

Mendip



From the Chair

The Mendip Society has continued steadily with its walks and organised events typically quieter through the winter months. With the wettest winter on record being out and about has been an effort for even the most avid walker.

The 2nd phase of tackling the overgrown hedge at Tania's Wood took place at the beginning of December, a big thank you to David Tranter and his team of volunteers for the beforehand preparation work which was a great help enabling a good length of hedge to be laid, and despite it being wet underfoot this year, it wasn't anywhere near as wet as the previous year when they were virtually working in a stream.

The downside of the clearing was that a mass of excess material was created with brash from the hedge laying itself, and further clearance of the Deer Park embankment. However not all is lost!! the experimental creation of Bio-Char that was reported on in the last edition will happen on SATURDAY 13th APRIL. You are all welcome to come along, to find out more about what's been happening.

Sladers Leigh is as always very popular with locals and visitors using the Strawberry-Line walk, and it has been especially busy whilst the National Trust Kingswood car park was closed for tree felling works.

We continue with sponsorship, and to promote our work at the Mendip Ploughing Society Annual Ploughing Match and the Wroughton and Burrington Hedging Society Hedging Competition. These special events bring together people from Farming, and Local Communities who have a passion and understanding of the countryside, alongside others who are new to the area and who would like to engage and learn about historic skills and past times.

The Mendip Society will continue to respond to Planning Applications opposing new developments that continue to 'land lock' the Mendip Hills, where the scale of development detracts from the openness and tranquillity of the countryside both in and around the Mendip Hills. Many villages risk losing their unique identity, and require better public transport linking them to road and rail networks.



I will leave Judith and Mike to work their magic reporting on items for this Newsletter, and look forward to seeing you all at the AGM at Draycott Village Hall, Saturday 27th April 10.30 Guest Speaker will be Dr Andy King who will be giving a talk on 'site monitoring of Mendip using drones'. - *Tina Bath*

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Cover Photo. - by Janet Sherwin.

A Lovely atmospheric sunset picture taken "Near Shepton Mallet". Great capture Janet, thanks for sending it in.

And from the Secretary

I hardly know how to start to write about the subject, but I am going to have to for this issue. It is distressful that I have to report that I will be stepping down from the post of Society Secretary and resigning from the Committee at the forthcoming AGM. I feel that I am no longer fulfilling the role adequately, being hampered by various things, some physical, but not least amongst them, just getting older, with less 'umph', concentration and memory than I used to have.



The Society must have a Secretary to function properly, and I say to anyone who would be willing to give it a go that it is a role which is at the heart of everything, that is varied beyond belief, that you meet the most interesting people, get to the most unusual of places and get the satisfaction of making things tick along nicely.

Luckily, we have the help of Pat Fraser who takes the minutes (and writes them up!) for us at the Committee meetings, which is a tremendous help – we are most grateful Pat, thank you.

If you have been with the Society for even a short while you will have got to know how it all works, but I will be very happy to talk to anyone thinking about it, either at the AGM or better still, between now and then, on the phone 01275 874284 or on Messenger, or in person before April 27th.

Judith Tranter.

From the editor

Hello from me again. With a small apology for reverting back to 16 pages this time around.

Winter, it seems, has reduced our activities a little and while plenty is planned for the coming year, a little less activity has taken place through the dark days of November, January and February. Add to that the necessity of including details of the AGM - see centre pages, which are designed as a pull-out should you wish to, and the fact that I have been busy moving house (which enforced a period without access to the internet - amazing how much we have come to rely on it!), and a bit less content becomes a practical necessity.



One activity that relies on a cold dark night for its atmosphere is of course the wassailing. If you missed it in person then hopefully our report from Judith Tranter (below) will give you a flavour of this very traditional event.

I am particularly pleased to include an article by Duncan Massey, a volunteer with the Blood Box partnership on page 6. Their very worthwhile mission is to make simple first aid kits, known as "Blood Boxes", available throughout the countryside, often alongside defibrillators, so that incidents and accidents involving serious blood loss can be treated, possibly saving a life. Much noise has been made about so-called bleed kits being available in town centres, but this initiative aims to do the same for the rural environment.

Add to that a report on events that occurred just too late to find space in our last edition, listings of what is to come and the regular contributions from our Chair, Secretary and President and I hope you will find plenty to interest you.

And finally - Just a little personal note following on from Judith's "From the Secretary" column, which I have just inserted into this edition. I think we all know just how much The Mendip Society means to her - and what she has done for it over the years. It cannot have been an easy decision to make, nor column to write. We should I feel, all be very grateful for all she has done for the society over the years, and wish her well for the future. Her replacement will have big boots to fill, but also, I hope, a lot of support from us all.

2024 Mendip Society Burrington Village Wassail

Wassailing is getting very popular now and so your Master of Ceremonies is in great demand from many sides. Thus it was that our own Wassail wasn't until Friday 9th February this year, on a rather grey evening, but at least it wasn't 'February Fill-dyke' weather. Our orchard this year was the lovely family orchard tucked away behind 'The Old Post House' in the middle of the village. We knew the then owners, Mr. & Mrs Simpson way back in 2004 when we used their apples to begin juice production in Rickford, just down the road. Now Mike and Vanessa Dennett live there, tending the same orchard. Vanessa knows it well - as Vanessa Simpson she spent her childhood there. And to complete the story of our 2024 wassail, our Wassail Queen, chosen by 'the bean in the piece of apple cake' and crowned by Les Davies, was none other than Polly Dennett, their daughter. Vanessa took the picture of Polly giving the apple trees their cider to remind them of their duty to bear fruit this year.



*Peter Janes (St. George) Standing up to the "nasty guy", his alter-ego, with the red cross of St George behind him.
Photo: Judith Tranter.*

We were accompanied, as we often are, by the Barley Rye choir, with wassail songs to the apple trees and after our refreshments and mulled cider in the village hall, to a rendition of the Mummers play 'St. George and the Dragon'.

This was a grand opportunity for the acting skills of our own members to be given full rein to their acting ambitions; Many thanks to Barley Rye and those who came from all over to help us keep up this fun but serious country celebration.

Judith Tranter.



*Wassail Queen Polly Dennett giving the apple trees their cider
Photo: Vanessa Dennett*

Wrington & Burrington Hedging Competition



*Alex at work.
Photo J Tranter*

The Mendip Society again sponsored the Wrington & Burrington Hedging Society in its annual match, once more in the main drive of Hazel Manor, on Saturday 9th March. Although not too nice a day, at least it wasn't raining and the hedgers set to with gusto, spaced out down the long drive. Amongst them we were very pleased to see Alex Hannam, a young man we know very well. Some fair few years ago now the teenage Alex started as a volunteer in Slader's Leigh. That year we laid the hedge at the northern end of the meadow to give us room to create the pond that is there now, taught by Nick Baker and Tina Bath. Alex never looked back and now is a busy self-employed hedger with an apprentice of his own.

The moral of this story? Join one of our hedge laying training days – you never know where it might lead you!

Improvers Hedging Course, Tania's Wood December 2023

On the 1st & 2nd of December, another group of hedgers, having been through the mill of a beginners day, (not really – we're very gentle with them) carried on from where those in January 23 left off, on the ancient hedgerow separating us from the fields of our neighbouring farmer. An amazing amount of growth has to be cut out, known as 'brash', before any of the grown out hedge and often quite large trees can be laid and incorporated into a tight knit new hedge. But this spring the cut brash and undergrowth will play an important role in the management of our wood, it is a vital component of the day's event on April 13th when we will be making bio-char for the first time.

Hedging tutor Chris Claxton will be firing up his new kilns and volunteers will feed them continuously, until at the end of the day we hope to have a product which will benefit the soil in the wooded area – from which it came in the beginning. – A perfect environmental circle.



*Brash, ready to use.
Photo J Tranter*



*Laying a full grown tree.
Photo J Tranter*



*It takes a bit of working out before cutting.
Photo J Tranter*



*Beautiful patterns and fungi of all colours.
Photo J Tranter*

Mendip National Landscape's Volunteer of the Year.



*Penny White hard at work drystone walling
Picture. Mendip NL website*

Our congratulations to Penny White who has been named as Volunteer of the Year for 2023 by the Mendip National Landscape team.

The Mendip Hills National Landscape website news page tells us that Penny has been volunteering for a number of years and has recently become a full member of the National Landscape's Volunteer Ranger team, where, with a team of nearly 40 other rangers, she plays a key role in promoting and protecting Mendip as well as being the first point of contact for many visitors to the area.

Penny also won the walling competition at the Mendip Ploughing Match last year, so double congratulations are in order.

To find out more about volunteering with The Mendip Hills National Landscape Team, visit: www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk/volunteering or call 01761 462338.

A walk around Coleford.

On a misty October morning our group gathered in the car park of the King's Head Underhill. The mist soon burnt off however leaving us in warm autumn sunshine as we set off on a circular route of around four and a half miles led by Sue Gearing with Les Davies bringing up the rear. Sue, as ever, was armed with plenty of notes and interesting facts about the area we were walking in, while Les, also as ever, had a ready supply of anecdotes and nuggets of local history to drop into the conversation.



Vobster coke ovens - very overgrown. A future restoration project for the society?

Sue led us through a varied and diverse range of landscapes, crossing the path of the old coal canal, the Mells stream (several times) and past the remains of the Vobster coke ovens. Apparently, there were once 77 of these long brickwork ovens on the site, but now all that remains to be seen are a few overgrown arched brick openings.

After crossing a couple of fields and popping out on to a local road we stopped for a break in Vobster itself before setting out on the second leg.



This listed old mine building is surrounded by an architectural stonework yard.

This took us past some local industry still very much alive, including glimpsing a listed building, part of the old mine workings, innocuously nestled in the middle of an architectural stonework yard. Finally, via the "Hucky Duck" viaduct we completed the circle. By now it was around lunchtime, so many of our group settled down to a lunch of rolls and beer in the garden of the King's Head. A basic menu allowed for Ham, Cheese rolls, or the day's "special" – Haslet, a delicacy that inspired several of our group to wax lyrical with nostalgia, and apparently enjoy a taste from their past.

And one around the Coalfields, Canals and railways of Camerton.

Just over a week later and another opportunity to explore a part of North Somerset's industrial past. This time led by Richard Frost as part of the Mendip Rocks Festival. Strictly speaking was not a Mendip Society organised event, however, as Richard is our walks and talks officer, an ex chair and a key member of the society it was only natural that it was included in our programme of events.



The Jolly Collier statue was originally made for the Festival of Britain in 1951.

Our group gathered together near the site of Camerton Colliery Wharf on the long-gone Somerset Coal Canal, where Richard set the scene and outlined the story of coal mining in the area. We then crossed over the road and entered Camerton Batch Nature Reserve, where an imposing stature of a miner, known as The Jolly Collier stood, just behind the capped entrance to the original mineshaft. Here Richard described the privations of being a miner in the area, and just how hard it was to extract coal from the narrow seams of this coalfield. We then set off for a pleasant woodland walk through the nature reserve, being told along the way that we were actually climbing over the spoil heap from the mine – nature has totally reclaimed this, and only those in the know would ever have guessed the origins of the slope. Along the way the old explosives hut was pointed out, a small, isolated building on an otherwise open hillside – well away from the mine and any houses, just in case!

After the obligatory group photo on the hillside we set off towards St Paul's Church, then finally downhill through the grounds of Camerton Court before returning to our starting point and offering our thanks to Richard for a short, but information-packed Sunday morning walk.



Group photo using the old spoil heap as a backdrop.

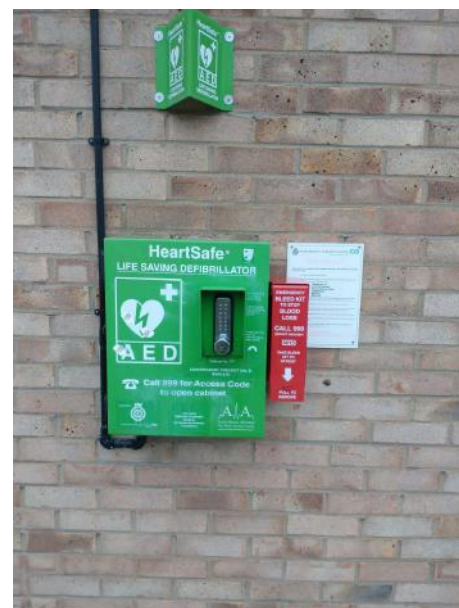
Blood boxes - a special report by Duncan Massey

if you have travelled across, or around the Mendip area recently, you may have noticed a crop of little red tin boxes cropping up, about the size of a shoe box?

I can explain what they are.

They are called Blood Boxes and contain a small but vital amount of first aid equipment, that could save a life if someone has suffered a catastrophic, life threatening, bleed injury. In the rural environment, these major injuries can be caused by any number of things – Chainsaw accidents, vehicle collisions, mountain bike or horse related incidents – the list goes on. Time is always of the essence, and having the proper kit close to hand, makes the process of saving life in an emergency a lot easier.

The good news is that the presence of publicly available defibrillators has focussed the mind, these are now being used extensively in cardiac emergencies, and saving lives. However defibrillators are only of value if there is enough blood left in the body for the heart to pump around. Therefore, the emergency response and first aid guidelines, have officially been altered a bit, to now include catastrophic bleeding, as the first priority, ahead of the more usual ABC of resuscitation (**A**irway, **B**reathing & **C**irculation- if you have forgotten!). So it's now 'cABC', as you will recall if you have attended first aid training recently.



AED and a blood box at Congresbury.
Photo: Duncan Massey.



Priddy's is in the old phone box.
Photo: Duncan Massey.

The police obviously have a deep and keen interest in this topic, particularly in areas mostly but not exclusively, where violent crime occurs, in particular - youth knife crime. The Avon and Somerset lead officer for knife Crime is Chief Inspector Mike Vass. Mike has recently set up a partnership, with the NHS, local businesses, and community leaders, to obtain, supply and install these little red boxes. They are as relevant and useful in rural areas as they are in towns and urban areas. Mike is now seeking locations for these emergency boxes.

So keep your eyes open as you travel around, a small team of volunteers is currently installing these red boxes across the Mendip area. They are often co-located with the local community defibrillator, for obvious reasons I suppose, so are quite easy to find. Let's hope you never have to use one in anger.



A stand-alone installation at Goblin Combe.
Photo: Duncan Massey.

Duncan Massey. Volunteer and member of the Blood Box partnership.

Editor's note: These life-saving kits are all installed by volunteers (see right).

It seems very likely to me that a number of our members will have suggestions about where these boxes might be installed. Some of you might even want to volunteer to help with the installations or help out in some other way. As Duncan pointed out to me, Chief Inspector Mike Vass is a very busy man, with many other matters to deal with, but you can get in contact with the Blood Box partnership via. post@heartsafe.org.uk



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY APRIL 27th 2024 To be held in the Draycott Memorial Hall, Draycott. 10.30am start

Address: Latches Ln, Draycott, Cheddar BS27 3UE

AGENDA – Welcome by Les Davies MBE, the Mendip Society President

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on April 14th 2023. – Will be available at the meeting.
2. The Chairman's Report and The Annual Report – To be read out at the meeting.
3. Summary Report of the accounts for 2023. Copies of the income and expenditure account 2023 will be available to members at the meeting, or, on request from the Treasurer otherwise.
4. Other Relevant Reports – Membership, The website, Rights of Way, Walks & Talks, Visits, and for the two Society Reserves at Slader's Leigh and Tania's Wood. Any questions and points of information on these.
5. Election of Officers –, including any new nominations: the President takes the Chair.
 - a. Election of Prime Officers – The Chairperson and the Treasurer – both are willing to stand.
 - b. **The position of the Society Secretary is vacant – nominations are requested for this post.**
 - c. Other members of the Management Committee are willing to stand again. Richard Frost, Peter Janes and Michael Rolfe. Any new nominations for the committee must be made in writing and given or sent to the Society before the meeting. secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk or telephone: **01275 874284**
6. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor. The date of the Annual General Meeting 2025
7. TEA AND CAKE followed by our 'After Meeting Talk' by Dr Andy King



“Where the Hills meet the Sea!” The use of drones in monitoring habitats and geological features in the western Mendip Hills and coast.

This recent project in our local area is a grand opportunity to see some very aesthetic images of local geology, habitats and landscapes, taken using the most up to date, growing in popularity, technology. Dr. King, Principal Geologist with Geckoella Ltd, but also a very local lad himself, (he spent much of his childhood in Cross Farm Road just next to the Memorial Ground) promises us The Mendip Hills and beyond as we've never seen them before.

3: Financial Report for the year ending December 31st 2023

A brief overview of the Income and Expenditure Account and for the year ended 31st December 2023

The Mendip Society had a Surplus of £9,163.97 including the balance of a legacy £6,637.81 (2022 £75.62) and after payments from the heritage fund totalling £3,000.00 (2022 £5,172.24)

The income of the Society excluding the legacy was similar to that in 2022

The outgoings for 2023 were higher than those in 2022 and with some variation in types of expense i.e.

- Publicity down, due to the lack of a dedicated publicity officer, although some work is being carried out by others on the committee.
- The increase in Talks/Events/Courses costs is due to the increase in activities organised during the year.
- The Small Grants made, were lower than in 2022, this was because the Society received less requests for grants.
- Management and Administration cost were up due to legal fees in regard to registering Vesting Orders with the Land Registry.

The Society's Accounts show it to be in a good position. Copies of the accounts will be available at the meeting or on application to the Treasurer after the date of the AGM

Marilyn Cattell – Treasurer

4: Membership Report for 2023 -2024

As of 14th February the Society has 298 members, 234 of whom have already renewed for 2024.

If there is a reminder inserted into your copy please renew promptly as membership expires at the end of March."

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024
382	366	390	385	366	351	308	298

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◀ Regrettably, several members have died during the year and we are grateful for the support they have given to the Society. Our thanks also to everyone who included a donation along with their subscription. On the subject of which, the Committee has decided that the subscription fees should be increased in 2025. Our costs have gone up relentlessly since they were last fixed in 2015 and it is only because of generous donations to the Society that we have been able to hold them down since then.

Subject to agreement at this AGM the new rates will be <60 £20, 60+ £17, joint £28...

Recommendation by word of mouth is valuable and usually the best way - so please encourage anyone you know who appreciates the beauty of Mendip to join.

Furthermore, we need people to join, or assist the Committee with the running of the Society – leading walks, organising talks, manning the stand at local events etc. **If you feel able to help, please talk to the Chairman.**

Gift aid allows the Society (as a charity) to claim an extra 25% of the value of your subscription from the Government. This is at no cost to you but you must pay sufficient UK income tax or capital gains tax in the current tax year to cover the sum reclaimed by the Society. A higher rate tax payer can claim tax relief (the difference between basic and higher rate) on sums given as gift aid, see www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid. If you wish to complete a gift aid mandate or need to cancel one, please contact the Membership Secretary.

Peter Janes- Membership Secretary

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

The website is the primary way of giving information about the Society to non-members, but also nowadays to members also. It can be a bit of a struggle to find new material to keep it fresh and interesting so if you have anything relevant to Mendip you would like to see included, please contact webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk.

The Mendip Society Nature Reserves in 2023

Both the Society's reserves have continued to be well looked after by our group of volunteers, without whom we could not keep the vast amount of growing vegetation in check. Footfall through Slader's Leigh has increased if anything this year and the Permissive Footpath has been open all year. The Right of Way across the very tip of Tania's Wood seems to be hardly ever used, which is something we should think of addressing in the coming year. With 2022 being the 50th Anniversary year of the Mendip Hills AONB we were lucky enough to be chosen to plant 5 different 10-15 year old trees in the reserves as part of their celebrations – they were also recorded as part of the Queen's Green Canopy- all are doing well. Both reserves were also registered with the Woodland Trust as suitable collection areas for seeds of certain trees, including English Oak, Hazel, Hawthorn, and Field Maple. The one species which I would like to grow the seed of is 'Wych Elm' which we do not have anywhere; so I was extremely happy when Buffy Fletcher, of the "Westbury Trees" Community Group gave us five healthy young saplings early in 2024 to plant in the two reserves; many thanks Buffy. The reports on both Slader's Leigh Meadow and Tania's Wood Nature Reserves can be read elsewhere in this newsletter. *Judith Tranter – Reserves Manager*

Rights of Way Officers Report 2023

A very quiet year, probably helped by Somerset County's re-organisation, with rights of way seemingly taking a back seat. Once things get back to some semblance of normality we'll probably get a backlog to deal with!

We have been notified of four Somerset Modification Orders, one each in Croscombe, East Pennard, Mells and Tellisford Parishes. All minor, two being for footpath diversions away from private gardens and two formalising unofficial diversions which have been in use for a number of years in place of the definitive lines of path. No objections raised.

North Somerset also quiet with just one Order referred in Puxton Parish. Existing line of path dangerous, with poor highway access. Proposed new route much improved and fully supported.

BANES silent, as usual!...

Dave & Margaret Parker: Rights of Way Officers.

Planning in Somerset - from our planning scrutiniser – Michael Rolfe

PRESERVING OUR NATIONAL LANDSCAPE AND BUILDING HOMES

In 2022, the government agreed that the national significance of AONBs should be 'reflected in their name'. As such, work has been undertaken with the National Association for AONBs which, going forward, shall be known as 'National Landscapes'. The rebranding was launched on the 22 November 2023.

The rebranding of the AONBs in England as National Landscapes is intended to strengthen their purpose, bringing them in line with National Parks. The shift should also enable additional funding sources and an increase in the profile of National Landscapes nationally.

National Landscapes will not become planning bodies, but it is likely that additional powers will be intruded in the future. This will enable bodies and the public to provide comments that carry much more weight in the...

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◀...assessment of planning applications than is presently the case. Going forward, the designation of AONBs shall still be recognised in planning legislation as Article 2(3) land.

In theory one of the consequences of this rebranding, will make it more difficult to develop land within these National Landscapes, bringing constraints in line with those already experienced within National Parks. Those of us who seek to preserve the Mendip Hills National Landscape will be delighted if the theory is reflected in practice.

Against this background, this Government and the present Opposition are or will both be pressing Local Authorities to construct 300,000 homes per annum together with all the infrastructure that is necessary to support such development. Hitherto, the present Government's Policy is set out in its 'National Planning Policy Framework' dated December 2023, which is available to read 'on line'. Cynics may deduce that this Policy does not protect National Landscapes to the extent that might be imagined by their rebranding. The Opposition does not have an equivalent national planning policy but seems intent on preserving our National Parks, Landscapes and countryside, whilst promising to construct 1.5 million homes in 5 years. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved without encroaching further into protected land and the countryside in general or indeed mirroring the current Government's Policy Framework.

Currently, the Government sets annual house building targets for Local Authorities. They each have to construct a prescribed number of dwellings or be faced with large financial penalties. The results of this policy are evidenced, for example, by the expansion of towns and villages, to the north and south of the Mendip Hills and more broadly across the Nation.

Our population is spiralling upwards and, together with other factors, it is apparent that homes must be found. Whatever party is in power over the next 5 years, the pressure will continue to remain on finding land to build the 300,000 homes per annum. Accordingly, our National Landscapes and the countryside will continue to come under pressure from Local Authorities, to succumb to the need for homes. Those who are hoping to preserve our countryside and ever diminishing natural flora and fauna will need to remain vigilant.

Walks, Talks & Visits Programme Reports – 2023

WALKS

Our activities started slowly as we emerged from Covid restrictions and attempted to get back to normal; we also encountered an unforeseen problem, a lack of walks leaders willing to commit to lead a group of members and visitors as they had before. And as expected over the winter months, there has not been a lot of activity mainly due to the weather, which despite Global Warming, sometimes still makes going outdoors, an unpleasant prospect! Or, I might just be getting older? However there were a few notable exceptions, thoroughly enjoyed by those who went along. About the time of the last AGM a group went by way of Pelting and Dursdon Drovers to Priddy Nine Barrow, whilst others tackled the steep ascent to Wavering Down. With the weather warming up Les gave us his Presidents Walk for this year, an enjoyable walk from Cheddar to his own beautiful piece of Mendip, Fox Wood. As summer finally arrived Kate Lawrence led a guided group walk around the Chancellors Farm Coronation Meadows, much appreciated in spite of the energy sapping high temperatures.

A special interest walk with Professor Tony Watts, organised by Richard Frost, visited the Great Unconformities of Eastern Mendip, and another led by Jo Bradshaw from the Bishops Palace, Wells, had a guided tour of the Mendip Hospital Cemetery.

As Autumn took over, by popular demand we walked round the stone circles on Leigh Down, noticing how much the vegetation had overtaken and covered some of the stones, which is maybe something we can help Nick Colton, the landowner with next year. Sue Gearing and Les Davies led "an exceedingly good walk" exploring the old industrial area of Coleford, with its mines, canal and Victorian life as its theme. And then, as part of the 2023 Mendip Rocks Festival, Richard took us on a walk to see the Camerton mine and railway, taking in Camerton Court as well.

Mike Harvey made his Society debut with a well-attended "Somerset V Hitler" wartime Mendip walk, originally devised by Don Brown, which Mike had arranged to conclude with tea in St Hugh's Church, he enjoyed it all as much as all the walkers did. As we entered the 'fungi season' we had another welcome walks debut from Nathan Orr, Mendip Hills National Landscape Nature Recovery Ranger which saw us exploring a whole new viewpoint of Burrington Combe.

Peter Janes gave us a lovely wet walk down Velvet Bottom which was enjoyed by a good turnout despite the slippery conditions. He also led us on a walk which included a visit to our own local reserve of Tania's Wood. Richard Ivens led a harder walk around the Cheddar Gorge Rim and the climate did its best to dissuade members to join him. However, during a clear spell in January, he led a sizable group around Axbridge & Cheddar Reservoir which was much appreciated. Then again, later that month, with another violent swing of the weather, on a walk from Stockhill to Priddy Barrows, Peter felt he was leading a 'swim' rather than a walk! (see picture by David Shears on the next page)

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◀ All of these showed us that there is still a strong demand for these activities and work is in hand to produce an interesting programme for the forthcoming year. So please keep an eye on the new printed programme, not forgetting to look at the website for any last minute events. Don't forget, if you have any ideas and suggestions, then please do not hesitate to contact me and we can try to make it happen. *Richard Frost.*

TALKS

As in the previous year our talks programme was sadly depleted. We were glad to welcome John Smith on two separate occasions, firstly dressed as a Roman soldier, he showed an audience of over 60, how the

Roman army lived and fought in Mendip, later in the year he was a Roman dignitary, living in one of the many villas that have been discovered and excavated in our area.

Finally, in September, hosted by the President, we had a full Shipham Village Hall for a showing of a film, made by Anthea Page, about Hannah More, the Bristolian social reformer. This was a lovely occasion, not exactly a talk, but a step onwards which we hope is the first of many others.

We hope to have a fuller talks programme this year. We value members' ideas for subjects they would enjoy hearing about – this would make our task much easier. *Richard Frost*

SOCIETY VISITS

Some of our walks can also be classified as visits and this year we are indebted to Sally Davis for planning and organising two group visits to really interesting places, to which we may not have even contemplated going to individually. In full summer we visited Burcott Mill, just outside Wookey, one of only two working flour mills left in Somerset. A packed demonstration tour followed by lovely fare made with their milled flour completed a great visit.

Come September another group visit planned by Sally was to the Avalon Marshes Centre on the Somerset Levels. Built over several years by volunteers, replacing the old Peat Moors Centre and only opened that Easter, it is full of local archaeology in that unique area. Our members found it an extraordinary place, of great value with their entry ticket valid for the rest of the year too.

With many thanks to Sally for her enthusiastic ideas, if you have any suggestions for the next visits, please contact her through 'secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk'.

5: ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

The President takes the Chair for the election of the officers of the Society.

1. Re-election of the Chairman and the Treasurer as prime members of the committee, both are willing to stand next year.
2. Re-election of the Management Committee. These serving members of the Management Committee: - Peter Janes, Mike Rolfe, and Richard Frost are willing to stand again. Proposed 'election en bloc.
3. Election of members to the Committee from any received nominations.

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

Now a message from the Committee *with no apologies for repeating it from last year, and from the year before that and the year before that as well.

You will realise from the list of members standing for election to the Committee that we are a very small group of people trying to do the great many tasks involved in running any society.

It is a fact that any member can volunteer for a specific task, without being a member of the Committee - we can co-op you to be a member, even a sole member, of any team that doesn't need to attend meetings (unless you want to), nor do you have to be a Trustee of the Society. But you would be a vital asset to the efficient running of the Society as a whole. For example – it might not be obvious when reading this years' planning report that we have only one member covering the planning applications for all of the areas covered by The Mendip Society (and a huge area it is) when in fact Mike Rolfe strives to keep a very thorough eye on it all - we are very indebted to him. Organising visits and trips to places of interest, having a presence at festivals, fetes and shows, managing our press and publicity activity, including our own newsletter 'Mendip', planning our talks programme and even the walks programme – they all need a new input of energy and TLC.

If there's something you feel you could do in this way please contact one of us at the AGM or by email or phone afterwards for a chat about what it would entail for you and how it would work. Thank you - **HINT** – you will find the relevant email addresses on the website under 'Contact' on www.themendipsociety.org.uk

Ends. ♦

Walking The Monarch's Way with John Price (Or what to do in your retirement).

We have more than a passing interest in the long-distance footpath, The Monarch's Way, as it skirts our nature reserve, Tania's Wood in Ubley, and we met John and his friends on a very wet day when they had just completed this stage of The Way. John has now compiled a photo-journal of their journey along the Monarch's Way – March 2016 to October 2023. In its introduction he says: -



*The start picture...
Photo supplied.*

"The group of seven that walked the route all met as colleagues of the Cheltenham and Gloucester (former) Building Society, commonly known as C&G. Over the course of our various retirements between 2003 and 2008, the group got together and walked many long-distance routes, before eventually setting out on The Monarch's Way on 9 March 2016." Of the core group of four, John, Andy, Stephen and Colin who started seven years ago, sadly, Colin has died but the other three have seen it through to its end at Shoreham. Touchingly, Colin's widow gave them a portion of his ashes to consign to the English Channel when they arrived, so in one sense he really did also complete the journey, of fifty-six enjoyable days, elapsed over seven and a half years.

The final leg of the journey was completed on 27th October, just twelve days after the anniversary of Charles's 1651 journey. They walked from Brighton, where they, and Charles had spent the night, to Shoreham and on the shingle spit raised a glass to the King and to their absent friend Colin, a very poignant moment.

They were joined on that final leg by two others who had also walked with them on many of the previous legs of the journey, Claire and Chris - and Chris wrote and read out a verse he had written for this moment.

*"And now at last we've reached the coast,
So raise your glasses in a toast.
So JP, Wes, Claire and Andy,
Charge your glass with beer or shandy,
And raise them to a dear old friend,
Who did not make it to the end.
But worry not, 'cause in the sky,
Is dear old Colin way up high,
Bidding us all ... 'A last goodbye."*



*...And on the shingle spit at journey's end.
Photo supplied.*

As if this walk wasn't enough of a challenge – John and the group are soon to start on the Palladian Way, hoping to complete this year! (see below)

AND – John also has news about the - **Battle of Worcester walk** -

On Thursday 16 May 2024, The Monarch's Way Association will be holding a Battle of Worcester Walk, led by John. This walk will be something of a new venture and, if successful, may become an annual event. Meet at 10:00am in the car park of the Ketch Worcester Battlefield Viewpoint (located where the A4440 intersects with the A38, fairly close to M5 junction 7).

The walk is around **9 miles long** and, allowing for lunch and looking at monuments etc, will probably take around 6 - 7 hours. There is no charge for the walk, it is a great opportunity to learn more about the context of the Escape of Charles and to meet fellow Monarch's Way walkers. If you would like to take part, please write to John at the email address below. There is also a leaflet available.

John Price – jp@thefugitiveking.uk / www.thefugitiveking.uk/index.php/walking-the-monarchs-way

The Palladian Way

This long distance trail is named after the classical style of architecture established by Andrea Palladio in 17th century Italy. The trail starts at The Old Gaol in the centre of Buckingham and finishes on Pulteney Bridge, Bath, It runs through Bath & NE Somerset, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire & is 118 miles long.

Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

Saturday 13th April. Bio-Char day in Tania's Wood Nature Reserve.

ST 436 559. Woodbridge Farm, Bickfield Lane, Ubley. BS40 6PX 10 am start.

Biochar is a charcoal looking like substance that's made by burning organic material in a controlled process called pyrolysis –this is burning wood brash, and other vegetation in a container with very little oxygen, releasing little to no fumes. The result is biochar, a stable form of carbon that can't easily escape into the atmosphere. So instead of bonfire burning our masses of brash from our hedge laying days, we have tutor Chris Claxton introducing us to this method of helping with the evermore important climate crisis.



Biochar
Photo credit: Rob Goodier/E4C

Contact: judith.tranter1@btinternet.com Tel: **01275 874284** to let us know you would like to come to help us, or even if you would just like to call in to see how it all works.

Thursday 18th April. An Ebbor Explore. Meet in Ebbor Gorge car park, nr Wookey Hole, BS39 4EJ. ST 520 484. What 3 Words ///yacht.bordering.accented. Please note; this is not Deer Leap car park. Meet at 10am. Aprox 6 km. Contact: Jo Bradshaw **07932 728617** or **0174987813**. No booking required, £2 fee for non-members.

Saturday 27th April. The Mendip Society AGM. Draycott Memorial Hall, Latches Ln, Draycott. BS27 3UE 10.30am The after-meeting talk is by Dr. Andy King and is open to non-members as well. (approx.11.30am start after meeting refreshments.) Donation welcomed for talk by visitors.



“Where the Hills meet the Sea!” The use of drones in monitoring habitats and geological features in the western Mendip Hills and coast.

This recent project in our local area is a grand opportunity to see some very aesthetic images of local geology, habitats and landscapes, taken using the most up to date, growing in popularity, technology.

Dr. Andy King, Principal Geologist with Geckoella Ltd, promises us The Mendip Hills and beyond as we've never seen them before.

More information **01275 874284** (non-members welcome to the meeting as well in a non-voting capacity)

Thursday 2nd May. Draycott Sleights: A walk with great views. Meet at 10am outside the Strawberry Special pub, Station Road, Draycott, Cheddar, BS27 3TQ. What 3 Words ///hillsides.mealtime.scooter. Approx 7km, 250m ascent with great views. Contact: Jo Bradshaw **07932 728617** or **0174987813**. No booking required, £2 fee for non-members.

Wednesday 8th May. Society group visit to the Somerset Earth Science Centre. Maximum group size - 10 persons. Stoke St Michael, Radstock BA3 5JU. 10am start. A donation of £15 person to SESC is requested. The programme normally includes a short talk on the Mendip Quarry industry, followed by kitting up in PPE for a visit to Whatley quarry by minibus.

10am – arrive & coffee; 10.15 – intro to Mendip quarry industry and geology talk in classroom.

11.00 - break and kit up in PPE for quarry tour; 11.15 - 12.30pm – tour of Whatley quarry and visit to view platform for observing a blast if possible. 12.30 – option to bring packed lunch to eat at SESC

13.00 – optional viewing of fossil and mineral collections/further questions.

Book for the visit with Sally on **07816 266531** or sallydavis99@hotmail.com by Monday 29th April please.

Friday 10th May. The Mendip Quiz. Open to everyone. Venue Mendip Activity Centre, Lyncombe Drive, Sandford, Churchill, Winscombe BS25 5PQ 6.30- 9.30pm

We are in the brand new meeting room on the top floor of the ski centre, there is a lift from the car parking area for those who want it. There is no charge for the evening through the generosity of the company, snacks and drinks are available to buy, (they do a very tasty selection of paninis and pizzas.) Quiz questions are wide ranging, prizes for the best team. Pre booking as an individual (you will be added to a team on the night) or as a team is essential; ring **01761 221995** or email: prj1099@gmail.com Full directions and information will be sent prior to the event.

Saturday 11th May. East Harptree Combe walk. Meet at 2.00 in the Forestry car park in East Harptree Woods. ST 557 541. BS40 6DA; What 3 Words /// appointed.universes.udder. 4 miles. Moderate. expect mud. Contact: Richard tel: **01275 852786**. Everyone welcome, no booking required, £2 fee for non-members.

Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

Sunday 19th May. Open Day in Slader's Leigh Nature Reserve, Winscombe Hill.

The meadow is a **designated Local Nature Reserve** at ST 422 562. Lying alongside the Strawberry Line Cycle and Walkway at Shute Shelve Tunnel, Winscombe Hill.

The flower meadow will be open from 11am until 4pm. with activities for children and adults; flower printing, scavenger trail, den building, and plant surveying, plus 'creatures of the pond'. Bring a picnic and enjoy the sun on your face (fingers crossed!). Drinks available.

At 2.30pm there will be a brief quiet time for us to gather around our new seat in the meadow for a dedication to the memory of Paul Harley and Dorothy Sage, whose families donated the cost of having this lovely seat made by Somerset Wood Recycling especially for the reserve.

The meadow can be reached either by walking 15 minutes south along the Strawberry Line from the Winscombe playing fields car park or by parking in the NT car park at the top of Winscombe hill and walking down the lane opposite. Although closer, this way is very worn and rough and may not be suitable for those with walking difficulties.

Enquiries: judith.tranter1@btinternet.com or **01275 874284**



Our new seat in Slader's Leigh, made by Somerset Wood Recycling.

In case of doubtful weather look at our website: www.themendipsociety.org.uk

Wednesday 5th June. Society group visit to Ebbor Gorge Beef Farm.

Pelting Drove, Priddy. BA5 3BA.

Maximum group size: 15. 2pm start. There is no charge for this visit.

Neil and Lottie farm with nature rather than against it. Their native Ruby Red beef is 100% Pasture for Life certified grass fed. Grazing animals on 100% pasture brings positive impacts for biodiversity and carbon, human health and wellbeing, and animal health and welfare.

The tour will involve an hour or so walk to go and see the cows and calves and some of the tree planting that's been done, time for questions and discussion together with tea and biscuits. Approximate time 2-3hrs.

There is plenty of parking on site but no toilet facilities, (except in their own house for absolute dire emergencies!). Book with Sally on **07816 266531** or sallydavis99@hotmail.com by Monday 27th May.

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**

And finally... We are always looking for cover pictures and people willing to write reports on the events they attend. Please don't be shy, take pictures, or write a few lines and send them all 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.

**PASTURE
FOR LIFE**



Reports for the Year 2023 (for the AGM on April 27th, 2024)

Slader's Leigh Flower Meadow

The weather this year has not been as we would normally anticipate and rely on (again!), but the flowers all seemed to love it. The primroses were prolific, the yellow rattle spread itself widely as did the wild garlic against the Yadley Lane boundary. The Small Leaved Limes (SLL) at the top flowered again – but sadly the seed never set to grow to fruition. With the very long summer drought the pond almost dried out completely, but the meadow as a whole remained a healthy green. It must be something to do with the type of soil which was dug out when the railway track was constructed – and then thrown over to form the embankment and into our field.

The tunnel and section of the Line past our reserve was shut for repairs and ash-dieback felling for two weeks in October and Slader's Leigh was declared the official route around it. We were very busy! The meadow was looking good after a thorough cutting by two volunteers and a mammoth raking up by a whole gang of the same; the new seat was in position and had a thorough baptism of folk trying it out for size. Although we had a few winter storms there was nothing to match winter 2021/2's devastating blows and the ancient oak brought down by Storm Arwen now has the most wonderful covering of mosses, ferns and lichen imaginable. The SLL are getting too big for their boots-again- and will need a major maintenance programme next year as will the bracken which is galloping in from all sides of the meadow as it once did years ago. We got rid of it by pulling it several times a year for some years, it will have to be done again – and soon.



We always enjoy a good lunch break and a catch-up.

We are extremely grateful, and fortunate to have a great gang of hard working volunteers, indeed we could achieve nothing without them. If you have never felt the pleasure of working together with like-minded others in a lovely meadow like Slader's Leigh- do please come and have a go this year.

Contact Judith Tranter 01275 874284 or at the AGM

Tania's Wood



Wet work! Hedge laying in a river...

We started off 2023 with two hedge laying days for those with some experience – and boy, did they need it.

Working in a river makes life a bit more difficult, and two days with such a large and dense hedge generated a huge amount of brash. (check up our 2024 programme for our new project making use of all of this material).

With the Forest School using the wood in the spring and summer terms, some of the children's fathers built them, and us, a lovely simple shelter, designed to be moved if needs be. We had a go at weaving some side panels for it – but it wasn't as easy as it looks on U- tube! Two of our volunteers put together an eight seated table for our events and courses- that also was a bit testing to do!

All the rain in the spring made everything growing in Tania's take off with a vengeance and we soon lost all the open spaces, as trees and bushes ran riot. Everything bore flowers, fruit, berries and nuts and the paths disappeared

beneath them. It was all we could do to keep the access and the Public right of way footpath across the lower part of the wood open. As Autumn came trees were laden with seeds, except for the two we really wanted, the hazel nuts and oak acorns. These were for Bleadon Trees as we are a registered collector for them – but the squirrels were better collectors than we were and had the few that there were. But 2022 was a “mast year”* so we weren't really surprised by the scant harvest this year. – Judith Tranter Manager of Reserves

* A mast year is one where an abundance of fruit and nuts are produced, from the old English “mæst”. (Yes, I had to look it up!) Ed.

Memorial Unveiled on Eightieth Anniversary of Tragic Crash.

In March 1944, some three months before D-day, a newly-built B-24J Liberator four-engined bomber, serial number 42-110039, set off on its delivery flight from America to Europe. It flew to Marrakesh via Bermuda and from there it set out to fly to RAF Valley on Anglesey. Bad weather there caused the crew to try to divert to St Mawgan in Cornwall. Having got lost, they found Filton airfield and flares were lit to help them land, but they aborted to go round again. Making a sweep around, the plane passed over Blagdon Lake before clipping the tops of trees on The Mendip Hills and crashing near Hazel Farm, a mile or so south of Ubley and Compton Martin. Of the ten young men aboard, five were killed and five survived. Today the site has a well-used public footpath running through it.* Blagdon Local History Society and the landowner, Yeo Valley Farms Ltd., have erected a plaque on the site of the crash and this was unveiled on the eightieth anniversary of the tragedy, with a ceremony on Thursday March 14th 2024, attended by some Society members.



The memorial service.
Photo: Peter Janes

The plaque was unveiled by Lt. Col. Barnhart of the United States Air Force and a brief non-denominational service was led by the new rector of the Chew Valley South Benefice, the Rev. Katrina Dykes.

More photos are available in the Gallery on our website,
www.themendipsociety.org.uk



Lt Col Barnhart USAF.
Photo: Peter Janes

*Nordrach Lane, ST 533 567.

Obituary - John Chapman 1933-2024



We are very sad to record the death of member John Chapman who has died recently after a stroke at his home in Cheddar. His has been a long life lived with energy and enthusiasm and commitment to many different interests, including that of our own Society. His wife, Margaret, was our Membership Secretary for many years and John was always there in the background.

My first introduction to him was on a Society visit to the Banwell Bone Caves, where he was instrumental in getting the site made safe and open to the public.

Alongside a busy career as an engineer on the Poseidon and Trident missiles development he found time for his passion in archaeology and caving. He loved rocks and incorporated as many of the more unusual ones he had found as he could into his garden, which I was always shown round when I visited for Society Committee meetings.

For many years he has been a member of many of the archaeological, historical and caving societies of the Mendip area, including the 'Friends of The King John's Hunting Lodge, and contributed many important first report write-ups of digs and excavations for publication. But I will always most remember him for the kindness and help he gave to anyone who asked him for information or help with doing something for our Society activities.

At his request there was to be held no formal funeral for him but there will be a memorial service in due course, if you let me know you would like to attend this I will send you the details when available. I am indebted to John Page for the photo of John. He was a camera shy person at the best of times and I could find not a trace of any in the many photos of Society activities and events I have accumulated over the years. If anyone has a photo taken on a visit to for example Banwell Caves I would be grateful for a copy of it.

I know that he also wrote a short book on the Bone Caves- if anyone has a copy of this it would be great to see it and to know we still have one in the society and they haven't disappeared without trace.

Judith Tranter

A Presidents' View.



Are you all feeling like me, in total wonder at where this year is going? March will see the start of Spring and the clocks change to bring in Summertime. Easter falls on the same day that summertime begins, so all in all things seem busy!

A personal thank you to all who attended the Burrington Wassail this time and thank you Mike and Vanessa Dennett for providing the venue along with daughter Polly who carried out the wassail Queen's duties so well. The supper was amazing, the entertainment enlightening with the Barley Rye choir and the mummers play. I was amazed at the acting skills that emerged! Also thank you Peter Janes for piping us to and from the orchard...With such musical skill as this, why not a Burns night dinner next year. I know it's hardly Mendip but it would be a different social gathering and a chance to put our own slant on things with local food.

With spring approaching help on the nature reserves is going to be needed, so if anyone can spare some time it would be greatly appreciated. Thanks to our chairperson Tina, rural skills are being included again in our programme. Some real 'hands on' stuff that has a practical application. I'm now starting to think about an orchard course to cover pruning, planting and so forth. I have carried out these courses throughout the South West and into Wales. Please give me your thoughts if it is something that would be of interest.

Walks and talks are also a strong part of our line up and help is always going to be needed in this area. How about having a go at walk leading yourself? It's not that scary and there is always plenty of support. Have a chat with Richard Frost our coordinator if you would like to know more.

A very important note for your dairy. The 2024 Annual General Meeting,(AGM) is on Saturday 27th April at Draycott Memorial Hall, more detail within this edition. Also with this edition of the Society's newsletter in mind, our editor Mike Harvey continually strives to raise its presentation to even greater heights. I keep trying to get to get one of my rainbow pictures onto the front cover, but continually fail due to the sheer talent of other contributors. I therefore am going to cheat and use my Presidents' contribution to this edition to sneak one of them in....



So here's 'My Rainbow Valley'. How many of us remember that 1968 record release by the band 'Love Affair'?

Kind regards, Les

THE MENDIP SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 262867 www.themendipsociety.org.uk
 For the secretary, call or e-mail: 01275 874284 / judith.tranter1@btinternet.com
 For membership write to, 'The Cottage, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 6EJ'.
 For newsletter content and pictures, e-mail: themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com
 For everything else write to '2 Walton Lodge, 27 Castle Road, Clevedon, BS21 7DA'