

Mendip



From the Chair

The summer for me has truly raced by, sadly not fuelled by glorious sunshine but by rather disappointing weather for the most part. Certainly trying to compete with the rain to complete various dew ponds I have been working on, has been a challenge to say the least. However, there is one in particular which is rather important to the Society, presently being restored on Batch Farm above Churchill by one of our members, Roger White.* This is a part of a much bigger environmental and social community project which we have been pleased to award a grant, it is also supported by Dunster House Ltd, a family run company selling timber garden products as its core business. You will have seen in Mike Harvey's article in the summer newsletter that they supplied the 'composting loo' to Batch Farm for use by their volunteers from Weston-s-Mare College. Dunster House also has a very strong 'Corporate Social Responsibility' Policy, which states:-



"Promoting a positive impact on society is something we strongly believe here at Dunster House. Over the last 25 years we have been fortunate to expand our business into the huge family we are today. Using our growth, we aim for a better future tomorrow. We plan on doing this by supporting those that are less fortunate, as well as focussing on environmental issues facing our planet"

Dunster House policy is also to give donations to Charities such as The Mendip Society, which they believe have the same ethos as themselves; we were very pleased (and surprised) to receive a donation of £200 to our own Small Grants fund in recognition of our support of Batch Farm's project.

To read about the amazing aid developments projects which Dunster House have pioneered go to –

<https://dunsterhouse.co.uk/corporate-social-responsibility>



It seemed the management committee has been scattered far and wide this summer, but there has been plenty going on within The Mendip Society; the two reserves are in good shape going into Autumn, the guided walks have proved as popular as ever, as did the second of our Film Shows a few weeks ago about the life and work of Hannah More.

Please enjoy reading the updates in this edition of the Newsletter. The coming months should offer more opportunities to get out and about across the Mendip Hills. I look forward to meeting up with some of you again at the various events.

Tina

*(See update on P 8. Ed.)

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Cover Photo. - by Peter Janes.

A frosty scene taken last winter above Ubley, including a recently restored length of dry stone walling. A timely reminder of what is soon to come, but also that all seasons can offer photo opportunities.

And from the Secretary

I am sorry to say that I have been unable to include a programme with this issue; with it running to 20 pages we have found that it would have possibly (with a zealous post office weighing scales) have tipped it into the next price range and we could not have anyone being charged excess postage. Please keep the lists of events (page 15) on your fridge door for reference!



You will already be familiar with the name, Mike Harvey, from the previous 'Mendip' issues (think front cover and lovely pictures) – but here, it is my pleasure to say how grateful I am that he has now undertaken the major task of putting all our, often garbled, maybe even inaccurate contributions, into readable, sensible order. Mike - welcome to our world of "Mendip".

Judith T

Thank you for your kind words Judith. I may have to add "Cat Herder" to the skills section of my CV, but it is an honour to be trusted with the job - more from me on the next page, and in a few "Ed." asides throughout.

Mike.

PS. Sorry for pushing for 20 pages - but we just have so much to include!

From the (new) editor

It would appear that I have graduated! Judith has now got enough confidence in me to let me loose unchecked... Big shoes to fill and a challenge to get my teeth into – albeit one I relish.

As I mentioned when I first started contributing to the design of our newsletter, my approach is one of evolution not revolution, sharp-eyed readers may notice a few small changes to the layout this time around. I have had enough positive comments about the new cover design to reassure me that it has been well received, so I am carrying on with the process. I could however always use more pictures from members please, both for the cover and to go with articles and reports. Apologies to anyone who has sent in a picture and not got a response. I do personally thank everyone whose pictures I see in writing, but it has previously come from a different address for technical reasons to the one you submit pictures to (see below). So if you have not received a note of thanks, please check your spam folders, it could be that I'm getting sent to your spam folder by mistake.



Moving on, not only am I keen to get pictures from our members, I would also like you all to contribute short articles about the activities you participate in. In this edition we have a great double page spread about our visit to Burcott Mill, written by Terry Gifford with pictures by Roger Harvey, and a few of mine for good measure. Plus Steve Eggington on the trip to Avalon Archaeology and Richard Frost on the Leigh Down Stone Circles. Some great examples of member involvement, and exactly the way I want our newsletter to be.

I am aiming to bring you three newsletters a year. These should drop through your letterboxes on or around the start of **March, July** and **November**. For this to happen, time is needed to compile, print and distribute. Currently this takes between four to six weeks. Therefore, please can everyone who contributes content make sure it is ready by Mid to late January, May or September respectively.

Mike.

NB: I now have a dedicated (two-way) e-mail address for photos and other correspondence relating to the newsletter. It is: **TheMendipSociety.photos@gmail.com** When submitting pictures or other materials, please make sure to add this to your address book or "safe" senders list.

Notices, odds and ends etc.



Royal Holloway College trip.

We have had a lovely invitation from Prof. Danielle Schreve for society members to have 'an away day' with her at the Royal Holloway College, Egham, with a private tour of the Founder's building, the Victorian Chapel and Picture Gallery. We will have a spot of lunch and afterwards Danielle will show us her lab and how the finds from Gully Cave are being processed and conserved.

The buildings and the grounds as well are absolutely stunning. You can see for yourself if you go to **<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/about-us/our-history>**. The first YouTube film, the College tour, although a bit long, is well worth watching and you will see what I mean by stunning.

Initially we would like to know if any members would be interested in going for the day, before we go any further with planning. Time-wise, the early weeks of April are a good time for Danielle, with a group of about 20 -25 travelling by a small coach. Please ring or e-mail either:

Tina, 01749 870854 / chairman@themendipsociety.org.uk or

Judith, 01275 874284 / secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk if you would be interested in going.

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In the last edition we promised to complete the story of **Walking the Monarch's Way - with John Price**. For reasons beyond anyone's control this has not been possible, in fact the walk is yet to be completed. However, meanwhile, this link (if typed carefully into your browser) will lead you to the "story so far" full of fascinating information and photographs. **<https://www.thefugitiveking.uk/index.php/walking-the-monarchs-way>**

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On page 17 of this edition we have a review of the **Hannah More Film** shown at Shipham Village Hall. We are delighted to tell you that this showing raised £730. Profound thanks to Anthea Page for generously allowing the society to show the film without charge, enabling all the money raised to go to our small grants fund.

A tour of Burford Mill, organised by Sally Davis



Fourteen years ago Steve and Louise French were looking for a change of life. Taking on a working mill like Burcott Mill without any previous experience in milling flour or commercially baking bread seemed a bit far-fetched. They went on holiday to Australia and came back to find that this mill just outside Wookey, a mile and a half west of Wells and looking up to the Mendips, was still for sale. They went for it, undoubtedly encouraged by the previous owner staying on for a year to oversee an apprenticeship in the dark and dusty arts of not only milling, but the essential maintenance of huge cogs, spindles, grindstones and belts. Burcott Mill is now run as a working flour mill, a bakery and a B&B with four rooms at <http://www.burcottmill.com>. Importantly it also hosts Wookey's village post-office in an outbuilding. During tours, cream teas are available outside, as the Mendip Society was delighted to confirm during our visit on 20 July 2023.



Part of our group outside Burcott Mill keenly awaiting the start of the tour.

This mill and Dunster Mill are the only working flour mills left in Somerset, out of 50 working water-powered mills in the whole country. (There are also about 50 working windmills too. In 1900 there were over 10,000!) The grade II listed building dates from 1750 but there has probably been a mill on this site for over a thousand years. It is thought that the Romans brought the technology of the water powered flour mill to the UK. The Domesday Book lists four mills owned by the Bishop of Wells in 1089, of which this is thought to be one. Certainly the name Burcott Mill was recorded in 1302. The current building was intended to serve the small manor of Burcott while Wookey village folk were expected to take their wheat to Bleadney Mill a few miles downstream on the same leat. However, with Somerset pragmatism they chose to pay the fine to use the nearer mill.

So the water from Wookey Hole, which is home to bobbing grey wagtails, white-bibbed dippers and flashing kingfishers upstream where trout and eels encourage visiting otters, is diverted from the Lower River Axe 800m upstream into a level channel which must have been dug over a thousand years ago. Because the river descends, the water at the mill sluice gate is four metres higher than the river just 300m away. Half the river water has been taken down the leat but it is only three feet deep at the sluice which is open for most of the time as the wheel is only turning when milling takes place once a week. It is the weight of overshot water in the buckets of the wheel that turns it, rather than the force of water flow. So it works in low water periods, although last September and

October there was a problem after long dry seasons on the Mendips which, of course, collect it to filter into Wookey Hole.

Steve and Louise now live in the 1750 building and milling takes place in the building made on the other side of the wheel in 1863 when the owner of the big house next door, Somerleaze, acted as a benefactor – an Oxford professor investing in a folly rather than a commercial proposition. So the previously all-wooden wheel, cogs and fittings were replaced by iron ones before steam-powered mills eventually determined the closure of most local small watermills. Burcott Mill survives on the enthusiasm of its millers in the last and present centuries.



Miller Steve French greets us all. A quick welcome before dashing back inside to start the water wheel turning.

After greeting us outside the historic mill, Steve dashed upstairs and out of the middle of three floors to close the wooden sluice gate to the bypassing stream and set the great wheel turning. Immediately flour started falling down a wooden chute from the grindstones on the floor above into an open sack. Steve sieved a sample for its coarseness and adjusted a mechanism that raised or lowered the grindstone. Although the whole mill was noisily

Words by, Terry Gifford, pictures, Roger Harvey & Mike Harvey



With the millstones turning, flour starts to fall down the chute into a waiting bag. Steve did explain that normally the bag is held tight against the chute to keep dust down.

And a short demonstration milling for us kept Steve running up and down stairs more than he did normally, he said.



Steve needed to make constant small adjustments throughout the tour.

working away, fine tuning was required for different stages of the process, often seeming to be conducted by the subtleties of pulling different bits of string. Wheat, from the Midlands, was being ground today. There is a second grindstone for spelt flour, a more ancient grain than modern wheat varieties, sourced at Sharpham Park, near Glastonbury.



Wheat on the left, Spelt on the right. Obviously different - to expert eyes!

Only the upper millstone moves and its centrifugal force brings the ground flour out from the central grain chute along its grooves to fall into the wooden tun surrounding the grindstones and from there down the square pipe to the waiting sack. On this middle floor were a number of

wheels set into the axle that spanned the width of the building from which belts could be attached to use the power available, including lighting before electricity. One of these could be engaged to drive a pulley to lift full sacks from the ground floor to the top floor granary.

The chatterbox wasn't vibrating, the 80 year old grindstones need dressing (deepening their grooves) and all the cogs need regular attention from the visiting millwright, Malcolm from Melksham. Apart from the fine tuning during weekly milling, there needs to be a longer-term attention to the mill's maintenance,



Belts, shafts and pulleys on the middle (Stone) floor.

So you can buy Burcott Mill flour at the back door, wholemeal or spelt, together with freshly baked bread, or from Good Earth in Wells and from some local farm shops. One family in Taunton is so keen on Burcott Mill flour that they make a bulk order every six months. And it was for their order that the wheel was turning on the day of our visit.



The end product. Stone-ground Spelt flour, as used in the delicious cakes that some of us sampled at the end of our tour.

Somerset V Hitler - A walk with Mike Harvey

Saturday September 2nd. Began as a dank, misty day. As I was due to lead my first society walk that afternoon, I was somewhat concerned that visibility might not be great, but at least the forecast was dry. By lunchtime all my fears were behind me as we actually had fabulous conditions for the walk. Warm, but not too hot, a gentle breeze and clear skies. A nice size group of around 27 gathered at Charterhouse, a mix of society members, AONB volunteers and a few friends I had sold the idea to.

How the walk went is for others to judge. I did ask if anyone would write a few words for this report, but everyone is a bit too shy it seems, so I will have to rely on the number of positive comments I received verbally and in writing following the event as proof it was not too bad all in all.



Pausing at the Trig point to admire the view - and catch our breath!
Photo: Mike Chipperfield

A part of my plan in making this walk free to all, was to attract new members to The Mendip Society, so we started off with our President, Les Davies, addressing the group and unwittingly stealing a lot of my opening lines! Nevertheless, as ever, Les gave a great endorsement for membership and got us off to a good start. We then climbed up to the trig point as a good lookout over the old decoy site, followed by a visit to West bunker, one of three control points for lighting effects, decoy fires and a shelter for the operators. Before finally looking down onto the site of the StarFish fires and Z guns, now sadly only a memory.

Around three and a half hours later, many of our footsore group were grateful for tea and cake, plus use of the loo and a sit down at nearby St Hugh's church.

This also gave me the chance to thank everyone, hand out membership forms to a fair number of people and offer a better look at some of the pictures and materials I had waved about en-route.

All that it remains for me to do now is to offer official thanks to everyone who either assisted or took part in the event.

Firstly, of course, to Donald Brown who did all the research and originally devised the walk, plus of course Mike Chipperfield and all the other AONB rangers who helped him to do so.

Then to Jim Hardcastle the AONB manager for the loan of a key to get inside the West bunker, and for getting his staff to check out the site and clear rubbish etc. ready for us.

To The Charterhouse Outdoor Centre for use of their car park and facilities.

A special thanks to Marion and Chris Ball who not only opened up St Hugh's for us, but also laid on tea and delicious home-made cake. I'm delighted to tell you that their efforts raised £94.50 from us all on the day, which will go towards keeping the elements at bay so others can enjoy the beauty of St Hugh's fabulous interior in the future.

And of course, to everyone who came along on the day. My plan is to run this walk once or twice a year, according to demand - hopefully, always with such good weather and in such good company!

Mike.



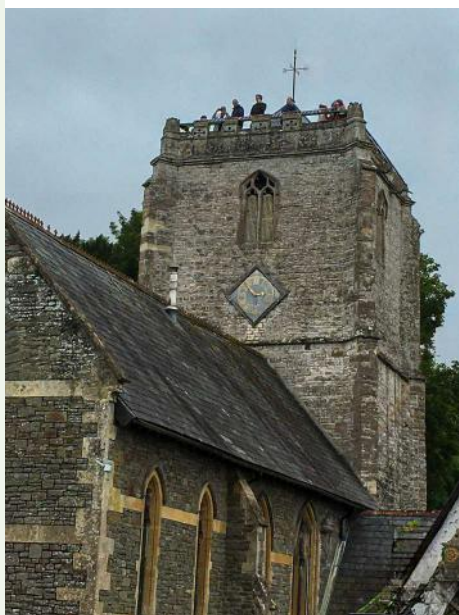
Yours truly - in full flow...
Photo: Huw Robson

St Thomas à Becket clockface restoration



St Thomas à Becket, Pensford
Photo supplied by: Jane Flower

As many readers might well be aware, the church of St Thomas à Becket, Pensford is unusual in many ways. Not only is it on an island, but also, the nave was sold off in 2008, leaving just the medieval tower, which is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust (C.C.T.), supported by an active Tower Friends Group, who fundraise, tidy and clean the tower as well as gardening the surrounding Churchyard. The back story to all this is well documented, fascinating and well worthy of an article in its own right, but right now, more pressing matters are the subject of our attention and this article.



A closer look at the clock face
Photo supplied by: Jane Flower

Recently, Jane Flower of the Tower Friends Group, who has a long connection with the tower, contacted Richard Frost, our small grants officer, with a request for financial support to help restore the rather fine clock face, which adorns one side of the much older tower. The clock mechanism itself is kept in good working order, is wound weekly and chimes out the hours across Pensford as it has done for over a hundred years, but the face and surrounding woodwork and stone is in need of some TLC and "timely" maintenance.



The clock mechanism - in good working order
Photo supplied by: Jane Flower

The clock face was last renovated over 30 years ago, at which time it was repainted and re-gilded, along with the weathervane. This involved removal of the clock face from the tower, which was achieved by abseiling down from the roof, then hauling the Clock face back up on ropes, not easy! The Clock expert entrusted with the job persuaded some caving friends to come along for the challenge.

The proposed restoration is of course, complicated to arrange (as well as the issue of raising enough finance!) with many different organisations now involved.

The C.C.T. have to give permission and have a checklist of forms to complete – everything has to be in order with a designated Project manager appointed, the specialist Conservation Builder appointed is willing to undertake this role.

Insurance has to be agreed with the C.C.T. Listed Building consent is required.

Scaffolding has to be agreed with the owner of the Church Nave as the access will be over their roof which is potentially damaging.

The easy part is obtaining a quote from the Clock Restorer, which has been achieved already.

Finally, the fundraising has been slow but the initial target had been reached with much generosity from local charities, however the cost estimate has now increased, which means a little more time and energy before the start of whole project - and has led to Jane approaching The Mendip Society for a little financial help.



Winding the clock - a weekly job
Photo supplied by: Jane Flower

The Tower 'Chapel' is kept as an inviting welcome space by the friends group, with fresh flowers, lighting and information leaflets as well as Walking / History leaflets for Pensford & surrounding villages, it is open every day. Inside there is the original Jacobean Pulpit and ancient Font from the Church nave next door. Jane Flower is the key holder and the contact for all enquiries.
Tel: 07703 699 123 / 01761 490 234

Society Chair Tina Bath restores a Dew Pond - by Mike Harvey

Dew ponds are a very traditional way of providing livestock with drinking water. The origins of creating a man-made pond for this purpose is lost in the mists of time, but certain techniques seem to be regularly used, and Mendip certainly has plenty of examples of them – We also have our very own specialist dew pond repairer, in the form of society chair Tina Bath.



Roger and Tina discuss the project

Roger White, as I have previously mentioned, has a rather fine example on his land, and is keen to restore it, mainly as a wildlife sanctuary, but also to preserve it for future generations.



Getting down to work.

Tina and Will in action.

Following a clearance operation involving students from Weston Technical College – which we have covered in previous articles, Tina is now in the process of making good the stonework to complete the job.

Living nearby, I have been able to drop in from time to time to see progress and take pictures as work progressed.



Just how deep does this go?

Roger, digging out the age-old silt...



... and dumping it on the spoil heap.

The first thing that strikes one about this particular pond, is just how deep it is. Back at the start of the project, when it was half full of rocks, old branches and unidentified detritus one got the impression of it being three or four feet deep.



Some of the items recovered from the mud.

Any guesses as to what they are?

Now however it is clear that the bottom at the deepest point is well over six feet, all with a generous base layer of semi-liquid silt.



A bottle recovered from the Dew Pond.

Research suggests it to be pre-1915

Of course, digging out old sites that have not been touched for many years can yield surprises. The best of which on this occasion being a rather fine old glass bottle. A little research has allowed us to discover that MAPS, was the trademark of Milsom's Aerated Products, based at Box near Bath.



Lime mortar is used to rebuild the side walls.

Photo: Tina Bath

A selection of rusty metal items, an enamel cooking pot and some brass cartridge cases also surfaced as many years of ancient mud was removed. The final stage, as shown above, is to refix the original stones in place using lime mortar. Once this is completed, the dew pond should be stable, watertight and good for another few hundred years.

A visit organised by Sally Davis. Words and pictures, Steve Eggington.



Bringing history to life

Members enjoyed a fascinating visit to the Avalon Marshes Centre on the Somerset Levels to see Avalon Archaeology's beautifully reconstructed buildings, spanning the county's heritage since the Iron Age.

Over several years, more than 100 volunteers, with expert guidance, under the auspices of the South West Heritage Trust, have managed to bring history to life, through extraordinary attention to detail, in the buildings, furniture and artwork.

Engagement officer, Natalie Watson, held members spellbound for three hours as she talked enthusiastically about the research that went into the project, which opened at Easter, replacing the old Peat Moors Centre.

First the roundhouse, based on those found in the lake village near Glastonbury, and still under construction.

Then a Roman dining room, complete with underfloor heating and intricate mosaic, based on a Roman villa, found at Hurcot, near Somerton.

Moving to the late ninth century, a Saxon Longhall, based on the Cheddar Palace, at Kings of Wessex School, with a frieze showing the reign of King Alfred. Finally, outside to a full-size replica of a Viking

Longship, plus a visit to the world's oldest excavation hut, used during the excavations of the lake village and now perfectly preserved.



One member said: "Natalie's enthusiasm and knowledge was just infectious. It was extraordinary." Entry costs £5 (£3 concessions) with free re-entry for the rest of the year.

Details: www.avalonarchaeology.org.uk

Steve Eggington

Editors note: Funding is only in place to run this centre until the end of 2023. While the intention is to keep the facility open well beyond that date, currently this is not assured. Go soon to be certain of seeing it.

A mixed bag of snippets - Judith Tranter

So many happenings going on in Mendip it's hard to keep up with them all – but here are a very few which I hope are of interest. We start with something of much importance to many, and especially to our Chairman crusader, Paul Harley - the Strawberry Line. The SL Society has recently become a charitable incorporated organization (CIO) approved by The Charity Commission, with a new charity number (1201543) and a great new website to showcase all the advances towards its end goal of completing the traffic-free pathway from the Mendips to the sea. Paul would have been elated to see the piece of the jigsaw he had been pushing towards for so many years finally fall into place. On the 16th September just gone, the short but vital link between Westbury-sub-Mendip and Easton which crucially passes safely under the



*A huge crowd waiting to use the newly opened stretch.
Picture by Rose Atkinson for WestCountryVoices.co.uk*

A371, was officially opened. (see www.somersetlive.co.uk) The high demand and pressure for safe active travel and what it means to local people is shown by the huge crowd waiting to walk the newly opened stretch in this picture taken from an article by Mick Fletcher, Chair of the Strawberry Line Society at: www.westcountryvoices.co.uk/active-travel-is-the-path-to-follow: Mick is incidentally also a Mendip Society member and co-founder of Westbury Trees, a group which attracted a Society 'Small Grant' when setting up.

Another organization benefitting from our sponsorship is the 'Mendip Ploughing Society' and we attended their 2023 Ploughing Match on Wednesday September 27th at Frianklyn's Farm near Chewton Mendip. The land used was on the hillside leading up to where a huge wind turbine was operational. This is important to know because you may just remember that September 27th coincided with the arrival of the first official

named storm of the UK winter season, Agnes. If anywhere was going to be windy, it would be where a wind turbine is situated. But with the sides lashed to the frame and the whole tethered down one side to our chairman's large trailer, our gazebo stayed upright and in one place, thankfully.



*How to weigh a pumpkin.
Photo: Judith Tranter*

As well as all the Ploughing classes, there was the hedging and dry stone walling; we are proud that Society members John Steers and Julian Butter came 2nd and 3rd in the latter. (And the Chairmans' Father won the heaviest pumpkin class, grown on the family farm in Ubley weighing in at 188lbs)

Finally – Sunday 22nd October and the finale of the Mendip Rocks Festival arrived – and lit up Cheddar Gorge with the crowds of several hundreds of curious visitors and the light of the projectors. Happy about the way they could all walk where-ever they wanted on the road (which was closed to vehicles), they loved the peace and quiet and dark – and a completely new experience. Photographs

projected high onto the rocks of the gorge, to be seen better as the darkness deepened. There is room here for only one projection, –my favorite – portraying the characteristic limestone ridges of Mendip – places of exploration and adventure. For the whole experience go to:

<https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/exploring/special-qualities>

However, the biggest thrill of the evening for me was to see, right overhead, something I had never heard of before, traveling across black sky in a straight line right up the Gorge, the 'Star Link satellites – amazing; look it up.



*The Dry Stone Walling Competition.
Photo: Judith Tranter*



*One of many "Moments on Mendip".
Photo: Elizabeth Woodger*



*Starlink Satellites passing over Cheddar Gorge.
Photo: © Mark Chivers*

Twenty Westbury-sub-Mendip walks, with Andrew Buchanan

If you're a walker, and fancy a circular walk, head for Westbury-sub-Mendip's Community Shop. There you'll find a series of leaflets describing 20 walks of varying difficulty and duration. Choose your walk, pay 75p for the path description, buy a sandwich and something to drink, then set out.

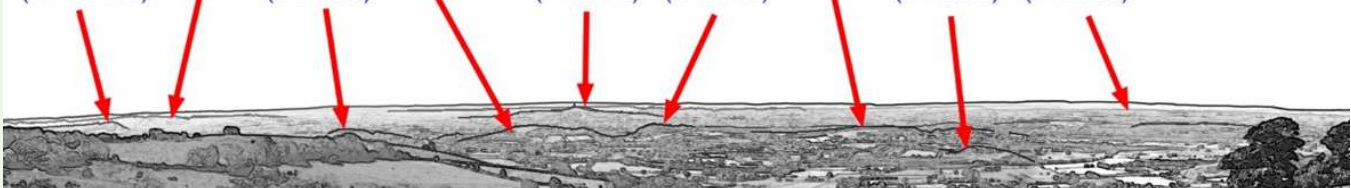
Every walk leaflet includes detailed and numbered route instructions and a map, plus details of points of interest along the way. Here's the Priddy Nine Barrows map – complete with a detour to the Queen Vic!



The routes vary in length, from 3 miles for one taking in Milchway and Broadway Hill up to 11 miles for a circular route to Wells and back. Between them, the 20 walks cover much of the ground within an area by Wells, Wedmore, Draycott, Priddy, and Ebbor Gorge

The walk leaflets often include panoramas from viewpoints, like this one for Deer Leap.

Dulcote Hill (4.7 miles) Worminster Down (3 miles) Hay Ben Hill (7 miles) Knowle Hill (3 miles) Glastonbury Tor (2 miles) Hembury Hill (9 miles) Yarley Hill (2 miles) Knowle Hill (9 miles) Polden Hills



All the walks start and end at The Cross, though parking there can be difficult, especially in term time. You can usually find space in The Square, just up School Hill. Happy walking!

A visit to the Leigh Down Stone Circles, words by Richard Frost

Following a successful visit to this amazing place last year, there were many who requested a repeat, and a chance for those who missed it the first time.

Located at Leigh Down, halfway between Winford and Regil, these circles are on private land owned by Mr. Nick Colton. On our first visit, it became immediately apparent that he had a vast knowledge of the Neolithic World and with all the myth and mystery that goes well with this setting.

A lot of work has gone into the rebuilding and research of this area and in this interesting setting, his detailed explanation and supposition of the superstition around this subject soon had us "hooked" as we hung onto his every word.



Nick Colton welcomes our group.

Photo: Richard Frost



Nick demonstrating pendulum dowsing.

Photo: Mike Harvey



One of the smaller circles that Nick has discovered by dowsing and then reinstated.

Photo: Mike Harvey

Lots of questions throughout the tour proved that there were plenty of facts and fiction to give us a few hours of thought-provoking content to satisfy even the most ardent sceptic! The setting on this Mendip escarpment plus a day with unbroken sunshine proved that it was a great place to enjoy our picnics afterwards. All this and the whole day was free! What more could you want from a Society event?

Do we do it again next year? I know that Nick is keen, so watch this space.

Richard Frost.



A selection of flint tools and other artifacts that Nick has discovered on his land.

Photo: Mike Harvey

A Special Interest Walk organised by Jo Bradshaw

Mendip Hospital Cemetery holds the remains of around 2,900 souls from all over Somerset and South Bristol. They were all patients at the Mendip Hospital, known as an asylum, or “mental hospital”, but in reality, many of the inmates were simply poor, or of limited intellect – one could get committed to such places for a wide variety of spurious reasons in the past!

The land they were buried in was once close to being sold off for housing development, but was saved by the formation of a Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery group and is now a memorial to them all. On August 20th a group of our members, led by Jo Bradshaw, visited to see the work being done to restore this place for themselves.

As our pictures show, restoration is an ongoing project. In places the original cast iron grave markers have been carefully reinstated, but many are still awaiting being returned to their rightful place.



A restored area with carefully replaced grave markers.

Photo: Mike Harvey



Markers still awaiting placement. Great care is taken to get this “right”.

Photo: Mike Harvey



Beautiful chainsaw carvings use fallen trees from the site.

Photo: Mike Harvey



One of the most striking features of this place are sculptures, carved from trees that have fallen or died on site by local chainsaw artist, Peter Bolton. These seem to add atmosphere to what is an already peaceful, reflective place.

At the top of the site, an exhibition in the small onsite chapel tells the story of the people who both worked and lived in the hospital. Volunteers are also on hand to offer more background, and to encourage people to get involved, leave a donation – or both!



The chapel. Attempts to get a group shot failed as everyone was too busy, off roaming the extensive site.

Photo: Richard Frost

Opening hours are limited, and while volunteers are often onsite, it would be best to check their website, which has lots more details about the story behind the cemetery, and listings of open days before making a visit to avoid disappointment:

www.mendiphospitalcemetery.org.uk

Or e-mail at: **enquiries@mendiphospitalcemetery.org.uk**

They can also be found on Facebook and YouTube.

Our thanks to Jo Bradshaw for organising our visit and of course to the Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery for the care and effort they put into keeping this special place accessible for all to visit and enjoy.

Will your photograph feature on the front cover of our next edition?

We are always keen to have members send in their photographs for us to consider for our front cover.

You don't need to have an expensive camera or lots of experience, just a high resolution picture of something connected to Mendip or a Mendip Society event.



Because we have had a few problems in responding to submissions in the past - here is a new e-mail address to send your files to:

themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com

More detailed instructions can be found by typing this address exactly as shown into a search engine.

http://bit.ly/Mendip_Society

Or, if you have a smart phone or tablet, scan this QR code to be taken there automatically.



'IMPROVERS' HEDGING TRAINING

A two-day training will be run on Friday December 1st & Saturday December 2nd 2023 in Tania's Wood Reserve, Ubley. We will be carrying on where we finished in



January this year on a well grown, rather congested boundary hedge, which does present some quite difficult problems, so you must have done at least one beginners course in hedge laying to take part.

We will be offering places initially to our own members who have already done a beginners day with us, and then opening it to any non-members who have some experience under their belts.

Any members who have the basic experience, but haven't been contacted and wish to join us in December please urgently contact us (details below)

Timings and joining details will be sent on booking .

To book your place on either or both of the days please contact Judith on: **01275 874284**

or e-mail: **judith.tranter1@btinternet.com**

ROMAN LIFE IN MENDIP

A talk by John Smith

Wednesday 22nd. November at 2pm.

Priddy Village Hall, Pelting Drove, Priddy, BA5 3BA.

Following the occupation of the Romans, what was everyday life like under their rule?

This talk logically follows on from **"Roman Army"**. A talk given by John Smith in March 2023.

It describes the effect of the Romans on the Local area. It starts with Roman Roads, then into Roman introduced building techniques & materials. How the modern Mendip home started.

Then into the goods used in the homes and businesses. Pottery, Glass, Foods, (Spices). Male and Female Clothing and Shoes. Writing, Measurement and Money.

"What the Romans did for us". Plus some of their mistakes.



Can you spare two hours to secure the loan of this painting for Wells Museum?

Wells Museum are building a team of volunteers to meet the conditions required to borrow **'The Tea Party'** from the Goldsmiths Company in London in February 2024. We want it in Wells so that it can co-star in a major exhibition alongside a remarkable collection of 500 years pottery that was excavated from the museum garden in the 1990s.



The Tea Party by Richard Collins

As a volunteer you'll be asked to register with the museum and take part in basic security training so that you are covered by the Museum's insurance. The show runs from 16th February to 13th April 2024. The slots are available from 10 to 12, 12 to 2 and 2 till 4, Tuesdays to Saturdays.

To find out more, please get in touch with exhibition manager Vicky Dawson.

E-mail: **vickym@dawsonsheritage.co.uk**

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

Sunday 12th November. Velvet Bottom and Charterhouse: Meet at 10.30 am at Blackmoor Reserve car park near Charterhouse (grid ref. ST 505 557, BS40 7XR) for a 4.5 mile walk. A walking pole may be useful as there are several short descents which may be slippery. Moderate. Contact: Peter Janes, 01761 221995.

Friday 24 November. Cheddar Gorge Circuit: Meet at 09.30 in Cliff Street Car Park, Cheddar (grid ref. ST 461 535 (BS27 3PS). Charges apply but on-street parking available elsewhere.
A Harder walk, circumnavigating the Gorge with possibly slippery limestone if wet. 5.6 km (3½ miles) with about 330 m (1,100 feet) of ascent. Contact: Richard Ivens, 01275 852786. No booking required.

Wednesday 22nd November. Roman Life in Mendip: A talk by John Smith. At 2pm, Priddy Village Hall, Pelting Drove, Priddy, BA5 3BA. See separate panel on previous page for full details.

Friday 1st & Saturday 2nd December. Hedging course: in Tania's Wood. Limited to eight places. Members free, non-members £10 per day. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL.** See panel on previous page for further details.

Sunday 3rd December. Tania's Wood Walk: Meet at 10.30 am at the Heron's Green lay-by on the B3114 by the Chew Valley Lake (ST 554 593, BS40 8XJ.) for a 4 mile walk to the Society's nature reserve, Tania's Wood, and back. Moderate.
Contact: Peter Janes, 01761 221995.

Saturday 13th January 2024. Axbridge Hill and Moor: Meet 2.00 in Axbridge Square, near Church Steps, (grid ref. ST 431 545, BS26 2AP).
A Moderate walk to include the lower slopes of Axbridge Hill and around Cheddar Reservoir. 6.5 km (4 miles) with about 120 m (400 ft) of ascent. Contact: Richard Ivens, 01275 852786. No booking required.

Wassail in Burrington: Friday 9th of February 2024. Full details on page 16

The Society Quiz: Organised by Richard Frost and Mike Rolfe. Details TBA

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 list and to be made aware of any changes to these listings please visit **www.themendipsociety.org.uk**



The following list is of talks organised by **The Westbury Society**. Please note that we are posting these here as we think they may be of interest to our membership, but we are not the organisers and take no responsibility for them. Any enquiries should be made to the address at the bottom of the list and not to The Mendip Society.

A range of evening talks on wildlife, local history and archaeology in Westbury-sub-Mendip Village Hall, on the third Thursday in the month between September and March each year. All talks start at 7.30pm and are held at:
Westbury Village Hall, Hannah's Lane, Westbury-sub-Mendip BA5 1JD.
Adults £2.50, under 16s free

Thursday 16th November. **Women of Wells** – a talk by Clare Blackmore

No December talk

Thursday 18th January. **Somerset Wetlands National Nature Reserve** – a talk by Megan Godley

Thursday 15th February. **Gully Cave Excavation** – a talk by Danielle Schreve

Thursday 21st March. **The Normans in Somerset** – a talk by Chris Etheridge

For further information, e-mail: **westburysociety@gmail.com**

It's Wassailing time again

FRIDAY 9th FEBRUARY 2024 in BURREINGTON ORCHARD at 7PM
With Master of Ceremonies – **Les Davies**

We have booked Burrington Village hall from 6.30pm in which to assemble and choose the Wassail Queen by the finding of a bean hidden in a piece of apple cake. From there we process through the village to the orchard of Mike and Vanessa Dennit where we will pick a venerable tree to receive our cider and blessings for the whole orchard. We also hope to have the company of our great friends The Barley Rye, who love wassailing as much as we do, but are in great demand at this time of year. The evil spirits will be dispersed with our fearsome noises and the gun of the 'spirit frightener' (with blanks of course, 'elth' n safety!). Then, it's back to the hall for the warming liquors and cake, cheese/biscuits/crusty bread, and mulled cider. (There may be a small charge for the supper this year, a sign of the times unfortunately)

Everyone is invited; once again we would like you to let us know that you are coming, plus any others you are bringing in your vehicle, just so that we know how many bottles we will need to mull. Please contact either:

Peter on: 01761 221995 / membership@themendipsociety.org.uk
(between 9th Dec. & 15th Jan 24)

or Judith on: 01275 874284 / secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk
(between 16th Jan. & 9th Feb 24).

Warm clothing (hats are good) and good boots or shoes are a must.

For the noise making a tin plate or can and a spoon are ideal. A torch is useful as Burrington is a no-lights village plus the grass could be bumpy underfoot in the new orchard we are wassailing this year. Many thanks to Mike and Vanessa for hosting this years' traditional celebration - DO JOIN US



Remembering Bill Carruthers

It is with much sadness that I write in this issue of the death of member William Carruthers, very much from my own personal point of view.



Photo courtesy of Veronica Carruthers

Bill was known throughout the Chew Valley and far beyond as a person who cared about his area and the people in it and who made things better for both, according to his own beliefs and through his own efforts and his editorship of the local paper he founded in 1984.

I first met Bill, a few years after then, when he put out a general appeal for any back copies of the paper the Chew Valley Digest (now called 'Chew Valley Gazette') that anyone had stashed away. Well, once a teacher, always a teacher as the saying goes, and everyone knows that teachers hoard everything that may conceivably be useful in the future don't they? But - I decided the Digest's need was greater than mine and handed over the whole hoarded lot to Bill;- he sent me a big bouquet of flowers in reply!

Thus began a connection between myself and Bill and Veronica his wife, with memories of many occasions of sitting at the same table (as in the photograph) in their lovely home not far from us in Rickford, and of talk of anything and everything to do with 'our area'. And also of the great practical help from both Bill and Veronica with my own efforts in local journalistic beginnings with a couple of small groups leading me eventually to the Mendip Society. He leaves a big legacy of what it is to be a very 'local person' who loved, and did his best to further and promote the local area in which he lived.

J. Tranter

Hannah More - an award winning film by Redcliffe films

Hannah More. 1745 – 1833. Bluestocking, writer, social reformer, teacher and much more besides. A truly remarkable woman in so many ways. Anthea Page, film maker, cinematographer and now Mendip Society member, is no less remarkable, having brought together a huge cast and all the necessary resources to make a full-length film about Hannah More's life on a very small budget. (circa £35,000)

Mendip Society members gathered in Shipham Village Hall on the evening of September 29th to see the results. Introduced by Anthea herself, who brought along some of the many costumes made for the film and explained how she had involved students from the Old Vic Theatre School, local drama groups and a huge army of volunteers to fill just about every support and technical role. The film featured many local locations and when pressed about the time-scale, all Anthea would admit to was that it took "A very long time" to complete.

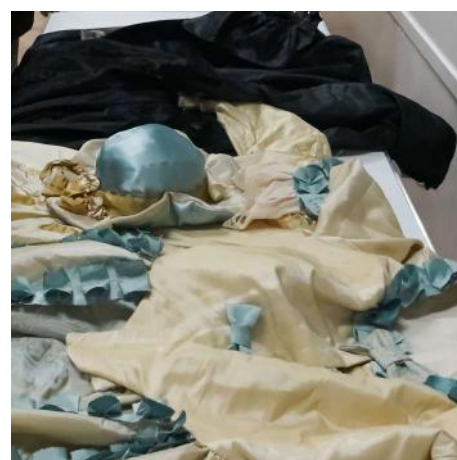


*Anticipation as the hall fills up.
Photo: Mike Harvey*



*Hannah More (Lily Maryon) learns about slavery.
Redcliffe films.*

The results were however, astounding! One quickly got drawn into the world of Hannah More, easily overlooking the few small tale-tales of necessary economy. With so many films costing many millions to make it is amazing what has been achieved on a shoestring, well worth seeing if you can.



*A selection of the costumes.
Photo: Mike Harvey*

A Gallery of Horrors - A special report by Peter Janes

Fly tipping continues to be a problem on Mendip and is a burden for land owners and councils. Quiet lanes and secluded lay-bys mean the risk of being seen dumping stuff is low and that tempts the unscrupulous to avoid the costs of legal disposal. Railing against this does little good but there are ways that everyone can help.

1. By reporting fly tips to the local council; this is easy via their websites. Points to note are:
 - Councils will deal only with rubbish on public land.
 - Take a photo if possible.
 - Get an accurate location. This is most easily done by estimating the distance from reference points (buildings, gateways, junctions etc.) and then looking at a website that shows aerial photos e.g. www.gridreferencefinder.com, or www.what3words.com.
 - Councils seem incapable of recognising grid references but do like a What3Words location. This may be read from the above websites once the location has been identified.
2. Pick up litter - all you need is a plastic bag and a picker or an old glove but note that very cheap pickers break easily and are a waste of money. Small amounts of rubbish can go in your dustbin / recycling boxes whilst collection of larger quantities can be pre-arranged with the council.



1



2



3



4



5

Pictures taken by Peter Janes to aid reporting of fly tipping on Mendip. All (sadly) taken recently.

1. Nordrach Lane. 2 & 3. Both taken near Charterhouse. 4. Torhole Bottom.

5. Lay-by on B3134 (Peter says: "I cleared this myself rather than reporting it.")

Slader's Leigh - Nature Reserve - Judith Tranter

Summer is finally over in the meadow; the flowers, lovely this year, are all done with seeding so most of the rather rampant vegetation has been cut. This year we had two marvelous volunteers, with their garden machines, and a line of rakers and clearers to do the job in the last week of August before the weather finally broke. This allowed the risings to dry off properly, so making it easier to rake it away into areas around the edges of the meadow. Here, instead of being 'bonfired', it was pushed into side ditches to break down, thus not only not adding to the pollution problem but also



Raking the meadow and showing off pitchfork skills.



We had to clear out the ditch behind the pile before we could fill it up with grass.

providing a playground for all the burrowing creatures which subsequently use it for all sorts of activities. This year, the volunteers had another task to tackle, and complete on this same day.

You will have seen the information in previous newsletters about the lovely wooden seat hand built by a 'not-for-profit company called 'Somerset Wood Recycling' (SWR) based in Weston-super-Mare, which has stood in the meadow for more than 10 years now. Well used by

very many walking and cycling through our Reserve, open to all that weather can throw at it, it has at last succumbed to old age. With generous donations from the families and friends of some members who are no longer with us, we have had another seat designed and made by SWR. On this, our raking and clearing day they were able to deliver it to the very site of the replacement, driving their big van down rutted tracks, across fields, through muddy gateways, to where our 'gang' was able to unload and carry it the few yards into place. We had taken the old seat out of its installation holes



Out with the old and in with the new.

and thought maybe we could put the new one in the same place. But no! It was wide enough for another person to sit and a bit wider, front to back as well. We could use one hole but the other three had to be dug out – hard work on a pathway made on quite rocky ground. But a job really well done – the seat is beautiful - And all this on the hottest August day ever, so we learned afterwards!



The installation gang - A job well done.



Post hole digging. Hard work!

We consulted the donors of the seat and we all agreed that it should be dedicated to their loved ones when the meadow is beautiful with flowers, the sun is shining and the fresh growth of life is everywhere, not as now (Oct/Nov.), when it is empty and cold, and preparing for its winters' sleep. So please keep a look out for the information in the Spring 24 newsletter for when that will be. Everyone will be invited to attend and there will be lots to see and do in our beautiful Reserve on Mendip.

All pictures, J. Tranter

Judith Tranter.

Tania's Wood Nature Reserve - Autumn has arrived. - Judith Tranter

Autumn has indeed arrived, with a vengeance in some ways, but Tania's Wood has enjoyed the variety of weather conditions thrust upon it; the trees, grasses, invasive brambles and other weeds are still growing wildly. It does require a bit of TLC, but it has rather been left to its own devices in the second half of this year, with occasional visits with a certain purpose, which will become clear on reading on.

The wildness has proved a hit with the children of the 'After-School-Club' of Blagdon Primary School in their Forest School activities. Their F.S. leader, Nicky Orr, sent this to us as they broke up for their summer holidays, with a request for more visits during the coming school year.



Animal faces - saw skills learnt along the way.
Photo: Nicky Orr

"The after-school Forest Club sessions at Tania's Wood have been running since April and although the numbers were a bit up and down the children have loved coming. We have seen the spring change to summer and have made elderflower cordial, cooked popcorn on an open fire, made animal faces using a saw to slice wood, used a hammer to make leaf pictures, climbed trees, decorated the lovely new shelter and much more. We would like to say a big thank you to the Mendip Society for letting us use Tania's Wood and to the volunteers who have helped upkeep the site, the children really got to know it well and want to come back! Many thanks, Nicky and Rose".

As the summer ends so the trees in the wood begin their journey into Autumn and then Winter, and it is seed gathering time again. Last year was a bumper one for the ancient oaks and hazels, conkers were huge and shiny. This year there is almost nothing – no acorns crunching underfoot, the hazels which were there in huge bunches have disappeared and conkers are puny and misshapen. This is disappointing as Tania's Wood, and Slader's Leigh also, are registered with the Forestry Commission as certified collecting sites, meaning that any trees grown from our seed have provenance. Our seeds go to 'Bleadon Trees', a not-for-profit group which supplies others in the area with saplings to plant up land. We can also receive some of our own tree saplings back to grow on ourselves. Some will probably go into the hedge we are laying in December (see p.14) to bulk it out as our boundary edge.



Climbing trees - some things never lose their appeal.
Photo: Nicky Orr

A few years ago, we ran several charcoal making days in the wood with Chris Claxton, one of our hedging tutors, using the wood cut out of the hedges which we were laying. The parlous state of the world's environment and climate has made people question the wastage in the burning of good wood in this way – now a better way of using the smaller brash material from the hedging has come to the fore – it is the turning of it into **biochar**



Have you ever seen hazel nut clusters like these before?

BIOCHAR: is a charcoal looking like substance that's made by burning organic material from agricultural and forestry wastes in a controlled process called pyrolysis.

During pyrolysis organic materials, such as wood chips, leaf litter or dead plants, are burned in a container with very little oxygen. As the materials burn, they release little to no contaminating fumes, and the organic material is converted into biochar, a stable form of carbon that can't easily escape into the atmosphere. It is a permanent soil improver – read all about it here – it is a very interesting subject. <https://www.carbongold.com/what-is-biochar>

Chris has agreed to run a day producing biochar in Tania's Wood using all the brash we produce this winter, after the hedging season ends, which will probably be in April time. Watch the website and the next newsletter for details.



Biochar - a permanent soil improver.
Photo credit: Rob Goodier/E4C

Judith Tranter.

A Presidents' view

It's the end of September and autumn is making itself known. I'm hoping for some good colours as the trees pull back anything recyclable from the leaves and dump anything they don't want into them ... It's a bit like pulling the flush on the toilet! There may well be some more dry, warm weather to come yet and I have always felt that sunshine at this time of the year is far more valuable than the biting heat of summer.

Lots of berries around this time and lots of fruit. There are those who will be looking at this as an indication that we are in for a hard winter. From my point of view it's not necessarily so. Those trees and bushes have amassed a good seed bank because the conditions have been favourable. Yes, there are going to be many that will benefit from this through the winter, us included.

Our Reserves are a shining example of the conservation and enhancement the Society is involved in. We often forget the value of such green spaces for people who have hectic and stressful lives. A stroll through Slader's Leigh when the meadow is in full bloom or the school visit to Tania's wood that provides the outdoor classroom can make all the difference. If you would like to get more involved in keeping these place green and pleasant then please get in touch.

The Society also helps other organisations make a difference. This years' Mendip Ploughing Society's 165th match was held at Emborough. We were there and despite the best efforts of 'Storm Agnes' who huffed and puffed but failed to blow our gazebo down, everyone had a great day.

A splendid evening was also had at Shipham Village Hall when Anthea Page introduced her film about Hannah More and her sisters to a packed hall of some 65 plus people. She was so impressed by the Society that she joined up on the night!

Lastly, a picture for you of 'Power From The Past'. My old school friend Andy Melrose stands at the controls of his ploughing engine 'Margaret' built in 1870 as it winches in a balance plough at the Mendip Ploughing Society's 150th match in 2019. Sponsorship from The Mendip Society helps to keep such events going!



Finally - a 'Happy Christmas' to you all and thank you for your constant support. Perhaps a membership gift to a friend or loved one this time?

As always with kind regards, Les.

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