatt; livestock are still grazed but numbers have dwindled over the years. Public access has however increased, and it cannot be denied that the benefits of this access for the health and well-being of folk is enormous. Bracken is being cut under the Landlord's rights of 'Estover', (the right to cut for cattle bedding, on buildings etc.) opening further access for the public. The Burrington Commons Act of 1911 was recognising free access on foot well before the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, (CROW Act) of 2000. A whole raft of Bye -Laws were also set in place to protect those with Rights of Common from the pressures of access.

There can be no doubt that Burrington Ham and Black Down

have changed within the last 50-60 years. Natural succession, that desire that nature has to cover everything with trees, is evident everywhere. In the process, we have lost a lot of the natural diversity. After all, hardly anything lives in bracken and where it also does have its place, a blanket cover of this plant is choking out a lot of other plant life. We are so very rich in landscape and wildlife diversity in this country. We do not have luxury of wild open spaces that are totally wild and untouched. Human habitation and need has shaped our land to become the envy of the world.

There is a new conservation scheme now in place for Black Down and Burrington Ham, the Coombe will also be included. Grazing has returned, starting with the ponies in 2004 and later the goats within the Coombe. This has been followed by cattle which are able to trample and graze. The future is bright for the Common again. It's entering a new age in which it will continue to deliver benefits to meet modern needs of the human presence in the landscape. We have only been around for half a million years, (or thereabouts) but look at the changes we have made to this world in which we live - some good, some bad. Burrington Commons, I hope, will be seen as a good change!



Cut bracken, open ground and grazing Red Devon steers – otherwise known as Ruby Reds.

Ed – did you see Les' article about the Burrington Ham new conservation scheme in the October Mendip Times – it makes an interesting follow up to his page here? Cut and paste this on-line link if you didn't –and turn to page 68. And while you are there have a look at pages 66 & 67. This is Sue Gearing's walk section, where she is following Les's 'Follow the Plough' walk with the Society back in August, with a few twists and turns and Les's recollections added in.

https://issuu.com/mediafabrica/docs/mendiptimes_6eacc2d126c827/1?e=1237616/53860396

Behind the Scenes of the New Mendip Hills AONB Visitor Guide

A Conservation Management Tool



All sites in the AONB are not equal. If you look inside the guide you'll see it only provides details for nine sites. These sites are deemed robust enough for large numbers of visitors as they all have car parks and other visitor facilities, many are managed specifically for visitors and represent the special qualities of the Mendip Hills. More vulnerable sites like Blackmoor Reserve are named but visitors are left to discover the details by themselves, hopefully deterring some of the casual visitors.

A Destination Marketing Tool

Successful marketing creates a position in your mind about the product or service, this is how you remember it and make choices in future. As humans we're fantastic at this positioning and love to make lists around them; your favourite film? Your best holiday? Your top five books? Bearing this theory in mind and that we have to meet the demands of recreation we need to create a position in people's mind for the Mendip Hills.

We want people to clearly associate the area with rock-based adventure. This is what sets the Mendip Hills apart from other countryside destinations. The Cotswolds are famous for their pretty villages, Cornwall for its rugged coastline, Wessex Downs for their rolling chalklands. The Mendip Hills is a tough, rocky landscape that's full of adventure with cliffs and caves. You'll notice all our marketing material is changing to reflect this through colours, fonts and images.

The map inside the guide has changed. We wanted to interpret the area to show what is special and where best to experience those special qualities. A new 3D style of illustration has been used, see if you can spot all the detail in it like caves and other hidden items. You can't navigate from it but with satnavs and mapping on your phone there are many ways to find your way around.

An Economic Development Tool

Walkers will always come to the Mendip Hills, there are many guidebooks and downloadable walks (many on the AONB website) that cater for this market. But there are lots of places for people to walk across the country so it's a very competitive market. We want people to visit the Mendip Hills specifically with adventure in mind.

There are many outdoor adventure companies that are a vital part of the local economy on Mendip. Back in 2006 the AONB Unit, with Active Mendip, commissioned an economic impact assessment of this sector. The headlines were that nearly half a million people took part in organised activities (where an instructor has a duty of care as opposed to people just turning up for a ride in the evening) every year, the sector employed 200 staff with a turnover of £6million. Supporting this sector is vital for a sustainable rural economy that provides employment for young people among many other benefits.

At first glance it is just a visitor guide but it also directs people away from the fragile sites, it interprets the landscape to explain what is special and it sows the seeds of adventure.

Download your visitor guide at <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/visiting-the-mendip-hills/>

TANIA'S WOOD AND SLADER'S LEIGH RESERVES THIS AUTUMN

It has been all systems go in the wood at Woodbridge Farm in Ubley during the last four months; with fairly consistent rainfall everything has grown apace and is beautifully green. Of course, this doesn't suit everyone and the Forest School have had a few messy days, which however does not seem to faze the youngsters themselves. Our FS leader ran two fully booked sessions for the Blagdon Youth Week in August proving that these outdoor wild activities are fulfilling a specific need somewhere.



Safe fire-lighting is universal fun



Running wild is good

In September we held our second Open and Geocaching Day with the Geocaching Assoc of GB. It's members were there to take a turn at conservation work and elected to continue the coppicing started by last years group. They were guided by our own members who had learnt themselves last year; and the result was a new huge pile of stakes suitable to be used on the two hedge laying training days in November. (Held on the 20th & 21st they were just too late for this newsletter). Others, Society members and the public, came as a result of publicity in the Mendip Times, attacking the remaining wildness of the high Deer Leap bank with great results. We were also very pleased to welcome Jan Glynn, our benefactor's daughter and his grand-daughter Susie, who came to see how we we're getting on in the wood which meant so much to their family.



Jan Glynn and daughter Susie chat to members at lunchtime



The wild end of the Deer Leap bank



Geocachers coppicing

SLADER'S LEIGH – <http://www.bristolwater.co.uk/article/strawberry-line-update/> This is the link for finding out whether Slader's Leigh has relinquished its role as diversion round the Shute Shelf tunnel – or not. The gist of it is and the final line is the important one to note! It is printed, in part, below.

Due to the on-going environmental issues the decision was made to complete our works before the bat hibernation period begins in October. This decision to keep the tunnel diverted throughout the summer holidays was not taken lightly. If work is not complete by the hibernation period then it could risk the path through the tunnel being on diversion until spring 2018. The diversion of the Strawberry Line will now remain in place until completion of the construction and reinstatement works.

– Slader's Leigh meadow is that diversion

RIGHT OR WRONG?

We have talked to many different people, either involved in the society or just passing through the meadow, some feeling very passionate about the works being done here and especially about the effect on the reserve, it can get quite heated at times. We are sure that, given time the meadow will re-assert itself and cover up the grass grids, and that it will eventually prove to be a useful asset. There is another small path of these grass grids across the bottom of the meadow from the gate to the seat. Even with a liner underneath it has virtually ceased to be a formal path and is great for wheelchairs and pushchairs and is always dry and mud free. The wide new path has no liner, it will disappear from view that much quicker and will encourage visitors from wandering all over, especially during the muddy season. We thought it a 'noble' offer to make to Bristol Water to allow them to by-pass the tunnel through the meadow – and we didn't think it would hurt it very much.

What do you think?

Let us know on our Face Book page or through the website and if you have any photos of it being used – they would be welcome too.

As luck would have it the Engineer in charge of the work in our area came through the reserve on our work day, Nov 15th, (see below) and we had a word with him. The pipes are in place in the tunnel, the work outstanding is laying them along the Line from a few 100 yds north of the tunnel to marry the two

sections up, plus some problems they still have with the tunnel lighting. They are still hopeful of opening everything up 'shortly'.

November 15th saw a good turnout for the planned work day in the meadow. Les had cut the grass for us back at the end of October so raking that up was our first task, it was hard work but our volunteers gave it their all and really stuck with it. We managed to start a fire going even though everything burnable was wet. Another big objective of the day was to clear out the pond we built a few years ago and which has served our frogs, toads and newts well. However it has been sorely neglected of late and had started in filling. This is what has happened to 90% of our countryside's ponds resulting in our wild creatures losing their homes. The culprit is a small, almost weedy looking plant – an alien by the name of *Crassula Helmsii* or New Zealand Pygmyweed, which forms great grassy mats in fresh water and is spreading like wildfire everywhere. So, because it can't be taken off site, once it has dried out we will burn it in situ. A team of three young ecologists from Kier (the firm doing the Water Pipe contract work) came and did what was necessary, with some help from us, and the result is brilliant. They have said they will come and do it again next year which is even more brilliant!

In the process we found a newt eft (baby) and four large frogs behaving badly, (see front page) both of which seems to be happening in the wrong season of the year?

We are extremely grateful to the 22 volunteers who helped us prepare Slader's Leigh for the winter – and look forward to welcoming them again next spring, when everything starts all over again.

Jamie, Rozy and Grace, the Kier ecological team



Half the group at the end of the day – don't you want to go home lads and lassies?



A line of grass rakers, pond debris



“ROCKtober”, the 7th Mendip Rocks! Festival, sponsored and organised by the Mendip Hills AONB Unit, Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC) and – for the first time ever – by The Mendip Society, certainly went with a bang. The month long celebration of the geology of the Mendip Hills, enjoyed this year by over 1,000 people, reached out to the wider community with events for all ages. Mendip ROCKS! will definitely be back next year.

EVENTS/WALKS IN OCTOBER IN WHICH THE SOCIETY WAS THE LEAD

SAT 7TH – Coal Mines, Fossils and Railways with Dr. Roger Moses.

Judging by the picture below, the dark and wet weather put no-one off going along to Radstock Museum for the start of the exploration of the industrial remains of the Somerset coalfield, (but we had no report sent in)



SAT 14TH – “An Introduction to Geocaching” with Jen Harley.

Burrington Ham was the destination of this walk around the common, to admire the views and the limestone crags and also to find out about Geocaching; we were a mixed group from those knowing nothing about it to some who had done it before. Between us we had a selection of GPS receivers, smart phone apps and digital maps; we discussed setting these up so that we were all using the same format (standard geocaching format) and looked at different geocaching containers. With the details of the geocaches we were going to be looking for, we entered the coordinates in our devices and headed up onto the Ham, checking the direction of the arrow as we went.

The next cache found us on the edge of the limestone cliff edge, Adele from the SESC told us all about the geology of what we were seeing. (right). We then headed down to Long Rock and Burrington Camp and then back to the start. We found 5 geocaches during our 2 hour walk around Burrington Ham and visited some interesting locations.



If you would like to find out more about geocaching, please visit www.geocaching.com or www.gagb.org.uk

SAT 20th Mendip Lead Mining with Richard Frost.

It was a nice, breezy day for the guided walk around the old mine workings at Charterhouse and Ubley Rakes, our group of 28 people visiting the site of the Roman, later on becoming the Victorian, lead mining area adjacent to the unique Condenser Flues. It always amazes me just how important this mine was to the Romans as Mendip lead became a much prized commodity in AD49, not long after they first arrived. It was guarded by Agricola's 2nd Army and their fort was larger than Bath! A pig of this lead found in 1853 weighing 163lbs is now in the British Museum.



Nearly 2000 years later the Victorians, with improved knowledge and using better extraction methods sifted through the old workings and by reprocessing the waste, won even more of the remaining ore, this all finished in 1885. In the Ubley Rakes you can stand on the site where Romans and Victorians worked on the same place only a few feet apart, and see evidence of their own individual methods of extraction. This is a heritage of which we should be forever proud, hard as it is to visualise such industry today as we stand on the site most would class as a rural idyll. (Photos by Denise Poole)

The ‘Rakes’, horizontal lead mine shafts.

News from the Hills

with Jim Hardcastle



The 2017 Mendip Hills AONB Volunteer of the Year Award has been awarded jointly to Dave and Judith Tranter for their amazing contribution to our work.

Dave has been an AONB Volunteer Ranger for over 20 years - he is a great ambassador for our work and plays a vital role welcoming new volunteers to the team. Judith often steps in to help Dave with his AONB Volunteering and together they have helped with conservation tasks, events & publicity, surveys and providing activities for our Young Rangers.

They have also been recognised for their wider work in the area including setting up two Mendip Society nature reserves at Slader's Leigh and Tania's Wood and coordinating the management and care of both sites.

The award was presented to Dave at the AONB Partnership Meeting on Thursday 16th November by Vice-Chair Councillor Liz Richardson.

British Blade Shearing Record

A new British record was set for blade-shearing sheep on Saturday 30th September at Fernhill Farm on the Mendip Hills. A back-breaking 397 lambs were shorn in 9 hours, roughly 1.4 sheep every minute by two Welsh shearers Gareth Owen & Clive Hamer – this set the first ever British Blade Shearing Record.

Blade shearing is a traditional method done without mechanical tools, only sharp blades pressed by hand movements that help to keep fleece in better condition when it's cut smoothly, leaving more wool covering and lanolin. All are welcome to the Spring Blade Tournament on the 24th March 2018, at Fernhill Farm.



A President's View



Dear all,

Would anyone have an idea where summer went? I think I must have been out to lunch when it happened! Things started reasonably but the long awaited and hoped for sunny summer somehow didn't seem to come up to expectation.

Well, it is close to Christmas now and I just cannot believe how quickly that has come around. Life seems to go faster and faster but look at what has been achieved this year. The walks programme is always full and varied. I am so pleased with the support it receives and there is a special thank you from me for your company on the walk around Hales Farm and Tickenham. As you may have gathered, it holds a special place in my heart. (pic above)

The Reserves go from strength to strength and are not only providing public access but public enlightenment as well. The courses and activities at Tania's Wood give many a chance for hands on experience, whilst the local schools benefit from the education opportunities that exist. Much more in this edition about the reserves and what has happened on them, from the people who are making it happen.

The Society has taken a lead role in helping to run the 'Mendip Rocks Festival' this year. It was evident at the final weekend at Wells Museum just how popular it now is; we hope to be there next year as well! Education is a large part of our remit, and it is education at all levels that counts. I would very much like to thank all the management committee for all the hard work they put into making this Society the success it is becoming. My thanks also go to the membership, we would like even more of you, so do please think about a Mendip Society Membership for your friends this Christmas. (contact Peter Janes, Mem. Sec).

Finally a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all - **Les**

Society Roundup

AND NEWS & VIEWS FROM OTHERS

Editor's Notes – You may have noticed that this issue of the newsletter has a definite emphasis on the worrying and rapidly increasing situation with regard to the number of planning applications in the Mendip area. I hope you feel that I have included a balanced view in including an article on how the AONB itself can deal with applications which impact on the Nationally Designated Area; the views of one of our principle planning scrutinisers on the creeping development of our countryside and finally the second part of the article by Lincoln Garland, living in Sandford, on the alternative to irreversible development of countryside by the building of carefully planned urban eco-cities.

Please let us have your views on this – and the way we should be dealing with it. Try our FaceBook page 'The Mendip Society' for interesting news and ideas from all over.

Stuart Young

We had a letter from Jo Morton, of Edinburgh, telling us of the death of her brother, Stuart, a Society member from 2006, living in Wrington; she asked if we could put a note in the newsletter. Thank you Jo.



Stuart was very knowledgeable about the natural history of the Mendips, keeping meticulous records of bird observations since 1973 and doing nearly 200 counts and breeding surveys for BTO and RSPB. A favourite place was Dolebury Warren Wood, where he helped on the work parties for its management. He was also an avid collector of rock samples building up a large collection which has gone to the Bristol City Museum. In his own quiet way he was a passionate environmentalist, a lovely Society member.

From the Chair – Autumn 2017

By Richard Frost



Looking back at the last programme, we have enjoyed a mixed bag of events ranging from our usual Saturday walks to sensational happenings at Ebbor Gorge, enjoyable wine tasting to scrabbling all over rocky outcrops in our involvement in the ROCKtober Mendip Rocks Festival. This Festival was very important to the Society as it now makes us a known entity with the Community, and is something that I would like to see us getting involved in again next year.

Our bi monthly column in that well loved publication, the Mendip Times, has proved popular with members and non members alike, and I have received many favourable comments from a diverse range of readers. Please take note that our guest speaker at next year's A.G.M. in Draycott on the 23rd March will be its Editor, Mr. Steve Eggington. I know it will be very well received by us, his fellow members.

As a result of numerous requests, we welcome the return of our Talks programme at Wells & Winscombe, covering the first quarter of the New Year.

I can promise an interesting range of subjects which hopefully will appeal to many different members; it is interesting that a lot of the speakers have been booked as a direct result of original enquires coming from members themselves, so please keep it up as it ensures a good choice of subjects. On the same theme, it would be really helpful if there is anyone out there who would like to have a go at hosting and organising these Talks which in turn would lead to an expanded programme.

I am thrilled at the level of enthusiasm and help shown this year, and if we can maintain it, then it can only lead to members getting a greater level of enjoyment from being part of a thriving Society.

The Website (themendipsociety.org.uk) – a note from Webmaster John Moore

The new website is very active, updated every few days. We have 40 to 60 users every week. Of particular interest, is the Home Page which contains news affecting Mendip Society members including changes to events and walks. All members should check the Home Page regularly although we try to supplement this with E-mail alerts for changes.

The Gallery Page is always worth a look. There are 'people' pictures from recent events plus 'nature' photos sent in by members. I would like to thank all our contributors for keeping this going.

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